

LEADER GUIDE

The Fully Human Journey

*A journey to recover the life you
were designed to live.*

PAUL MILLER · SAFE & SOUND

THE HEART OF IT

You are not a
problem to be
solved.

You are a
design to be
recovered.

This is where we begin. And it is where we're going.

A LETTER BEFORE WE BEGIN

Welcome

If you're holding this, something in you is ready. Maybe it's a quiet ache you've carried a long time. Maybe it's the sense that you've been managing your life instead of living it — keeping it together on the outside while something underneath goes unattended.

I wrote this because I've lived that gap, and because I've come to believe the gospel speaks to all of it — not just your sin, but your wounds; not just your soul in some abstract sense, but the whole embodied, aching, hoping person that you are.

Over the weeks ahead, we're going to go slowly, and we're going to go honest. You'll read. You'll reflect. You'll write things down you may never have said out loud. You'll practice small habits that, over time, become a different way of being. And you won't do any of it alone — you'll do it beside people walking the same road.

This is not a course to complete or a test to pass. It is a journey to become whole. Come as you are — the parts you're proud of and the parts you hide. All of you is welcome here.

Glad you're here.

— Paul

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The weekly rhythm

Each week follows the same gentle shape. The rhythm doesn't change, so you never have to brace for what's coming — you can simply show up and be honest.

This Week	An invitation into the week's theme, a Scripture focus, and a verse to carry.
Teaching Session	On four key weeks, a short teaching to watch or receive together before you read.
The Reading	A chapter from <i>Fully Human</i> , in full. This is the heart of each week — read it slowly.
Reflect & Journal	Prompts and space to write what's stirring. No one grades this. No one has to see it.
Go Inward	An exercise, inventory, or self-assessment to help you see yourself honestly.
Pray	A guided prayer to move what you've seen from your head into God's presence.
The Practice	One small habit for the week. The practices build on each other into a way of life.
Bring to Group	A few things to bring to the circle — because we heal in the company of others.

One rule holds it all together: whatever you write, whatever you say — tell the truth. This is the one place you don't have to perform.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Five movements, twelve weeks, one becoming

The Journey doesn't march through chapters. It moves — from the ache that brought you here, all the way to a whole soul life — and it builds, week by week, toward a single evening.

MOVEMENT ONE*The Ache*

Weeks 1–2. The honest longing underneath the surface. Not “what’s wrong with me” as an accusation, but as an invitation.

MOVEMENT TWO*The Design*

Weeks 3–5. Recovering who you were actually made to be — an embodied soul, with real needs, made on purpose.

MOVEMENT THREE*The Disruption*

Weeks 6–8. Where the design was broken. What we buried, and why the body remembers what the mind would rather forget.

MOVEMENT FOUR*The Restoration*

Weeks 9–10. How wholeness actually comes — not by trying harder, but by being met, and made whole.

MOVEMENT FIVE*The Invitation*

Weeks 11–12. Learning to stop bringing pieces — and to bring your whole self, unhidden.

GRADUATION

The Journey culminates in **The Fully Human Experience** — an evening of worship, confession, prayer, and release. Everything from Week One is quietly preparing you to arrive ready to bring your whole self before God.

YOU'RE JOINING SOMETHING

The Journey Covenant

This is more than a small group. It's a shared agreement about the kind of room we're going to build together — safe enough to tell the truth. Before we begin, we make these promises to one another.

*1***Tell the truth.**

We bring our real selves — not the managed version. Honesty is the whole point.

*2***Protect confidentiality.**

What is said here stays here. Always. Trust is built by keeping it.

*3***Listen before fixing.**

We witness one another's stories. We don't rescue, advise, or one-up.

*4***Show up consistently.**

We keep coming back. The becoming happens in returning, week after week.

*5***Participate with honesty.**

We engage — the reading, the writing, the silence — as far as we're able, never by force.

*6***Honor one another's stories.**

Every person here is an image-bearer with a sacred story. We treat each one with reverence.

SIGNED

DATE

BEFORE WE BEGIN

The Honest Starting Line

This is a snapshot, not a score. There are no right answers, and no one sees it but you. Respond as honestly as you can — we'll return to these same statements at the end of the Journey, and you may be surprised how far you've come.

The gap between who I am and who I let people see feels small.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I can name what I'm feeling, and I believe my feelings matter to God.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I treat my body, emotions, and needs as part of me God made — not as the enemy.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

There is at least one person who has seen the real me and stayed.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

When I'm struggling, I bring my whole self to God — not just a tidy list of requests.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I believe I am loved by God as I actually am, not as I pretend to be.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

FOR LEADERS

You keep a room. You don't run a program.

This guide contains everything the participant sees, plus a short **Leader's Notes** section before each week, printed on tinted pages like this one. You are not expected to be an expert or a therapist. You are the keeper of an environment safe enough for people to tell the truth.

TWO RULES HOLD EVERYTHING

The leader goes first in honesty. And safety always outranks content. Hold these two, and almost nothing else can go wrong.

YOUR REAL JOB EACH WEEK

- Protect the environment — confidentiality, no fixing, no rushing.
- Go first, so the room learns how deep it's safe to go.
- Facilitate, don't perform. Ask, then get quiet.
- Know the edge of your role, and refer when something is beyond a group.

FOR LEADERS

How to use the Leader's Notes

Each week's notes give you: the **Big Idea** (the transformation this week aims at), **Objectives**, the likely **Emotional Landscape**, **What to Watch For**, **What NOT to Do**, a suggested **Discussion Flow**, scripts for **Difficult Conversations**, a **Prayer Focus**, and an **Optional Exercise**.

BEFORE YOU LEAD EACH WEEK

- Do the week yourself first — read, reflect, and practice as a participant.
- Read the Leader's Notes and pray for your group by name.
- Know your care pathway: a pastor and a trusted counselor you can refer to.

A WORD ON THE HARD WEEKS

Week Eight (Concealed Wounds) and the weeks around it can surface real pain. If someone discloses trauma, abuse, or crisis, stay present, don't try to fix it, and connect them to professional help. Keep the *Care Leader Guide* nearby.

CARE FOR YOURSELF

You will carry a lot. Be seen before you ask others to be seen. You cannot give what you don't have.

MOVEMENT ONE

The Ache

*The honest longing underneath the
surface — heard not as an accusation,
but as an invitation back to the design.*

WEEKS ONE & TWO

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week One: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

Tonight sets the ceiling. The ache people carry is the doorway into the whole journey — welcome it, and the room opens.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Establish safety and walk through the Journey Covenant together.
- Help people name the ache without shame.
- Model honesty by going first.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Expect nervousness and guardedness. Some deflect with humor; most under-share. There's often visible relief when honesty is genuinely welcomed.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Who deflects or goes quiet.
- Anyone whose "what's wrong with me" carries real despair — follow up personally this week.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"What made you say yes to this journey — and what are you hoping for?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone spirals into self-condemnation,
name the thesis over them: not a problem to be solved, but a design to be recovered.

If someone stays silent,
honor it. Silence is participation. Never put them on the spot.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for safety and courage — that each person would sense they are welcome exactly as they are.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Go around and have each person share one word for how they're arriving tonight.

WEEK ONE

What's Wrong With Me?

We begin where the honest questions live — not to diagnose you, but to stop pretending. The ache you walked in with is not a verdict. It may be the truest thing about you this week.

THIS WEEK

We name the low hum underneath an otherwise fine life — and begin to hear it as a signal, not a defect.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalm 139:13–16

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” — Psalm 139:14

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

We do not begin by trying harder.

We begin by telling the truth.

We are not here to fix ourselves.

We are here to be found.

The ache we carried in the door...

is welcome here.

And the God who designed us...

has not given up on the design.

Here, we can stop hiding.

Here, we begin.

TEACHING SESSION ONE

What's Wrong With Me?

Before you read this week's chapter, watch the first teaching session together as a group, or on your own. It sets the tone for everything ahead — and gives language to the ache you may have carried a long time without a name.

As you watch, notice what stirs. Jot down a phrase, a question, or a feeling you don't want to forget.

TEACHING SESSION
LINK

NOTES

THE READING · CHAPTER ONE

What's Wrong With Me?

from Fully Human

I still wear the \$15 ring.

Not because I'm proud of it. I wear it because my wife told me to. After I broke the real one, she handed me a cheap replacement from Amazon and said, with the kind of calm that is somehow more frightening than anger: "Break this one and you won't see me again."

She wasn't being dramatic. She was being precise.

Here's what happened. Early in our marriage I discovered something about myself I hadn't known was there — or more honestly, something I had known was there and had spent years making sure no one else ever saw. I had been suppressing my emotions for so long that I had confused suppression with maturity. I thought because I didn't react, I was healed. I thought because I kept it together on the outside, the inside had resolved itself. It hadn't. It was just waiting.

One afternoon Jenny and I got into an argument. I don't even remember what it was about — which tells you something about how disproportionate what happened next actually was. I felt unheard. I felt overwhelmed. And somewhere in the middle of that ordinary disagreement, everything I had been holding for years came rushing to the surface at once. I yelled. Not name-calling, not physical — but loud and sharp in a way that wasn't normal for me, in a way that surprised both of us.

I repented immediately. Told God and Jenny both: that will never happen again.

It happened again.

And then a third time — years later, a different argument, the same overwhelming feeling — I slammed my hands on the counter so hard the ring on my finger snapped. I stood there looking at the pieces, and the question that rose up from somewhere underneath all the shock and shame was not why did I do that but something older and more desperate than that:

What is wrong with me?

I want to be clear about something before we go any further. My story is not a template for harm. If you are in a relationship where there is physical danger, verbal abuse, or control — what I'm describing is not your situation, and this chapter is not a reframe that makes any of that acceptable. Get safe. Get help. Full stop.

But for the rest of us — for the people who have stood in the wreckage of something they promised themselves they would never do again, who have looked at the pattern of their own behavior with genuine bewilderment — I think you know exactly what I'm talking about.

You promised yourself you were done with it. And then you weren't done with it.

You said you'd never go back. And then you went back.

You made the commitment, meant it completely, and then watched yourself violate it anyway — not with indifference but with a kind of horrified helplessness, like watching yourself from across the room and being unable to stop what you're seeing.

What is wrong with me?

It is one of the most honest questions a human being can ask. And it deserves a more honest answer than the ones we usually give ourselves.

The Apostle Paul — the other Paul, the one who wrote most of the New Testament — asked the same question. He just asked it in Greek, in a letter to the church in Rome, roughly two thousand years before I broke my wedding ring. But the feeling is identical:

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

— Romans 7:15

Read that again slowly. The man who wrote Philippians, who planted churches across the Roman Empire, who had been caught up to the third heaven — this man sat down and wrote, with apparent bewilderment, that he does not understand himself. That the things he wants to do, he doesn't do. That the things he hates, he does anyway.

This is not a struggling new believer. This is the Apostle Paul. And he sounds exactly like the rest of us.

“

I had confused
suppression with
maturity.

FULLY HUMAN · CHAPTER ONE

What Paul is describing in Romans 7 is not a spiritual failure unique to him. He is naming the architecture of the human condition — the strange internal civil war that every person who has ever tried to live with integrity has felt. The gap between intention and action. Between the person you genuinely want to be and the person you actually keep becoming. Between what you know is right and what you find yourself doing at two in the morning when no one is watching.

Theologians call this the noetic effects of sin, or the divided self. Psychologists call it ego depletion, cognitive dissonance, the shadow self. Twelve-step communities call it powerlessness. Your grandmother probably called it something more direct.

Whatever you call it, you know what it feels like. And when we feel it — when we are standing in the gap between who we meant to be and what we just did — we reach for an explanation. And the explanation most of us reach for is the same one:

I'm only human.

Notice something about that phrase. We never use it as a compliment.

No one finishes a marathon and says "I ran 26.2 miles — I'm only human." No one forgives the person who hurt them most and attributes it to their humanity. No one reaches a hard-won sobriety milestone or chooses honesty when lying would have been easier and thinks, Well, that's just what humans do.

We reserve that phrase exclusively for our failures. Our lapses. Our moments of weakness and inconsistency and harm. I'm only human is shorthand for I'm limited, I'm flawed, I'm less than I should be — and the only reason it functions as an explanation is because we have collectively decided that humanness itself is the deficiency.

We have, in other words, created an identity out of our dysfunction rather than our design.

And that category error — mistaking the wound for the person, mistaking what sin has done to us for what we actually are — is the source of more spiritual confusion, more therapeutic dead ends, and more exhausting self-improvement cycles than almost anything else I can think of.

Because if your humanity is the problem, then the solution is to become less human. To suppress more, feel less, need less, want less, depend less. To achieve a kind of spiritual stoicism that looks like maturity but is actually just a more sophisticated version of what I was doing before I broke my wedding ring — holding it all in and calling it health.

That is not the gospel. That is not formation. And it is not what God had in mind.

Go back before the fall. Before Romans 7. Before the civil war inside every human heart. Go back to the beginning, to the moment before anything had gone wrong, and listen to what God says:

Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.

— Genesis 1:26

And then, after the work is complete:

God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good.

— Genesis 1:31

Not adequate. Not functional. Not good enough given the circumstances. Very good. The original design for human beings — including the neediness, the embodiment, the emotional range, the dependency, the relational wiring, all of it — was assessed by God himself as very good.

Which means that if God created human beings in his image and called that creation very good, then whatever it means to be human cannot, at its core, be deficient. The problem is not the design. Something happened to the design.

That something is sin. And here is the distinction that changes everything:

Sin is not your humanity. Sin is what happened to your humanity.

The Apostle Paul makes this exact move in Romans 7. He doesn't just name the problem and leave it there. He carefully qualifies his language: "So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it" (v. 17). He is not excusing himself. He is being precise. He is drawing a line between himself — the person, the image-bearer, the one God created — and the power that has invaded and distorted that person.

This is not a minor theological distinction. It is the difference between a diseased person and a person with a disease. The corruption is real. The damage is real. But the corruption is not the thing itself — it is what has happened to the thing.

Your sin is real. Your patterns are real. The gap between who you want to be and who you keep becoming is real. But none of that is evidence that your humanity is the problem. It is evidence that your humanity has been damaged — and that damaged things, when properly understood, can be restored.

At the center of orthodox Christian theology is a claim that we have somehow managed to make both abstract and familiar at the same time, which means we've drained it of its actual strangeness: Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human. We say it in creeds. We sing it in hymns. We have said it so many times that we no longer hear what we're saying.

But notice something. We say fully human. Not almost human. Not human in appearance but not really. Not human on the outside but divine on the inside. Fully. Human.

And we never — not once, not in any orthodox theological tradition — say Jesus was only human.

That distinction is not accidental. Intuitively, even without working it out theologically, we know there is something about the humanity of Jesus that is categorically different from the way we explain our own. When we fail, we say I'm only human. When we speak of Jesus, we say fully human — which implies not that he was exempt from humanity, but that he inhabited it completely, without the distortion. That he was what humanity actually looks like when it's working the way God designed it to work.

Which raises a question we haven't been asking loudly enough: What if the goal isn't to be only human — but fully human?

Jesus is standing in a crowd — the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, surrounded by ordinary people who feel everything Paul describes in Romans 7. Conflicted. Inconsistent. Tired of themselves. And he says:

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

— Matthew 5:48

And we read that and feel the familiar collapse — the sinking recognition that we are nowhere near that standard, have never been near it, and likely never will be. We read it as an impossible demand designed to humble us into helplessness.

But that's not what Jesus is doing. In the Greek, the word translated perfect is *teleios* — and it doesn't mean flawless or without error in the way we use the English word. It means complete. Whole. Fully realized. Brought to its intended end.

Jesus is not giving the crowd an impossible standard to make them feel small. He is pointing them toward a wholeness they were designed for — and that he, standing in front of them in a human body, is demonstrating. He is not the bar they can never reach. He is the picture of what recovering the design actually looks like.

Not only does Jesus save humans — he defines what it means to truly be one.

So if you are still asking the question — what is wrong with me? — I want to suggest that you are asking the right question but may have been accepting the wrong answer.

The answer is not: you are human, and that is the problem.

The answer is: sin has distorted something that was originally very good, and you were not designed to fix it yourself — you were designed to have it restored.

The distinction matters because it changes everything about how you approach your own healing. If the problem is your humanity, then the solution is suppression — feeling less, needing less, performing better. If the problem is distortion, then the solution is restoration — being seen, being known, and being slowly, carefully brought back toward the design.

That is what this book is about.

Not self-improvement. Not a better morning routine. Not trying harder at the things you've already tried harder at. But the recovery of something that was always there, underneath the distortion, waiting to be restored — a fully human life, the kind God imagined when he looked at what he had made and called it very good.

You are not a problem to be solved. You are a design to be recovered.

And the one who designed you has not given up on the design.

SIT WITH THE WORD

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

PSALM 139:13–14

Before you turn to the questions, read this slowly — twice. The ache you named in the reading is not evidence that something went wrong in the making of you. You were *knit together*. On purpose. The design is still there, underneath everything.

REFLECT

Let it land

Where in the reading did you feel a flicker of recognition — a “that’s me”?

What have you been managing on the outside that hasn’t actually resolved on the inside?

If your ache could speak plainly, what do you think it’s trying to tell you?

GO INWARD

The thing I've made sure no one sees

This is between you and God. No one will read it unless you choose to share it. Tell the truth here, even if your hand shakes a little.

Name one part of yourself you've worked hard to keep hidden — a fear, a pattern, a wound, a question.

What have you been afraid would happen if someone saw it?

Read Psalm 139:14 over that exact part of you, out loud: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."
What rises in you when you do?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Write freely. A sentence or a page. There is no wrong way to do this — only honest and less honest.

Begin with: “*What’s stirring in me this week is...*”

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*God, I have spent so long keeping it together
that I forgot what I was holding.*

*You knit me together. You know the ache,
and the part underneath it I've never shown anyone.*

*Meet me there. Not to fix me —
to find me.*

*Remind me I am not a problem to be solved,
but a design You have not given up on.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE ONE

Noticing

This week, do just one thing: *notice*. Notice the moment your “performing self” switches on — the small shift where you start managing how you come across instead of simply being present.

You don’t have to change it. You don’t have to judge it. Awareness comes before transformation. For now, awareness is the whole assignment.

HOW

Once a day, pause and ask: *Am I present right now, or performing?* Name it silently — “performing” or “present” — and take one slow breath. That’s it.

This is the first practice. Each week adds another, until you’ve built a rhythm you can keep for the rest of your life.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

Come with something honest. You never have to share more than you're ready to — but bring at least one of these.

-
- 01 What line from the reading stayed with you — and why?
 - 02 Where do you notice the gap between your outside and your inside?
 - 03 What would it mean, this week, to hear your ache as an invitation instead of a verdict?
-

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read **Chapter Two — “Who Are You... Really?”** and watch Teaching Session Two. Keep up Practice One as you go — just noticing. Come next week ready to ask a harder, freeing question: not what's wrong with you, but *who you actually are*.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Two: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

People are exhausted from defending selves that were never really them. Tonight loosens the grip on roles and listens for a truer name.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish performed roles from given identity.
- Make space to grieve identities that were survived into.
- Reinforce confidentiality.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Naming roles can surface grief or defensiveness — some roles were survival. Expect a mix of relief and resistance.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone whose identity is fused to performance (the achiever, the strong one).
- Signs of shame when a role is named.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Whose voice taught you who you were supposed to be — and what did it ask you to become?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone insists a role "is just who I am,"
don't argue. Invite curiosity: "What would it cost to set it down, even for an hour?"

If defensiveness rises,
slow down. Defensiveness usually guards a wound. Make it safe.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would hear the name God gives — beloved child — beneath every role.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Invite each person to name one role they're tired of performing.

WEEK TWO

Who Are You... Really?

Last week we named the ache. This week we go beneath it — past the roles we lead with and the labels we’ve accepted — to the person underneath. Not what you do. Who you are.

THIS WEEK

We loosen our grip on the identities we perform, and listen for the truer name we’ve been given.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 John 3:1–2 · Ephesians 2:10

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.” — 1 John 3:1

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

Before I am what I do,
I am who You made me.

Before I am useful,
I am beloved.

Strip away the roles;
meet the real me underneath.

Here, I am known.
Here, I am Yours.

TEACHING SESSION TWO

Who Are You... Really?

Watch the second teaching session before you read. It names the difference between the identities we perform and the identity we’re given — and why so much of our exhaustion comes from defending a self that was never the real one.

TEACHING SESSION
LINK

NOTES

THE READING

Who Are You... Really?

from Fully Human

Most of us can answer the question “What do you do?” before we can answer the question “Who are you?”

We have a job title ready. An elevator pitch rehearsed. A social media profile that summarizes us in a bio. But ask someone to describe who they are apart from their career, their accomplishments, their family role, or what they’ve been through, and the conversation gets quiet in a way that feels uncomfortable. Not because people are evasive. Because most of us genuinely don’t know how to answer that question.

We default to what we do because we’ve been taught — mostly without realizing it — that doing is the same as being. That output equals identity. That your value can be measured in your production.

This equation runs deep. It runs through our school systems, our workplaces, our families, and even our churches. It says: if you succeed, you are valuable. If you fail, you are suspect. If you perform well, you are secure. If you struggle, you are questionable. And somewhere along the way, most of us stopped questioning the equation and just started living inside it.

There are men reading this book who are quietly breaking down but don't know how to name it, because they were taught that strength means silence. That being a man means holding it together. That asking for help is a form of weakness, and weakness is the one thing you cannot afford to show. Their struggles are buried so far beneath what they've been told they should be that they've begun to mistake the burial for healing.

There are women reading this who are not breaking down — they're functioning, even thriving by external measures — but they are carrying more than they were ever meant to carry. They have been strong for everyone. They have been everything for everyone. And somewhere in the process of holding everyone else together, they started to believe that their worth is located in how much they can hold at once. Someone calls them strong and they want to scream, because strong no longer feels like a compliment. It feels like a life sentence.

Both of these people are operating from the same distorted equation. Their identity has been built on output. And output is an unstable foundation.

Here is the thing about building your identity on what you do: it only works as long as you keep performing. The moment you fail — and you will fail, because every human being does — the whole structure collapses. And in the rubble you find yourself asking the same question from a different direction: if I'm not what I do, then who am I?

The answer to that question begins in a garden, in the moment when human identity first got distorted.

Genesis 3 is one of the most analyzed passages in all of Scripture, and for good reason. But we tend to focus almost entirely on what Adam and Eve did — the act of eating the fruit, the disobedience, the rule broken. That matters. But it's not the whole story. Because there is a second thing that happened in Genesis 3 that we talk about far less, and it may be more devastating than the first.

Watch what the text says after they eat:

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

— Genesis 3:7

Notice what changed. Not their bodies. Not their design. Not the fundamental nature of who they were. What changed was how they saw themselves. One moment they are naked and unashamed — completely, vulnerably, comfortably themselves. The next moment they are naked and filled with shame, reaching for fig leaves to cover what they cannot bear to see.

Sin did not change who Adam and Eve were. It changed how they saw themselves.

This is the part we keep missing. We talk about the fall as a moral event — disobedience, broken rules, earned consequences. All of that is true. But Genesis 3 is also an identity event. Sin didn't just corrupt behavior. It corrupted the lens through which a person sees themselves.

They didn't just commit sin. They started to identify with it. They didn't just fail. They began to see themselves as the failure.

And if you're honest — really honest — you do the same thing.

You don't just say: I made a mistake. You begin to think: I am a mistake.

You don't just say: I failed. You begin to believe: I am a failure.

That is not conviction. Conviction is healthy; it names the act and invites correction. What I'm describing is something else — a fusion between the thing you did and the person you are. When that fusion happens, the question is no longer "How do I change what I did?" but "How do I escape what I am?" And the answer most people find is hiding.

I want to tell you something about myself that I've never been entirely comfortable sharing.

I was in third grade. There was a poetry competition at school — the kind where they put the winning poem in a book, the kind where they call your name on the intercom in front of the whole school. I couldn't think of anything to write. So I found a poem in one of our children's books and copied it. Word for word. Turned it in as my own.

A few months later, they called my name over the intercom. My poem had won. It went in the book. My grandmother got a copy of that book and kept it. I couldn't tell her. I didn't know how.

What I did was wrong. I knew that. But what happened next was something more complicated than guilt about an action. I began to see myself as an imposter. Not just someone who had done something dishonest, but someone who was fundamentally fraudulent — someone who couldn't produce anything real on their own, who only succeeded by taking what belonged to someone else.

To this day, I struggle with borrowing other people's ideas. Everything I do has to be original. When I preach, when I teach, when I write — there is something in me that needs it to be mine, because somewhere deep in my formation is a third-grade boy who learned that his real work wasn't good enough, and who has been trying to prove otherwise ever since.

That is not discipline. That is a distorted identity driving a behavioral pattern. I was never just guilty of plagiarism. I became an imposter in my own mind — and I have been trying to outperform that story for decades.

This is what sin does to identity. It doesn't just produce an action. It rewires the story you tell about yourself.

When the identity gets distorted, the response is always the same. You cover. You compensate. You try to manage the gap between who you've been told you are and who you actually feel yourself to be.

There are four ways this plays out, and most of us cycle through all of them at different points:

The first is performing. Performing says: if I do enough, I'll be enough. So you do more. You take on more. You work harder, serve longer, show up bigger — not because the work is meaningful, but because the work is covering something. You are trying to produce your way into worthiness.

The second is proving. Proving says: if I show enough, I'll be secure. So you make sure people see your wins. You position your accomplishments carefully. You cannot let a correction go without a defense, because what feels like a critique of your work actually registers as a verdict on your value.

The third is pretending. Pretending says: if they don't see it, I don't have to face it. So you build a version of yourself for public consumption — composed, capable, fine. The distance between that version and the one you go home to every night keeps growing, and you keep hoping no one notices the gap.

The fourth is projecting. Projecting says: if I put it on you, I don't have to deal with it in me. So the things you haven't healed become the things you're most irritated by in everyone around you. The thing that bothers you most about someone else is usually the thing you haven't faced in yourself.

These four cycles — performing, proving, pretending, projecting — are not character flaws. They are survival strategies developed by a person whose identity got distorted early and who found ways to function inside the distortion. They make a kind of sense. But they cannot heal what's broken. They can only manage it.

There is a word for what happens when you live long enough in these cycles. It's a word borrowed from psychology, but it describes something theological: disintegration. We'll come back to this in depth later. But understand the basic shape of it now: in God's original design, a human being is integrated — whole, coherent, unified in body and soul and spirit and identity. When sin distorts identity, that integration fractures. The person you are in public doesn't match the person you are in private. What you believe on Sunday doesn't hold on Monday. What you perform on the outside is at war with what you feel on the inside.

We call that hypocrisy. But I want to offer a more compassionate and accurate description: it is the symptom of a distorted identity that hasn't been healed yet. Most hypocrisy is not malice. It is the gap between the healing a person hasn't received and the standards they've agreed to perform.

Here's the thing about God's response to Adam in the garden that I find remarkable.

When God comes walking in the cool of the evening and calls out to Adam — knowing already what has happened, knowing the choice that has been made, knowing the damage that has been done — he doesn't lead with an accusation. He doesn't say: what did you do? He doesn't say: how could you?

He says: where are you?

That is a pastoral question, not a prosecutorial one. It is the question of someone who is not primarily interested in adjudicating behavior but in locating a person. Because the most urgent problem in that garden was not the fruit that had been eaten. It was a human being who was hiding — hiding from God, hiding from the woman, hiding from himself. Identity had fractured. The most important thing was not punishment but presence.

Where are you?

I think God is still asking that question. Not as an accusation. As an invitation. Not "How could you have done that?" but "Where have you gone? Which version of yourself are you hiding behind? Come out. Let me see you."

Salvation, in this light, is not primarily about getting forgiven for what you did. It is about being restored to who you are.

Most of us want forgiveness for our behavior but don't want restoration of our identity. We want Jesus to clean up the mess without touching the source of it. We want the acts forgiven but the wound untouched. And Jesus is offering something far more comprehensive than that. He is not just willing to pardon what you've done. He is committed to restoring who you are.

That process is what this book is tracing. Not a moral upgrade. Not a behavior modification program. A recovery of identity — the slow, sometimes disorienting, ultimately liberating process of becoming the person you were designed to be, rather than the distorted version of yourself you've been managing for years.

The quality of your work is not the measure of your worth.

You are not what you produce.

You are not your failures. You are not your wins. You are not your history. You are not your habits. You are not the story sin has been telling about you.

You are an image-bearer of God, distorted by sin, now being recovered by grace.

The question is not what's wrong with you. The question is whether you're willing to stop hiding long enough to be found.

Part Two

The Design

True Humanity

REFLECT

Let it land

Whose voice taught you who you were supposed to be? What did it ask you to become?

If you couldn't answer with what you do, how would you answer "who are you?"

GO INWARD

The roles I lead with

We all carry roles — some given, some chosen, some survived into. Naming them is not rejecting them. It's remembering they are not the whole of you.

List the roles you most often lead with (parent, provider, strong one, fixer, achiever, the fine one...).

Which of these would be hardest to lay down — and what are you afraid is underneath it?

Read 1 John 3:1 slowly. Sit with one word: *child*. What shifts if that is your truest role?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Begin wherever you are. Perhaps: *“The version of me I’m most tired of performing is...”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*Father, I have worn so many faces
that I forget which one is mine.*

*You call me child — not for what I produce,
not for how well I perform,
but simply because I am Yours.*

*Quiet the voices that named me wrong.
Let me hear the name You gave me,
and learn to live from it.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE TWO

Naming

Last week you practiced *noticing*. This week, add one small act: *name* what you notice.

Naming is the first step out of hiding. What we can name, we can bring into the light — to ourselves, to God, and eventually to one another.

HOW

Once a day, name one true thing about your inner state, out loud or in a note: “I’m anxious.” “I’m tired.” “I’m more hopeful than I expected.” No fixing. Just the true word.

Keep noticing. Now add naming. The rhythm is beginning to build.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

-
- 01 What role are you most tired of performing — and what might it look like to set it down here?
-
- 02 When have you felt most like your real self? What made it safe?
-
- 03 What does it stir in you to be called a beloved child, apart from anything you do?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

We move into **Movement Two — The Design**. Read **Chapter Three — “You Are a Soul.”**

Keep noticing and naming as you go. Come ready to recover something you may have forgotten: what you actually are.

MOVEMENT TWO

The Design

*Recovering who you were actually made
to be — an embodied soul, with real
needs, made on purpose.*

WEEKS THREE, FOUR & FIVE

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Three: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

Many in the room have been at war with their own bodies and emotions. Tonight declares a ceasefire.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people receive a whole-person view of themselves.
- Introduce silence as a practice.
- Bless the parts people have treated as the enemy.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

The idea that “you are a soul” can free or disorient. The five minutes of silence may feel uncomfortable — name that as normal.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Discomfort with stillness — reassure that restlessness is okay.
- Anyone carrying body shame; handle gently.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Where have you been taught to treat your body, emotions, or needs as the enemy?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If the silence makes people anxious,
normalize it: "Restlessness is welcome. You don't have to fill it."

If someone shares body or health shame,
witness it kindly; don't advise or diagnose.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would receive themselves — body and soul — the way God does: whole, and good.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Lead the five-minute silence together, then invite one word about the experience.

WEEK THREE

You Are a Soul

We've been taught the soul is the "spiritual part" of us — separate from the body, the emotions, the ordinary life. Scripture says something far more whole. You do not have a soul. You are one.

THIS WEEK

We recover a whole-person view of ourselves — and stop treating the body, emotions, and needs as the enemy.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 2:7 · Psalm 139:13–16

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

"The Lord God formed the man... and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." — Genesis 2:7

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I am not a spirit trapped in a body.

I am a soul, made whole.

My body is not my enemy.

It is the place I meet God.

Every part of me was made on purpose,

and called good.

So I will stop dividing myself.

Here, I come whole.

THE READING

You Are a Soul

from Fully Human

There is a word we have been using for centuries without fully understanding what it means. We sing about it. We preach about it. We tell people that Jesus “came to save your soul” without stopping to define what we’re actually saying. We assume everyone knows what a soul is. And then we build entire theologies, spiritual practices, and understandings of human personhood on top of a definition we never examined.

The definition most people carry — the default setting for what a soul is — sounds something like this: the soul is the spiritual part of you. The invisible, interior, immaterial component that survives death and goes to heaven. The part of you that belongs to God, as distinct from the part of you that belongs to this world. It’s the “church” part of you, you might say. The part that shows up on Sunday. The inner spiritual man, separate from the body, separate from the emotions, separate from the everyday ordinary experience of being alive.

That definition is not from the Bible. That definition is from Plato.

Plato's philosophy, which was enormously influential on Western culture including early Christian thought, divided human beings into two parts: the immaterial soul, which was noble and eternal, and the material body, which was limited and corrupted. The soul was trapped in the body. Death was liberation. The goal of the good life was to transcend bodily existence and ascend to pure spiritual being.

This is a coherent philosophy. It is also not what Scripture teaches about what it means to be human.

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. And *nephesh* does not mean the spiritual part of you.

Nephesh means your whole being. Your embodied self. Your physical life. Your breath. Your emotions. Your mind. Your relationships. Your identity. Your desires. Your story. Your entire lived experience as a person.

When the text of Genesis 2 says that God formed man from the dust and breathed into his nostrils, and the man became a living soul — the word is *nephesh*. Not a body that now contains a soul. A living *nephesh*. A whole, integrated, embodied person. The breath of God animated not a spiritual component but a complete human being.

This is why when David writes in the Psalms “my soul thirsts for you” — he is not describing a spiritual experience separate from his body. He is describing the whole of himself, including his body, his history, his emotions, his longings, reaching toward God. When he writes “my soul is downcast” — he is describing something that shows up in his posture, his appetite, his sleep, his relationships. Because the soul is the whole person, when the soul is in distress, the whole person is in distress.

You are not a soul in a body. You are a soul with a body. The body is not the cage for your real self. The body is part of who you are. And so are your emotions, your mind, your relational bonds, your history, and every other dimension of what it means to be you.

This is what John means when he writes to his friend Gaius:

Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.

— 3 John 1:2

The Greek word translated “spirit” here is *psyche* — the same root as our English word psychology. Most translations use “soul.” John is expressing a hope for his friend that his physical health would match his soul health — and in doing so, he is treating body and soul as genuinely connected, genuinely interdependent, genuinely part of one integrated human experience.

The health of the body is not separate from the health of the soul. They are part of the same life. They influence each other. Wound one and you wound the other. Heal one and the other begins to heal too.

Think of it this way. A tree has roots, a trunk, and branches.

The roots are your emotions. They are underground, largely invisible, but they are the source of everything else. They draw water from the deep places. They stabilize the whole structure. Without healthy roots, nothing above the surface can be healthy for long.

The trunk is your soul — your integrated center, the seat of your deepest desires and affections, the place where your history and your identity and your relationship with God all converge. The trunk connects the hidden to the visible. It carries what the roots draw up and makes it available to the branches.

The branches are your thoughts, your decisions, your behavior — the visible, observable expression of your interior life. The fruit grows on the branches. But the fruit is only as healthy as what's happening at the root level.

You cannot fix the branches by trimming them. You cannot produce lasting change at the surface of your life without addressing what is happening underneath. This is why behavior modification so often fails on its own. You change the branches without touching the roots, and the same fruit grows back because the same conditions are still producing it.

But here is what the tree picture also tells us: the roots, the trunk, and the branches are one tree. You cannot cleanly separate the spiritual from the emotional from the mental from the physical. They are one integrated life. When your soul is healthy, it shows in your thoughts. When your emotions are unaddressed, they show in your behavior. When your body is depleted, it affects your prayer. When your relationships are fractured, it affects your sense of God.

These are not four categories. They are one life.

Before we go further, I want to make a distinction that will matter throughout this book: the difference between feelings and emotions.

We tend to use these words interchangeably, but they are not the same thing. Feelings are conscious. A feeling is something you can name: I feel sad. I feel anxious. I feel proud. I feel angry. Feelings are the surface experience — what you can observe and report about your inner state.

Emotions are deeper. They are often not conscious — they operate in the unconscious mind and body before they become feelings you can name. An emotion is the underlying current that produces the surface feeling. The feeling of anxiety might be produced by an emotion of fear rooted in an early experience of abandonment. The feeling of anger might be produced by an emotion of shame that has never been addressed. The feeling you experience today is often the visible tip of an emotional iceberg that goes much deeper.

This matters because it explains why you can tell yourself not to feel something and still feel it. You are commanding the surface when the source is deeper. It explains why insight alone so rarely produces transformation. You can understand why you feel the way you feel and still feel it — because understanding is a branch-level activity and the emotion is a root-level reality.

What a biblical view of the soul tells us is that God is interested in all of this. Not just the spiritual level. Not just the Sunday-morning presentation. The roots. The underground work. The things you feel before you can name them. The things that drive you before you're aware they're driving.

Why does any of this matter for a book about becoming fully human?

Because if you misunderstand what the soul is, you will misunderstand what healing looks like. And the church has been operating with a misunderstood definition for a long time.

When the soul is defined as the spiritual part of you, then soul care becomes purely spiritual work: pray more, read more, fast more, believe harder. The body is secondary. The emotions are suspect. Mental health is a sign of weak faith. Anxiety means you're not trusting God enough. Depression is a spiritual problem. Trauma is something you can just take to the cross and leave there.

And then people pray and read and fast and believe — and they still struggle. And instead of concluding that the model was too narrow, we conclude that the person isn't trying hard enough. We add shame to the wound.

But if the soul is the whole person — if *nephesh* includes the body, the emotions, the mind, the relationships, the history — then soul care is whole-person care. Tending to your physical health is soul care. Processing your emotions is soul care. Getting good sleep is soul care. Being in honest relationships is soul care. Sitting with a therapist and excavating the roots is soul care.

None of this replaces prayer. None of this replaces Scripture. None of this replaces the transforming work of the Spirit. It includes all of that. But it refuses to be only that — because God did not create a spiritual compartment that floats detached from the rest of you. He created a *nephesh*. A whole person. And he intends to heal the whole person.

Your soul includes every part of you that God intends to restore.

Which means there is no part of you that is outside the reach of his care.

Not the part you've been trying to fix on your own. Not the part you're ashamed of. Not the part that doesn't feel spiritual enough. Not the part that shows up in your body and your sleep and your relationships and your emotional patterns.

All of it is you. And all of you is what God came to save.

SIT WITH THE WORD

“Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

GENESIS 2:7

Dust and breath, woven together into one living being — a *nephesh*. Not a soul poured into a body like water into a cup, but a whole person, body and breath inseparable. This is the design underneath everything you’ve been taught to be ashamed of.

A MOMENT OF SILENCE

*Set this down. Sit for five
minutes.*

*You do not have to produce
anything.*

*You are a soul, not a
machine.*

Just breathe, and be.

FIVE MINUTES · UNHURRIED

REFLECT

Let it land

Where were you taught to treat your body, emotions, or needs as obstacles to overcome?

What would change this week if you believed every part of you was made on purpose?

GO INWARD

A blessing, not a battle

Many of us have spent years at war with ourselves. This is an invitation to lay down the war — slowly, and by parts.

Name one part of yourself you've treated as the enemy (your tears, your hunger, your limits, your longings).

Write a single sentence of blessing over it instead of judgment. Begin: *"This part of me is..."*

What has it cost you to be divided against yourself? What might wholeness give back?

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*God, You formed me from dust and breath
and called the whole of me good.*

*Forgive me for the war I've waged
against the body and soul You made.*

*Teach me to receive myself the way You do —
not in pieces, but whole.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE THREE

Honoring the Body

You've been noticing and naming. This week, let your practice move into the body itself.

Formation is not only in the mind. To honor the body you've been overriding is to agree with God about the goodness of the design.

HOW

Each day, tend one bodily need you'd normally push past — rest, water, a walk, a full breath, sleep. Receive it as worship, not weakness. As you do, say quietly: "Thank You for the body that carries me."

Noticing. Naming. Honoring. Three practices now — the beginning of a way of life.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

-
- 01 What part of yourself have you been at war with — and what would a ceasefire look like?
-
- 02 How does it land to hear that you don't *have* a soul, you *are* one?
-
- 03 What did the five minutes of silence stir in you? What's hard about being still?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read **Chapter Four — “I’ve Got Needs”** and watch Teaching Session Three. Keep the practices going. Come ready to look honestly at something many of us were taught to be ashamed of: our needs.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Four: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

For the self-sufficient, admitting need feels like failure. Tonight reframes need as design, not defect.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people name legitimate needs without shame.
- Expose the pattern of counterfeit provision.
- Normalize asking.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Admitting need is vulnerable; expect minimizing (“I’m fine”). The inventory may surface where counterfeits have crept in.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Chronic self-sufficiency masking exhaustion.
- Any hint of addictive counterfeit coping — note it, follow up, refer if needed.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"What legitimate need have you been calling a weakness?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone minimizes their needs,
gently reflect it back: "I noticed you moved past that quickly."

If a counterfeit (substance, behavior) surfaces as a real struggle,
respond without shock, and connect them to real help.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would bring their real needs to God first, and trust Him to provide.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Have each person name one true need aloud and one honest way to meet it well.

WEEK FOUR

I've Got Needs

Many of us learned to be ashamed of needing anything. But even Jesus, in the wilderness, was very hungry. Need is not a flaw in the design. It's part of it — and it's exactly where the counterfeit comes looking.

THIS WEEK

We name our real, God-given needs — and notice where we've been meeting them with counterfeits.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Matthew 4:1-4 · Philippians 4:19

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” — Philippians 4:19

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I was made with needs.

They are not my weakness.

When I pretend I need nothing,

I hide from the God who provides.

So I will stop pretending.

I bring my hunger into the light.

TEACHING SESSION THREE

I've Got Needs

Watch the third teaching session before you read. It reframes need as part of the design rather than a defect to overcome — and shows how the enemy works not by inventing needs, but by offering counterfeit ways to meet the real ones.

NOTES

TEACHING SESSION
LINK

THE READING

I've Got Needs

from Fully Human

The text says Jesus was very hungry.

I don't want us to move past that too quickly, because I think we do. We rush to the temptation and the resistance and the theological significance of the whole episode — and we skip right over the detail that Matthew took care to include. Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights without food. And when it was over, the text doesn't say he was hungry. It says he was very hungry.

Matthew is telling us something intentional. Jesus is not performing stoicism here. He is not demonstrating that the Son of God rises above bodily need. He is experiencing what you experience when you haven't eaten in forty days — a hunger so deep it has gone past discomfort and become something closer to suffering.

And it is precisely into that moment — the moment of maximum need — that the enemy shows up with a proposition.

If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.

Commentators have focused, rightly, on the temptation to misuse divine power. But there is something else happening here that we miss when we stay only at the theological level. The enemy does not tempt Jesus with something he doesn't need. He tempts him with something he genuinely needs. Jesus is hungry. Bread would help. The temptation is real because the need is real.

This is the architecture of every temptation you have ever faced.

The devil's scheme is not to invent needs that don't exist. It is to meet real needs through solutions God never designed to meet them.

You cannot be genuinely tempted by something you don't actually need. Temptation only works because it targets a legitimate human need and offers a counterfeit provision. Think about how this plays out in everyday life.

You need affirmation — so you chase attention, performing for an audience that can only validate what you show them and never knows what you're hiding.

You need rest — so you escape responsibility, retreating into numbing behaviors that provide relief without restoration.

You need connection — so you settle for relationships defined by dysfunction, where the familiarity of the pattern feels safer than the vulnerability of genuine intimacy.

You need significance — so you perform, accumulate, achieve, always adding one more thing to the pile in hopes that the pile will eventually feel like enough.

None of these needs are wrong. Affirmation, rest, connection, significance — these are human needs, designed into you by God, essential for flourishing. The problem is never the need. The problem is where you're trying to get it met.

C. S. Lewis put it this way:

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

— C. S. Lewis

Lewis is pointing toward something the wilderness temptation confirms: the deepest human needs cannot be satisfied by anything this world offers. Not because the world's offerings are all bad, but because the need is too large for any earthly provision to fully meet. The hunger that drives you toward counterfeit solutions is ultimately a hunger for something only God can give.

Jesus' response to the devil in the wilderness is one of the most important statements in all of Scripture about what it means to be human.

He doesn't say: I don't need bread. I'm divine and above such things.

He says: People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The Greek word Matthew uses for "people" is *anthropos* — human beings. Jesus is making a statement about human nature. He is saying that humans — by design, in their original created state — were not made to be sustained by physical provision alone. There is a deeper need built into every human being that physical provision cannot reach. And that need is not incidental to being human. It is central to it.

We were not created with a God-shaped void. We were created with a God-shaped dependency.

“

The devil's scheme
is not to invent
needs that don't
exist.

FULLY HUMAN

The word void suggests an empty space that exists as a deficiency — something missing that needs to be filled. But the picture Scripture gives us is more intimate than that. We don't just need God the way a room needs furniture. We need God the way a lung needs air. The dependency is not a wound. It is how we were designed to function.

Go back to the moment of creation. Genesis 2:7:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

— Genesis 2:7

The life of the first human being was initiated by the breath of God. Not by the dust. Not by the form. By the breath. The animating force of human life, from the very beginning, was the direct, personal, sustaining action of God.

Now notice what Jesus says in Matthew 4: people do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The word that comes from the mouth of God. In Hebrew, the word for both breath and word is the same: ruach, the breath-word of God. Jesus is making a connection back to Genesis. The same breath that gave life at creation is the same sustaining word that humans need to live. We were made by the breath of God, and we were designed to keep running on it.

Disconnected from that source, we are not just empty. We are trying to run on the wrong fuel.

Think about the difference between a supplement and a source. A supplement is something you add to your life to enhance it — a vitamin, a mineral, an extra something that makes you a bit more functional. You can skip your supplements and be okay. You might not be optimal, but you'll survive.

A source is something different altogether. A source is what you cannot live without. You can't skip water. You can't skip oxygen. You can't skip the thing that your life actually runs on and expect to keep functioning. You survive without supplements. You die without your source.

Too many believers are treating God like a daily supplement. Something to add to the life they're already managing. Something that makes things a little better, a little more meaningful, a little more hopeful — but not something the whole enterprise depends on. Something you can skip on a busy week without catastrophic consequences.

But God is not a supplement to the human life. He is the sustaining source of it.

This is deeply countercultural, and we need to name that clearly.

The cultural script for a successful adult life is a story about autonomy. You grow up, become independent, stop relying on others, figure out your own path, manage your own affairs, stand on your own two feet. Dependency is what you grow out of. Self-sufficiency is what you grow into. The measure of a mature person is the degree to which they need as little as possible from anyone else.

Jesus stands in the wilderness — depleted, hungry, fully human — and inverts that entire script. He doesn't demonstrate humanity at its strongest. He demonstrates humanity at its most honest. He is hungry and he knows it. He is dependent and he embraces it. He is in need and he does not pretend otherwise.

Self-sufficiency suppresses your humanity. Surrender is what restores it.

That sentence might be the most countercultural claim in this entire book. Because everything in us resists it. Everything in the culture around us says it's backward. Surrender feels like losing. Dependency feels like weakness. Admission of need feels like failure.

But the wilderness shows us something different. Jesus doesn't conquer his hunger by denying it. He doesn't overpower temptation by pretending he has no need. He resists through surrender — surrender to the word of God, surrender to the Father's provision, surrender to the rhythm of need and supply that is built into the human design.

The wilderness is where Jesus shows us what fully human looks like under pressure. Not invulnerable. Not self-sustaining. Not above need. But oriented — honestly, resolutely oriented — toward the source.

There is a part of you that is already reaching toward God. Maybe you haven't given it that name. Maybe it shows up as a longing you can't quite articulate, an ache underneath the busyness, a sense that whatever you've accumulated still isn't quite enough. That longing is not a malfunction. That is your design surfacing.

The Apostle Paul will later put it this way: my old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. The life that is fully human is not a life of self-generated strength. It is a life of trust — daily, repeated, sometimes reluctant trust that the source will be enough.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus resisted every temptation in the wilderness — after the battle was over — the angels came and took care of him. The provision came. Not before the struggle. After it. On the other side of surrender.

And the same God who sustained Jesus in the wilderness is the God who is asking you to stop trying to sustain yourself.

You have needs. That is not a confession of weakness. That is an accurate description of your design.

There is no need that a human being has that God has not already made provision for. Not always the way we want. Not always when we want. But always in a way that sustains the life he created.

The question is not whether the provision exists. The question is whether you're willing to stop reaching for bread that will leave you hungry again, and start living from the source that was always meant to sustain you.

REFLECT

Let it land

What need have you been calling a weakness — and where did you learn to be ashamed of it?

Where has a real, unmet need sent you looking for a counterfeit?

GO INWARD · INVENTORY

A needs inventory

Go slowly and honestly. For each need, name how you've actually been meeting it lately — well, neglecting it, or reaching for a counterfeit.

Rest & sleep*the body's limits***Nourishment***what feeds you***Safety***room to exhale***Connection***to belong***To be known***seen as you are***Purpose***work that matters***Beauty & joy***delight, not just duty***Solitude***time with God and self*

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The need I find hardest to admit is...”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*God, You made me with hunger,
and You are not ashamed of it.*

*Forgive me for the counterfeits —
the ways I've fed real needs
with what could never fill them.*

*Meet me at the point of my need,
and teach me to bring my hunger to You first.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE FOUR

Asking

You've been noticing, naming, and honoring the body. This week, take the risk of *asking*.

For people trained to be self-sufficient, asking can feel like failure. It is actually the doorway out of counterfeit comfort — and into real provision.

HOW

Once this week, name a real need out loud — to God in prayer, and to one trusted person. Ask for something specific. Notice what rises in you as you do.

Noticing. Naming. Honoring. Asking. The rhythm keeps building.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

-
- 01 Which need was hardest to name in your inventory — and why?
-
- 02 Where have you reached for a counterfeit when a real need went unmet?
-
- 03 What would it look like to bring one real need to this group and simply ask?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read **Chapter Five — “Fraud Alerts.”** Keep the practices going — especially asking. Come ready to look at the selves we build to feel safe, and what it might cost to set them down.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Five: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

Everyone in the room wears masks. Tonight names them and begins, gently, to set them down.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people identify their false selves.
- Deepen trust so masks can begin to drop in the room.
- Model going first with your own mask.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Naming masks can bring shame or relief. The room's safety sets the ceiling — your vulnerability sets the tone.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Who performs even while describing their performance.
- Anyone whose masks hide something heavy.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Which 'self' do you work hardest to keep intact — and what are you afraid people would find without it?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If the room stays surface-level,
go first and go deeper. The room follows the leader.

If someone drops a mask and gets emotional,
let it be. Don't rescue. Witness, and thank them.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for the courage of the truly loved — that each person could be known and stop performing.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Invite each person (only if ready) to name one mask they're ready to set down.

WEEK FIVE

Fraud Alerts

To protect ourselves, we build a self we think will be accepted — and then spend enormous energy defending it. This week we name the masks, and hear the invitation to be searched, and known, and loved as we actually are.

THIS WEEK

We identify the false selves we perform — and begin, gently, to set them down.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalm 139:23–24 · Psalm 51:6

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” — Psalm 139:23

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I have built a self I thought was safe.

It is exhausting to defend.

Search me, God; I cannot see it all.

Show me the masks I've worn.

Give me courage to set them down.

Here, I can be real.

THE READING

Fraud Alerts

from Fully Human

Two years after my wife Jenny and I got married, we bought our first home. We were saving up to furnish it — an exciting, if slightly bare, season of new beginnings. Jenny manages our finances carefully; nothing gets past her. So one afternoon she pulls up our bank account and finds two charges from a restaurant in Atlanta called Two Urban Licks. One charge for over three hundred dollars. Another for a hundred and fifty.

She called me. And she went from Proverbs 31 to Criminal Minds in about two seconds.

I picked up the phone expecting hello. What I got was considerably more direct than that. She had already called the restaurant and the bank by the time she reached me. The verdict: fraud. Someone had gotten hold of my card information and used it with real enthusiasm — first at the bar, then at a full dinner.

We disputed the charges, froze the account, and moved on. But here is what stayed with me about that experience: the card had been used as if it were legitimate. The person who used it probably didn't look like a fraudulent person at that restaurant table. They ordered confidently. They sat down and ate. They presented themselves as someone who belonged there — and the whole time they were operating on a stolen identity.

I've been thinking about that ever since. Because I think a lot of us know what it feels like to sit at the table and wonder if we actually belong there.

Imposter syndrome is the pattern in which a person doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and carries a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. Despite external evidence of competence, despite the degrees and the accomplishments and the feedback from people who trust you — the internal experience is: I don't really deserve this. It's only a matter of time before someone figures out I don't actually know what I'm doing.

You've felt this. Most high-functioning, conscientious people have.

You get the promotion and immediately wonder if they made a mistake.

You receive the compliment and internally inventory all the ways it isn't entirely accurate.

You achieve the goal and feel not satisfied but vaguely anxious that now expectations have been raised and you don't know if you can meet them.

You work twice as hard as everyone else not because the work requires it but because something in you believes that working less would expose what you're afraid everyone is about to discover anyway.

This is not a modern phenomenon. It is an ancient one. And there is no more striking example of it in all of Scripture than the Apostle Paul.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is writing to a church in chaos. The community at Corinth is divided, arguing about leadership, questioning the resurrection, and — not incidentally — questioning Paul himself. His authority has been challenged. His manner of speaking has been criticized. His past has been held up against his present and found suspect.

And Paul doesn't hide from any of it.

For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me.

— 1 Corinthians 15:9-10

Paul's past is not something he puts in the footnotes. Before his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul — then known as Saul — was actively committed to the destruction of the early church. He was not a passive bystander to persecution. He was one of its architects. He approved of the stoning of Stephen. He went house to house dragging believers off to prison.

And now he is writing letters to those same churches. Now he is the one doing the planting. The man who once hunted Christians has become the one who leads them.

If there were ever a person with legitimate grounds to feel like an imposter, it is Paul. And Acts 9:26 confirms that others felt it too:

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer.

— Acts 9:26

The community had reasons to be skeptical. His track record was real. His history was public. And it would have been completely understandable, completely rational, for Paul to internalize that skepticism and conclude: I've done too much. I've gone too far. What right do I have to stand here and tell anyone anything about Jesus?

But Paul does not collapse into that conclusion. He names it, owns it, and moves through it. Not because he has convinced himself the past didn't happen, but because he has been convinced of something that redefines the past.

Imposter syndrome feeds on three lies. Paul names all three in these verses, and he answers each one with the same currency: grace.

The first lie is I'm not enough.

Paul says: I am the least of the apostles. Not a statement of false modesty. A genuine assessment. He knows who he is, what he was, what he did. And he also knows that what he is now is not the result of his own effort to compensate for who he was. The lie of I'm not enough is particularly destructive because it blurs the line between your perceived inadequacies and your actual identity. It takes the honest acknowledgment that you have limitations and converts it into a verdict that you are the limitation. Your weakness becomes your identity instead of the place where God's strength becomes most visible.

The second lie is I've done too much.

Paul's history was not private. In the first century, the people who knew what Saul of Tarsus had done were still alive. Some of them were in his churches. The skepticism of the Jerusalem community was not irrational. And it would have been entirely possible for Paul to decide that his history disqualified his future. We do this. We hold ourselves hostage to the things we've done, trusting the voices that point us toward shame more than we trust the grace that points us toward God. We decide privately what we publicly affirm God can forgive — and then we exempt ourselves from receiving it.

The third lie is I have to do more.

Paul acknowledges it himself: I have worked harder than any of the other apostles. There is an overperformance pattern in Paul's biography that is hard to miss. He is tireless. He is relentless. Some of that is genuine calling and genuine love. But some of it — the part that sounds like I've worked harder than anyone — carries the fingerprint of a person who is still, in some part of himself, trying to earn what grace has already given. The lie of I have to do more will take the language of diligence and service and use it to cover the wound of believing you are not yet enough. You will work yourself into the ground trying to compensate for an inadequacy that you've never submitted to God for healing.

Paul's answer to all three lies is the same:

But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me — and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.

— 1 Corinthians 15:10

Grace. Not the erasure of the past but the redefinition of it. Not the pretense that what happened didn't happen, but the insistence that what happened is not the final word about who you are.

The resurrection is the theological ground under all of this. Paul opens 1 Corinthians 15 with the resurrection precisely because resurrection is the answer to the lie that what has been broken cannot be restored. If the resurrection is true, then nothing is finally dead that God intends to raise. If the resurrection is true, then the worst thing about you — your history, your failure, your inadequacy — is not the final thing about you.

In Christ, you are not an imposter.

You are not a fraud.

You are not a person who barely made it in under the wire and is living in fear of being found out.

You are a son or a daughter, accepted not on the basis of your performance but on the basis of his. And because that is true, you have nothing to prove and nothing to cover.

Let me give you three fraud alerts — three places to watch for identity theft.

The first: lies from the enemy. The enemy specializes in taking things that are true about your limitations and converting them into conclusions about your identity. Yes, you have weaknesses. Yes, you have failed. Yes, there are places where you are not enough on your own. The fraud is the jump from those true observations to the conclusion that you are therefore unworthy of love, incapable of growth, or disqualified from purpose. That jump is not logic. That is theft.

The second: shame from your past. Shame is not the same as guilt. Guilt says: I did something wrong. Shame says: I am something wrong. Guilt is corrective. Shame is corrosive. And the enemy will use your history — the things you did, the things done to you, the seasons you'd rather no one ever knew about — to keep you frozen in a story that ended the moment you came to the cross. Don't let your history hold you hostage to an identity that grace has already rewritten.

The third: pride in your performance. This one is subtle because it wears the clothing of virtue. You work hard. You achieve. You maintain the standard. But underneath the performance, if you're honest, is a fear — a fear that if you stop producing, people will see that you're not actually who they think you are. That is not confidence. That is exhaustion dressed as competence. And it is one of the most effective ways the enemy keeps high-functioning people from ever experiencing the freedom of grace.

We guard our financial accounts against fraud with alerts, passwords, instant notifications. We respond to a suspicious charge at a restaurant with the urgency of a crisis. But we let the enemy steal our identity in Christ and barely notice it happening.

What if your perceived inadequacy is not your liability but actually the platform for God's greatest work in your life?

Paul's inadequacy was. His weakness became the testimony. His failure became the frame through which grace was made visible.

Yours can too.

Not because you've earned it. Because he paid for it.

Part Three

The Disruption

Why We Feel Off

SIT WITH THE WORD

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

PSALM 139:23–24

This is a dangerous, freeing prayer. To ask God to search you is to stop hiding — to let the light into the rooms you’ve kept locked, trusting that the One who sees it all loves you still.

REFLECT

Let it land

Which “self” do you work hardest to keep intact — and what are you afraid people would find without it?

What has the defending cost you?

GO INWARD · INVENTORY

The masks I wear

Name the version of yourself you tend to present in each setting — and, beside it, what that mask is protecting.

At work

the self you show

At church

the self you show

At home

the self you show

Online

the self you show

With family

the self you show

When afraid

the self you show

Which of these masks are you most ready to set down — and with whom might it be safe to try?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The self I’m most afraid to let anyone see is...”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*Search me, God. I'm tired of guarding
a self that was never really me.*

*You already see behind the mask,
and You have not turned away.*

*Give me the courage of the truly loved —
to be known, and to stop performing,
beginning here.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE FIVE

Unmasking

You've noticed, named, honored, and asked. This week, take the bravest step yet: let one true thing be *seen*.

Masks lose their grip in the presence of one safe person who sees the real you and stays. That is how hiding ends — not all at once, but one honest moment at a time.

HOW

Once this week, let one trusted person see something you'd normally hide — a fear, a struggle, a true feeling. Small is fine. What matters is that it's real.

Noticing · Naming · Honoring · Asking · Unmasking. A way of life is taking shape.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 What mask are you most tired of wearing?

02 What does it cost you to keep defending a self that isn't fully real?

03 What would it mean to let this circle be a place you don't have to perform?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

We enter **Movement Three — The Disruption**. Read **Chapter Six — “Disintegration.”** Keep the practices going. Come ready to name where the design first broke — and to do it gently.

MOVEMENT THREE

The Disruption

*Where the design was broken — what
we buried, and why the body remembers
what the mind would rather forget.*

WEEKS SIX, SEVEN & EIGHT

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Six: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

This begins the harder movement. Tonight names the split between the shown self and the hidden self — and its cost.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people name the gap between inside and outside.
- Introduce the Examen as a keystone practice.
- Prepare the room gently for the deeper weeks ahead.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Naming division can surface grief or conviction. The tone shifts heavier here — let it, without rushing to resolve.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone for whom “the gap” reveals a double life or a secret carried alone.
- Rising heaviness — pace accordingly.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Where is the gap between your inside and outside widest — and what has it cost you?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone confesses something heavy,
receive it without shock; thank them; follow up privately.

If the room gets heavy,
slow down. Silence and presence are enough tonight.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for integration — that each person would move toward one undivided, honest life.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Introduce and practice the Examen together as a short guided reflection.

WEEK SIX

Disintegration

To be whole is to be undivided — the outside and the inside in agreement. It's how we began: naked and unashamed, nothing hidden. This week we name where the splitting started, and the quiet cost of living divided.

THIS WEEK

We trace the fracture between who we are and who we show — not to condemn it, but to begin healing it.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Genesis 2:25–3:10 · Psalm 32:3–5

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave.” — Psalm 32:3, 5

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I was made to be whole,
one undivided self.

But I learned to hide,
and the hiding split me in two.

Bring the pieces back together, God.

Make me one again.

I don't want to live divided.

Here, I begin to come whole.

THE READING

Disintegration

from Fully Human

The word integration has a Latin root: integer. It means whole. Complete. Undivided.

When something is integrated, all of its parts work together as one coherent thing. An integrated person is someone whose public life and private life are not in conflict. Whose values and behavior are aligned. Whose inner world and outer world are speaking the same language. Who does not have to maintain two separate accounts — one for God, one for everyone else. One for Sunday, one for the rest of the week.

Integration is the original design. It is what Adam and Eve had before Genesis 3 — a complete, coherent, undivided selfhood. They were naked and unashamed, which in the language of Genesis means not that they lacked clothing but that they lacked concealment. There was nothing hidden. No gap between who they were and how they appeared. No distance between body and soul, between identity and behavior, between their relationship with God and their relationship with each other. They were integrated.

And then they weren't.

Something happens in Genesis 3 that we have been slow to name with precision. We call it the fall. We describe it as disobedience. We identify it as the origin of sin and death and all the suffering that follows.

All of that is accurate. But there is a dimension of Genesis 3 that receives far less attention than it deserves, and it may be the one that most directly explains the chronic inner conflict of your daily life.

Look again at what the text says happens in the moment after they eat:

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

— Genesis 3:7

They had been naked the whole time. Nothing about their bodies changed in that moment. What changed was the relationship between their sense of self and their bodies. For the first time in human history, a person looked at their own body and felt that something about it was wrong, exposed, dangerous. They separated their embodied self from their sense of identity. They looked at themselves from the outside for the first time, and what they saw made them want to hide.

When God comes walking in the garden and calls out to Adam, Adam says: I was afraid because I was naked.

He has been naked since the first moment of his existence. But only now — after sin has attached itself to his identity — does he distance himself from his own body. The body that was once simply and naturally him has become something he can observe from the outside, something that can be seen and judged, something to be managed and covered.

This is the beginning of disintegration.

The fragmentation of the soul. The body separating from the sense of self. The inner life separating from the outer presentation. The person who faces God separating from the person who faces the world. What was whole becomes divided. What was integrated becomes fragmented.

This is not only a spiritual phenomenon. Modern psychology has documented the experience of disintegration in careful and clinically precise terms, and understanding that language helps us see how deep the fracture goes.

Sin disintegrates the soul from the inside. Trauma disintegrates it from the outside. They work differently but they produce similar fractures. Sin corrupts identity — it changes how you see yourself, what you believe you deserve, what story you tell about who you are. Trauma overwhelms the system — it fragments, scatters, numbs, hijacks the nervous system, buries emotion, distorts identity in response to experiences that were too much for the system to process.

For many believers, trauma has shaped their Christianity before they ever had a theological language for either. They learned to survive inside painful experiences — and survival strategies are not the same as healing. They learned to perform composure while carrying fracture. They brought a divided self into their relationship with God and called it faith.

What they needed was not more spiritual discipline. They needed someone to name what had happened to them: their soul — their *nephesh*, their whole integrated person — had been shattered. And God intends to put it back together.

A distorted identity produces divided living.

This is the most practical consequence of disintegration, and it is one we all recognize even if we haven't named it this way. You act one way in public and another way in private. You believe one thing on Sunday and live a different way on Monday. You perform strength while hiding the struggle. You present the integrated version and manage the fractured one.

“

A distorted identity
produces divided
living.

FULLY HUMAN

We tend to call this hypocrisy, and the accusation is one of the most common charges leveled against religious people. There are too many hypocrites in the church. And in a narrow sense that's true — there are people who perform a version of faith they don't live. Willful pretense is real.

But I want to offer a more precise and compassionate account of most of what we call hypocrisy in the church. Most of it is not willful deception. Most of it is the gap between the healing a person hasn't received and the standard they've agreed to present. It is attempting to operate at a level of wholeness that you haven't yet experienced. It is a disintegrated person trying to perform integration because they've been told that integration is what a Christian looks like, without anyone helping them actually get there.

The four cycles from chapter two — performing, proving, pretending, projecting — are the behavioral face of disintegration. They are the survival strategies developed by a person whose soul has been fragmented and who has learned to manage the fragments instead of having them healed.

Performing: doing enough to feel like enough, because the internal measure of worth has been disrupted.

Proving: showing enough to feel secure, because the internal sense of security has been fractured.

Pretending: hiding enough to feel safe, because the internal experience of safety has been violated.

Projecting: placing on others what hasn't been faced in yourself, because the inner world has become too painful to examine directly.

These strategies are not character flaws. They are the logical responses of a disintegrated soul trying to function in a world that expects integration. And they will never produce healing, because they are designed to manage the fracture, not close it.

The Apostle Paul offers a different path, and it runs directly through the discomfort that our survival strategies are designed to avoid.

My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness.

— Galatians 5:16 MSG

The life of the Spirit is not the suppression of the human. It is the integration of the human — body and soul, emotion and mind, private and public, Sunday and Monday — under the animating influence of God himself.

The path toward integration begins with honesty. Not the performed honesty of a testimony crafted for public consumption, but the kind of honesty that admits, in the presence of God: I am not whole. I am divided. There are parts of me that are running on survival strategies I developed long before I knew what healing looked like. I need more than forgiveness for what I've done. I need restoration of what I am.

That honesty is not the end of the process. It is the beginning of it.

Where are you? God is still asking Adam's question. And the most healing thing you can do is stop hiding long enough to answer it.

Here. I'm here. Behind the fig leaves. Behind the performance. Behind the version I've been presenting. This is where I am.

That is not weakness. That is the beginning of integration.

And God, who walked in the garden asking for the person behind the leaves, is the same God who is walking toward you now.

REFLECT

Let it land

Where in your life is the gap between your inside and your outside the widest?

What has it cost you to keep the two apart?

GO INWARD

The gap

Integration doesn't begin with fixing. It begins with honesty about the distance.

Describe the “public you” — the version most people meet.

Now the “private you” — the one underneath, that fewer people (or no one) sees.

What is one small step this week toward letting the two become one?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The part of my life that feels most divided is…”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

God, I am tired of living in two.

*The self I show and the self I hide
have drifted so far apart.*

When I kept silent, something in me wasted away.

So I stop hiding now, even a little.

*Make me whole. Make me one.
Lead me back to the undivided life.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE SIX

The Examen

So far your practices have grown your awareness through the day. This one gathers the day up in God's presence.

The Examen is an ancient evening prayer — a gentle, honest review of your day *with* God, not *before* a judge.

HOW

Each evening, take five quiet minutes. Ask: *Where did I show up today, and where did I hide? Where did I sense God, and where did I miss Him?* Name it without shame. Give thanks, ask for grace, and rest.

Awareness (noticing, naming), honoring the body, honest asking and unmasking — and now a daily rhythm of returning. This is becoming a rule of life.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 Where do you feel the gap between your outside and inside most?

02 What has living divided cost you?

03 What would “coming whole” make possible?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read **Chapter Seven — “Does God Care About My Feelings?”** Keep up the Examen this week. Come ready to bring something we’re often taught to leave at the door: our emotions.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Seven: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

Many were taught to distrust their emotions or hide them from God. Tonight gives permission to feel, and to pray honestly.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people name their real emotions.
- Reframe feelings as a door, not a threat.
- Model honest, unedited prayer.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Some carry deep suppression; naming feelings may be unfamiliar or emotional. Expect tears for some, numbness for others.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone who can't access or name feelings (a sign of deep protection).
- Emotions that surface strongly — hold space, don't fix.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Which emotion were you most taught to suppress or be ashamed of?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone becomes tearful,
let them. Offer presence, not tissues – as – rescue. Tears are welcome.

If someone is emotionally flat,
don't force feeling; affirm that numbness is also information.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would experience God as a refuge for all of what they feel.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Invite each person to pray one honest "God, honestly I feel..." sentence.

WEEK SEVEN

Does God Care About My Feelings?

Many of us were taught to distrust our emotions — to rise above them, or to hide them from God. But Scripture is full of raw, unedited feeling brought straight to God. Your feelings are not a problem to overcome. They are a door.

THIS WEEK

We stop leaving our emotions at the door and learn to bring them honestly into God's presence.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalm 62:8 · Psalm 42 · John 11:35

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." — Psalm 62:8

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I was taught to hide what I feel,
even from You.

But You are not afraid of my sorrow,
my anger, or my fear.

So I will stop editing my heart.
I pour it out before You.

You are my refuge.
Here, I can feel, and be held.

THE READING

Does God Care About My Feelings?

from Fully Human

In 2011, a study was published that changed how neuroscientists think about emotional pain. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that the same regions of the brain that become active in response to physical pain — the regions that fire when someone hits you, burns you, injures you — are also activated during intense experiences of social rejection and emotional loss. The brain processes being excluded, being abandoned, being rejected, with the same neurological circuitry it uses to process being physically hurt.

In other words, when your heart breaks, something close to physical pain is happening in your body. When you are rejected or betrayed or abandoned, the same alarm systems that respond to a punch in the face are responding to what is happening in your emotional world.

Emotional pain is not just a figure of speech. It is real. It is embodied. It is happening to you in ways that are measurable and documented and deeply, uncomplicatedly human.

Which makes what the church has so often taught about emotions not just theologically questionable but genuinely harmful. Because somewhere along the way, in the broad stream of Christian tradition, we began to teach — explicitly or by implication — that having feelings is a problem.

The logic goes something like this: we are people of faith, and faith is not based on feelings, therefore feelings are unreliable, and unreliable things should not be trusted, and things that should not be trusted should be suppressed or ignored. We say “don’t live by your feelings” and then slide, almost without noticing, into “don’t have feelings.” We say “you can’t trust your emotions” and then conclude that the spiritually mature person is the one who has minimized their emotional experience.

The result is a Christianity that produces not healed people but numbed ones. People who have learned to manage their emotional experience rather than process it. People who perform composed faith while carrying unaddressed grief, unfelt fear, unnamed anger, and buried longing. People who mistake the suppression of feeling for the victory of faith.

But consider what we are actually saying when we teach this. We are saying that the God who created the entire range of human emotional experience — who designed the system that produces joy and grief and anger and fear and longing and love — intended for us to produce that system and then not use it. We are saying that the *nephesh* — the whole integrated person — was designed with an emotional dimension that God now wants us to suppress.

That does not follow.

Feelings were not a byproduct of the fall. Feelings are part of the design. And God does not ask you to manage what he built into you. He asks you to bring it to him.

The God of Scripture is not emotionally neutral. This surprises people who have been raised on a version of God that is primarily defined by power and sovereignty and the transcendent quality of being above everything.

Search the Old and New Testaments and you find a God who grieves, who delights, who is moved by compassion, who is angered by injustice, who weeps. The psalms are a record of emotional life in relationship with God — and they include anger, despair, confusion, exuberance, longing, and triumph, all brought directly into God's presence without apology.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit himself has feelings. He writes:

Do not bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit of God.

— Ephesians 4:30

Sorrow is an emotion. The Holy Spirit experiences something that can be described as sorrow. God is not a feeling-free divine computer processing theological transactions from a safe distance above the human experience. He is a God who is moved. A God who is affected. A God whose emotional life is not a weakness but a reflection of the fullness of who he is.

And since you are made in the image of that God — since your emotional life is part of what it means to bear his likeness — your feelings are not a problem. They are part of what makes you human in the fullest sense.

There are three things you need to understand about your feelings. The first: feelings are meant to be felt.

This seems obvious until you realize how many of us have spent years not feeling our feelings. We distract ourselves from them. We numb them with activity or substances or overwork or screens. We tell ourselves we're fine before we've checked whether we're fine. We label the act of feeling as weakness and the act of suppressing as strength.

But you cannot heal a wound you won't acknowledge. You cannot process a grief you've refused to feel. You cannot address a fear that you've covered with enough busyness that you haven't had to look at it. Feelings that are not felt do not disappear. They migrate — into the body, into behavioral patterns, into the walls you build around the parts of yourself that got hurt.

Feelings are data. They are telling you something about what is happening inside you. They deserve to be heard before they are managed.

The second: feelings are meant to be expressed.

There is a story in John 5 about a man who had been lying by a pool called Bethesda for thirty-eight years. He was physically unable to care for himself and had been in that condition for longer than many people in the crowd around him had been alive. When Jesus sees him and knows he has been there a long time, he asks a question that sounds simple but isn't: Do you want to get well?

The man's response is interesting. He doesn't say yes. He doesn't even directly answer the question. He starts talking about the pool — about how others always get there before him, about how there is no one to help him, about how he has been here all this time and no one has come through for him.

What is happening in that response? He is not evading the question. He is answering a deeper one. His real wound is not only physical. He has been invisible for thirty-eight years. He has been overlooked and cut in front of and left behind by people who could see his need and chose not to respond to it. He is not just sick. He is emotionally wounded, and the moment someone finally pays attention — the moment Jesus asks him directly and waits for an answer — everything that has been held in comes out.

He basically throws it on Jesus. And Jesus heals him.

Notice that the man's faith is never mentioned. The text doesn't say your faith has made you whole, the way it does in other healing accounts. What the man brings is not faith in any formal sense. What he brings is his honest, unfiltered, emotionally raw experience of being unseen and uncared for — and Jesus responds to it.

Jesus cares about what you've been carrying. He is not looking for the polished version of your struggle. He is asking to receive the real one.

The third thing: feelings are meant to be managed — but not by you alone.

Your feelings are excellent motivators and terrible managers. Left to run unchecked, unprocessed, unaddressed, emotions become something closer to tyrants. An unmanaged fear makes every decision around self-protection. Unmanaged anger corrodes relationships. Unmanaged grief becomes a weight that colors everything. The goal is not to have no feelings but to have feelings that are managed well — felt, expressed, processed, and submitted to God.

God is not asking you to suppress what you feel. He is asking you to bring it to him.

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

— Psalm 55:22

Cast is a physical word. It is not the word for carefully handing something over. The same word is used when fishermen cast their nets — a full-body throw, committed and complete. God is not asking you to carefully parcel out small pieces of your anxiety at regular intervals. He is asking you to throw the whole thing. All of it. With both hands. The grief you've been managing alone. The fear you've been rationalizing. The anger you've been suppressing. The longing you've been too afraid to name.

All of it.

Psalm 147 says he heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. Psalm 34 says the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Not the people who have it together. Not the people who have managed their emotions successfully. The brokenhearted. The crushed.

God moves toward the wound, not away from it. And the most important thing you can do with what you've been feeling is stop pretending you haven't been feeling it, and bring it to the only one with the power to actually address it.

SIT WITH THE WORD

*“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.”*

PSALM 62:8

Notice what the Psalm does *not* say — it doesn’t say clean up your heart first, then bring the acceptable parts. It says pour it *out*. All of it. God is refuge enough for the whole of what you feel.

REFLECT

Let it land

Which emotion were you most taught to suppress or be ashamed of?

What might that emotion be trying to tell you — if you let it speak?

GO INWARD

Naming what you feel

We can't bring to God what we won't name. Slow down and tell the truth about your inner weather.

What are you actually feeling these days — underneath “fine”? Name as many as are true.

Which feeling have you been carrying alone, without bringing it to God?

Write that feeling as a one-line prayer, unedited. Begin: *“God, honestly, I feel...”*

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The feeling I’ve been afraid to bring to God is…”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*God, I've kept my heart at a distance,
offering You only the tidy parts.*

*But You made me to feel,
and You can hold all of it.*

*So here it is — the sorrow, the anger,
the fear, the longing.*

Be my refuge. Meet me in what's real.

AMEN.

PRACTICE SEVEN

Praying Honestly

The Psalms are full of unedited emotion — lament, protest, longing, joy — brought straight to God. This week, you join them.

Praying honestly means refusing to perform even in prayer. God already knows; honesty just lets you meet Him there.

HOW

Once this week (or daily, if you can), pray one raw, unedited feeling to God — out loud or written. No churchy language. Just the truth of what's in you.

The rhythm deepens: awareness, honoring, asking, unmasking, the Examen — and now honest prayer. You're learning to bring your whole self to God.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

-
- 01 What emotion were you taught to hide — even from God?
-
- 02 What's it like to imagine God as refuge for *all* of what you feel?
-
- 03 Where do you need to stop performing, even in prayer?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

A gentle heads-up: next week's chapter, "**Concealed Wounds**," is tender. Read it slowly and kindly. There will be extra room to go gently — and you never have to go further than you're ready to.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Eight: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

This is the most tender week of the journey. Your job tonight is not depth — it's safety. Go gently, and hold people well.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Create a very safe, unhurried space.
- Let wounds be acknowledged — never forced open.
- Know and be ready to use your care pathway.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Wounds may surface — grief, tears, disclosures, or shutdown. Some go quiet to protect themselves. Both are okay.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Disclosures of trauma, abuse, or self-harm — stay present, don't fix, connect to real help.
- Anyone dissociating or overwhelmed — gently ground and support.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.
- Do NOT push anyone to “go deeper.” This week, less is more.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: “ <i>Only as far as you're ready: what's one wound you're beginning to let be seen?</i> ”
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone discloses trauma or abuse,
 stay calm and present. Believe them. Don't interrogate. Afterward, connect them to a pastor or licensed counselor. See the Care Leader Guide.

If someone shows signs of crisis or self-harm,
 don't handle it alone — involve your pastor or care team immediately and ensure they are safe.

If someone shuts down,
 don't pursue. Offer quiet presence and a private check-in later.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray Psalm 34:18 over the room — that each would sense God close to their broken heart.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Keep it simple tonight. Consider closing in gentle prayer over one another rather than an added exercise.

WEEK EIGHT

Concealed Wounds

The wounds we bury don't disappear. They go underground and shape us from there — often for years. This week we turn toward what we've concealed. Gently. Only as far as you're ready. There is no prize for going fast here.

THIS WEEK

We turn, with great care, toward a wound we've carried in silence — and let it be seen by the God who is close to the brokenhearted.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalms 34:18 · Isaiah 61:1

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” — Psalm 34:18

BEFORE YOU BEGIN THIS WEEK

This chapter touches concealed wounds — the things we’ve buried and stopped naming. Go gently.

You do not have to uncover anything you’re not ready to. If this week stirs something heavy, that is not a failure — it’s your soul beginning to tell the truth.

Tell your leader. Reach out to someone you trust. And if what surfaces feels like more than a group can hold, please talk with a pastor or a licensed counselor. That is not weakness. It is wisdom, and courage.

You are not alone in this. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

There are wounds I've carried in silence,
so long I stopped calling them wounds.

You are close to the brokenhearted,
and You are not afraid of my pain.

So I will turn, gently, toward what I hid.

And I will not turn alone.

Hold me as it comes into the light.

Here, I am safe enough to grieve.

THE READING

Concealed Wounds

from Fully Human

I was in sixth grade when I got called to the office. The intercom came on in the middle of class — a request for me to report to the front office because my mother was calling. When I got there and picked up the phone, she broke down crying immediately. She had come home from work early. My father had skipped work. She found him with the neighbors — who were, to be direct about it, drug dealers — and he was done. Not just with her, but with being there at all. By the time I got home from school that afternoon, he would be gone.

My father had been in and out of my life for years before this. He had other children with another woman, and there was a pattern — he'd come to live with us for a while, things wouldn't work between him and my mother, and he'd leave. I'd go six months or a year without seeing him. Then he'd come back like nothing had happened. I'd learned to adapt to that emotionally. I'd developed a capacity to absorb his absence and continue functioning.

But this call was different. Something in my mother's voice told me that this was not the pattern ending the usual way. This was the pattern ending.

She told me that my sister — who was closer to my dad than I was — was going to need me when she got home. Take care of her. I said okay. The secretary behind the counter asked me, when I hung up the phone, if everything was all right.

I looked at her. I paused. Then I nodded and said yes, everything was fine, my mom just needed me to do something for my sister.

I walked back to class. And to cope with everything I was carrying, I started acting out — clowning around, making people laugh, being the class entertainer. Everything was fine. Everything was cool. Everything was handled.

There was a wound. And I had already, at twelve years old, developed the instinct to conceal it.

I have to tell you something about concealed wounds that took me years to understand.

When you injure a bone and it doesn't get treated properly, it heals wrong. It knits itself back together, but in the wrong position, or with scar tissue in the wrong places, or with a limitation that wasn't there before the injury. The bone heals. But it doesn't heal correctly. And the longer you wait to address it, the more entrenched the misalignment becomes.

Emotional wounds work the same way. Left untreated, they don't dissolve. They don't disappear into the past where they can't affect you anymore. They close over. They develop scar tissue. They become the invisible framework through which you interpret every relationship, every perceived rejection, every experience of feeling unseen or unprotected or dispensable.

I grew up thinking I'd dealt with my father's absence because I was still standing. Because I was functional. Because I hadn't collapsed. But I hadn't dealt with it. I had concealed it and then built my life around the concealment. I had become a person who was almost constitutionally incapable of letting anyone see that something had hurt me, because a twelve-year-old had decided, in a school office, that the correct response to pain was to say everything was fine and go back to class.

Some of you are carrying wounds like that. Wounds from early experiences that you have managed to function around for so long that you've confused functioning with healing. The evidence is not in your dysfunction — it's in the invisible rules that govern you. In the patterns you keep returning to. In the walls that seem to go up automatically when certain things happen. In the ways you respond to people who remind you, unconsciously, of people who hurt you long ago.

The wound healed. But it didn't heal correctly. And until it's properly addressed, it is shaping you in ways you're probably only partially aware of.

The man at the pool of Bethesda had been in his condition for thirty-eight years. The text does not tell us how he got there or what the original injury was. What it tells us is the duration: thirty-eight years of being physically unable to help himself, surrounded by crowds of other sick people, watching others get into the water that was supposed to hold his healing.

And for thirty-eight years, people had seen him and kept walking.

When Jesus asks him if he wants to get well, the man doesn't answer the question directly. He says: I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. Someone always gets there ahead of me.

Read that carefully. He is not describing a logistical problem. He is describing thirty-eight years of being invisible. Of being passed over. Of being the person who has an obvious need that everyone can see and no one addresses. He has been hurt not only by his physical condition but by the cumulative experience of being repeatedly overlooked by the people around him.

And when Jesus asks him a question and waits for an answer, it all comes out. He doesn't even know who Jesus is yet — he doesn't know that the person asking him has any power to do anything about his condition. He just knows that someone is finally paying attention. Someone is finally asking. And so he tells him.

He brings not just his physical need but his emotional wound. He brings not just the body that doesn't work but the heart that has been carrying thirty-eight years of feeling unseen.

And Jesus heals him.

I want to propose a distinction that I think will change how you understand your own experience.

Hurt is not simply an emotion you deal with. Hurt is a wound you heal from.

We tend to collapse the two — to treat what we've been through as something to be managed emotionally, processed therapeutically, moved past as efficiently as possible. But the biblical language is consistently medical, not just emotional. Broken hearts are healed. Crushed spirits are restored. Wounds are bandaged. The imagery is not of someone learning to feel okay about what happened to them. It is of someone receiving genuine treatment for a genuine injury.

Psalm 34 says: The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Psalm 147 says: He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.

Not just comforts them. Not just helps them cope. Heals them. Bandages the wounds. The language is treatment, not just comfort.

This means that God's intention for your pain is not primarily that you would feel better about it. It is that you would be healed from it. There is a difference. Feeling better about a wound can happen without the wound closing. Real healing is something more than that. It is the wound actually being treated, at its actual depth, by someone with the actual capacity to address it.

But healing requires exposure. You cannot bandage a wound that is still covered.

This is the hardest part for people like me — people who learned early that the appropriate response to pain is concealment. Because concealment felt like protection. It felt like strength. It felt like having it together. And bringing the wound into the open feels like the opposite of all those things. It feels like weakness. It feels dangerous. It feels like handing someone a weapon they could use against you.

I understand that feeling. I lived inside it for most of my life.

But I also know now what living inside that concealment costs. It costs the integration of the self. It costs the kind of intimacy that can only exist between people who have actually seen each other. It costs the healing that can only come to wounds that have been acknowledged and brought into the light.

The man at the pool was not healed because he had impressive faith. He was healed because he was honest. Because when someone finally asked — when someone finally stopped and paid attention and waited for a real answer — he told the truth about what he had been carrying.

That is what Jesus is asking of you. Not a polished testimony. Not a managed version of your struggle. The real thing. The thirty-eight-year thing. The wound that you have been calling fine for so long that you've almost convinced yourself.

He is asking for it because he intends to heal it. Not manage it. Heal it.

You do not have to keep carrying what you've been carrying. The weight of an unaddressed wound is not yours to hold forever. There is a God who specifically, intentionally, moves toward the broken and the crushed — not because he's impressed by how long you've survived, but because he intends to do something about the survival strategy and give you something better.

Wholeness. Actual wholeness. Not the performance of it.

But it begins with honesty. It begins with the willingness to say: here is what I have been carrying. Here is how long I have been carrying it. I can't keep going on my own. I need you.

That is not weakness. That is the beginning of healing.

Part Four

The Restoration

Becoming Fully Human

SIT WITH THE WORD

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

PSALM 34:18

Read this slowly, with your hand on your heart if it helps. Wherever the wound is, God is not far off from it. He is *close* — nearest, in fact, to the most broken place.

GO INWARD · GENTLY

Turning toward the wound

There is no rush and no requirement. Answer only what you're ready to. Even acknowledging that a wound exists is holy, courageous work.

Name one wound you've carried a long time. You don't have to relive it — only to acknowledge that it happened, and that it mattered.

What did you learn to do to survive it? How might that still be shaping you?

Now read Psalm 34:18 over that exact place: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.” What do you want to say back to Him?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“What I’ve never really let myself grieve is…”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

*God, I've kept this wound in the dark
because the dark felt safer.*

*But You are already there,
closer to the break than I have ever been.*

I don't need to fix it today.

*I only need to stop pretending it isn't there,
and let You near it.*

*Be close to my broken heart.
Begin, in Your gentleness, to heal.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE EIGHT

Tending

This week's practice is the gentlest yet. After turning toward something tender, the work is not to push forward — it's to *tend*.

To tend a wound is to stop ignoring it and stop attacking it — to be present to it with the same kindness God shows you.

HOW

Each day, place a hand where you feel the tenderness, breathe slowly, and say: "This mattered. God is close to it. I don't have to carry it alone." Then do one kind thing for yourself — rest, a walk, a call to a friend.

Be especially gentle with yourself this week. Keep only the practices that give you life. Tending is enough.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 Only if you're ready: what's one wound you're beginning to let be seen?

02 What helps you feel safe when something tender surfaces?

03 How can this circle care well for one another this week?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Be gentle with yourself in the days ahead — surfacing a wound is tiring, holy work. When you're ready, we turn a corner: **Movement Four — The Restoration.** Read **Chapter Nine — “Fully Clothed and Perfectly Sane.”** Hope is coming.

MOVEMENT FOUR

The Restoration

*How wholeness actually comes — not
by trying harder, but by being met, and
made whole.*

WEEKS NINE & TEN

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Nine: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

The tone turns. After the hard work of surfacing, tonight is about hope: no one is too far gone to be restored.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people receive hope and name the lies they've believed.
- Contrast striving with receiving.
- Speak gospel truth over old lies.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Relief and hope, but some may resist — hope can feel unsafe after disappointment. Honor both.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone who deflects hope or insists they're the exception.
- Lies spoken as facts ("I'm just broken") — gently counter with truth.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Where have you believed you were 'too far gone' — and what's the truth over that lie?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone can't accept hope,
don't argue them into it. Speak one true thing over them and let it sit.

If a deep lie surfaces,
help them name it, then invite the group to speak truth over them.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would believe God has not given up on what He intends to restore in them.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Invite each person to name one lie; have the group speak the gospel truth back over them.

WEEK NINE

Fully Clothed & Perfectly Sane

A man among the tombs had come apart — shattered into pieces that no longer added up, beyond every human intervention. Jesus crossed the water to reach him, and did not scold him into shape. He restored him. This week, hope enters: what if you are not too far gone?

THIS WEEK

We turn a corner from disruption to restoration — and discover that wholeness is received, not achieved.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Mark 5:1–20 · 2 Corinthians 5:17

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I have believed I was too far gone.

But You cross the water to reach me.

You do not scold me into shape.

You make me whole.

Clothe me. Restore my right mind.

Gather my pieces into one.

Here, hope begins again.

Here, I am being restored.

TEACHING SESSION FOUR

Missing Pieces

Watch the fourth teaching session before you read. “Missing Pieces” names the turn at the heart of this journey: the shattered can be made whole. Not by assembling the fragments ourselves, but by being met by the One who restores personhood.

TEACHING SESSION
LINK

NOTES

THE READING

Fully Clothed and Perfectly Sane

from Fully Human

He lived in the burial caves. Not metaphorically. Not as a figure of speech. The man in Mark 5 had made his home among the tombs — in a region of caves used to bury the dead, at the edge of human community, in the place where people brought what they wanted to put behind them. He had crossed the boundary from the world of the living to the world of the dead, and he lived there.

He could not be contained. People had tried. Chains and shackles, the text tells us — and he had broken all of them, with a strength that didn't seem to be entirely his own. He was a danger to himself and others. He wandered. He howled. He cut himself with stones. He was a person whose inner fragmentation had become so extreme that it expressed itself in the total dissolution of normal life.

He had not chosen this. No one chooses this. He had arrived here through a series of experiences and encounters that had broken him into pieces, and the pieces no longer added up to a coherent person. He was not crazy. He was shattered. And the shattering had driven him to the only place he felt he could exist — on the outskirts, among the dead, as far from normal human life as a person can get while still being alive.

When Jesus arrives on the other side of the lake — having crossed the water specifically to reach this man, in this place — the demonized man sees him from a distance and runs to meet him. Not away. Toward. There is something in the recognition of Jesus that compels him forward even before he knows what is going to happen. He runs and bows at Jesus' feet.

And the demons beg to be sent away.

And Jesus sends them.

And the man who had been Legion — many, fragmented, shattered into pieces with no coherent center — is suddenly sitting. Clothed. In his right mind.

The miracle is described in a phrase that I find one of the most beautiful in all of the Gospels: fully clothed and perfectly sane.

The town comes out to see what has happened. They know this man. They know what he was — the chains, the tombs, the howling. And what they find is a person sitting calmly at the feet of Jesus, wearing clothes, in possession of himself. The same man. A completely different condition.

And they are afraid.

This is one of the only miracles in the Gospels where the crowd responds to the healing not with joy or praise but with fear. They ask Jesus to leave. The miracle is so radical, so far outside what they had believed was possible for this particular person, that it disrupts their world in a way they cannot accommodate.

There is something worth sitting with in that response. Because it exposes something true about human beings: we can become more comfortable with familiar dysfunction than with unfamiliar wholeness. The chains and the tombs and the howling had been there for a long time. The community had organized itself around this man's brokenness. They knew how to relate to him as a disaster. They did not know how to relate to him as a whole person.

Too many of us would rather live with the dysfunction that feels familiar than embrace the healing that feels foreign.

Think about what this means for your own life. There are ways you have been broken for so long that the brokenness has become part of your identity — a story you tell about yourself, a limitation you've accepted as permanent, a wound you've stopped believing could close. And the idea of being genuinely healed, of being fully clothed and perfectly sane in all the places where you currently are not, feels so distant and so disorienting that you aren't sure you can imagine it, let alone want it.

What would it mean to be whole? Genuinely whole — not managed, not compensating, not working around the damage, but actually restored?

Before the healing in Mark 5, there is a moment in Luke 4 where Jesus makes explicit what he has come to do. He is in the synagogue in Nazareth, the town where he grew up, and he is handed the scroll of Isaiah to read. He unrolls it and finds the passage:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.

— Luke 4:18-19

He reads it. He sits down. And every eye in the synagogue is fixed on him. Then he says: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

He is not describing a distant future event. He is describing what is happening right now, in this moment, in and through him. Good news to the poor. Release for captives. Sight for the blind. Freedom for the oppressed.

And then he crosses the lake and finds a man living in tombs.

And everything he said in the synagogue in Nazareth happens in the burial caves of the Gerasenes. Good news reaches someone who has been written off. A captive is released. A person who could not see himself clearly is given back his sanity. The oppressed is set free.

Luke 4 is the mission statement. Mark 5 is the mission in action. And the connection between them tells us something essential about the scope of what Jesus came to do.

The Greek word for save in the New Testament is *sōzō*. It appears throughout the Gospels and Epistles in contexts we usually associate with spiritual rescue — salvation from sin, eternal life, the forgiveness of God. But *sōzō* is not a narrowly spiritual word. Its range of meaning includes to heal, to make whole, to restore, to rescue, to deliver, to reintegrate.

When the blind man cries out to Jesus and Jesus restores his sight — the word is *sōzō*. When the woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years touches the hem of Jesus' garment and is healed — the word is *sōzō*. When the demonized man is delivered and found sitting clothed and in his right mind — the word is *sōzō*. When Paul writes that by grace you have been saved — the word is *sōzō*.

Salvation and healing are not two separate categories in the New Testament. They are one word. One work. One comprehensive act of God directed at the whole person.

Wholeness is not a secondary benefit of salvation. Wholeness is what salvation is.

When Jesus walks out of that tomb region and the man is sitting clothed and in his right mind, we are seeing salvation in its fullest expression — not just the forgiveness of sin, not just the promise of heaven, but the restoration of a human being to integrated, coherent, dignified personhood. The pieces back in their places. The self back in its rightful center. A person who was many, now one.

What would it mean for you to be fully clothed and perfectly sane?

I don't mean that metaphorically. I mean it literally. What are the places in your life where you are still living in the tombs? Where you are still existing at the margins of your own life, on the outskirts of full participation in relationships and purpose and presence, because something has shattered you in ways you haven't been willing to bring to Jesus?

What is the condition you've accepted as permanent?

The man in Mark 5 had no category for what was about to happen to him. No one in his community believed it was possible. He had been in chains too many times, had broken too many restraints, had been beyond reach for too long. The expectation was management, not healing. Chains, not restoration.

And Jesus walked across a lake specifically to find him.

Not because he was the most visible person in the region. Not because he was the most religious, or the most grateful, or the most likely to respond well. Jesus crossed the water for the person living in the tombs — the one everyone else had given up on, including, possibly, himself.

God has not given up on what he intends to restore in you.

He crosses water to get to people others have written off. He goes to the tombs. He goes to the places of the dead and the forgotten and the far-gone. He goes there because that is where the people who most need him tend to end up.

And what he does there is not chain management. It is wholeness.

Fully clothed. Perfectly sane. The person God designed, recovered from the wreckage of what broke them.

That is what Jesus came to do. For the man in the tombs. And for you.

“

God has not given
up on what he
intends to restore in
you.

FULLY HUMAN

THE READING

Salvation Is Bigger Than You Think

from Fully Human

Most of us were given a gospel that was smaller than the one Jesus preached. Not wrong. Smaller. The gospel we received was true as far as it went — it just didn't go as far as the gospel Jesus announced in the synagogue in Nazareth, or demonstrated in the burial caves of the Gerasenes, or proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount. We received a gospel focused primarily on the afterlife: your sins are forgiven, heaven is your destination, the transaction has been completed. And that is glorious. It is. The forgiveness of sin and the promise of resurrection are not small things.

But somewhere in the process of distilling the gospel to its most portable form, we left out the dimensions that speak most directly to the life you are living right now. We emphasized what Jesus came to do for you after you die and underdeveloped what he came to do for you while you're alive. We focused so intently on the destination that we lost the theology of the journey.

The result is people who are forgiven but not free. Saved but not whole. Justified but still fragmented, still performing the cycles we described in chapter two, still carrying wounds that were never named as things Jesus intends to heal. People who have a genuine relationship with God and still feel, in some deep and private place, that the distance between what they believe and what they actually experience has never quite closed.

That distance is not a sign of weak faith. It is often a sign of a truncated gospel that told us what Jesus did for our sin but didn't tell us what he intended to do for our souls.

Go back to *sōzō*. The Greek word the New Testament uses for salvation.

To heal. To make whole. To restore. To rescue. To deliver. To reintegrate.

This is not a word about the afterlife alone. This is a word about what happens to the whole person when God intervenes. Every time this word appears in the Gospels — in healing stories, in deliverance accounts, in encounters where broken people come to Jesus and leave different — the word is *sōzō*. The same word. The same work. The same scope.

When Jesus announces his mission in Luke 4, he is not describing what he will do for souls that have been separated from their bodies after death. He is describing what he is doing right now, in time, in bodies, in real human lives. Good news for people who are poor. Release for people who are captive. Sight for people who are blind. Freedom for people who are oppressed. These are all present-tense, this-world, in-your-body realities.

And then he goes and does them, one person at a time.

The Apostle Paul captures the scope of this beautifully in Romans 8:

God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.

— Romans 8:29 MSG

The original and intended shape of your life. Not just the forgiven version. Not just the heaven-bound version. The fully restored version — conformed to the likeness of the Son, shaped along the lines of the life of Jesus, recovered to the design that was intended from the beginning.

This is the scale of what salvation means. And it is much larger than most of us have been told.

The healing in Mark 5 is a picture of sōzō in its full expression. Let's map what Jesus accomplished in that encounter against what he announced in Luke 4, and watch how perfectly it matches.

Good news for the poor: the man in the tombs had nothing. He had lost everything — community, shelter, dignity, sanity. The good news came to him in the form of a person who crossed a lake specifically to find him in his poverty.

Release for captives: he had been in chains, literally. And when the chains were insufficient, the condition itself was the captivity. Jesus released him from both.

Sight for the blind: the demonization that had fragmented him had also distorted his ability to see himself, see others, see God clearly. On the other side of deliverance, he was in his right mind. Sight restored.

Freedom for the oppressed: he had been oppressed by forces he did not choose and could not control, for longer than anyone could remember. Jesus set him free.

Everything Jesus said in the synagogue came to pass in the burial caves. The mission statement became the lived reality. And it happens again and again, in life after life, in the ministry of Jesus: the announcement of Luke 4 becomes the action of the Gospels.

And it is not over.

Here is the hard question that this raises for those of us who have been believers for years:

If salvation is this comprehensive — if it includes emotional healing, and identity restoration, and freedom from the patterns that have kept us stuck, and the reintegration of what sin and trauma have fragmented — then why don't we experience more of it?

I think the most honest answer is: because we have been offering Jesus pieces instead of ourselves.

We bring him the pieces we've decided he's allowed to touch. The religious pieces, the spiritual pieces, the areas where we're comfortable with intervention. We hand over the Sunday-morning self while protecting the Tuesday-night self. We say yes to forgiveness and no to transformation. We want the destination without the journey. We want the relationship without the vulnerability that real relationship requires.

We tell Jesus: this part you can have. This part I'll keep. Touch my sin but don't touch my identity. Fix my behavior but don't disturb my defenses. Heal the things I've done without dealing with the things that have been done to me. Give me relief without requiring my full surrender.

And so we get a partial experience of a gospel designed to be total.

You will never experience the full restoration that salvation offers while you are offering partial surrender.

This is not an accusation. It is an invitation. Because the man in the tombs, with all of his Legion of demons, with all of his brokenness and wildness and years of being beyond reach — that man experienced the full scope of what Jesus can do. Not because he was impressive. Not because he had great faith. Because he didn't bring a piece. He came out of the tombs, ran to Jesus, and bowed his whole self at the feet of the only person who could actually help him.

He didn't get a better life. He got his life back.

That is what is available to you. Not a managed version of your current condition. Not a slightly improved edition of the person you've been struggling to be. Your life, back. The original and intended shape of it, recovered from the wreckage of what has distorted it.

Jesus didn't die for a fraction of you. He died for the fullness of you. He intends to save not a compartment but a soul — and as we established in chapter three, the soul is the whole person.

Every part of you that God intends to heal is part of what Jesus came to save.

The question is how much of yourself you're willing to bring to him.

REFLECT

Let it land

Where have you believed you were “too far gone” — beyond restoration?

If salvation is bigger than you thought — not just forgiveness, but restoration of the whole person — what does that change?

GO INWARD

Name the lie, receive the truth

The enemy's lies are often quiet and old. Bringing them into the light is the first step toward being free of them.

What lie have you believed about yourself — “I’m too much,” “I’m broken beyond repair,” “I’m unlovable”?

Where do you think that lie was first written into you?

Now write the truth of the gospel over it, in your own words. Begin: *“The truth is...”*

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The part of me I’d given up on is…”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

God, I had written myself off as beyond repair.

*But You have not given up
on what You intend to restore in me.*

Cross the water. Reach the tombs.

*Gather my scattered pieces,
and set me down — clothed,
and in my right mind.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE NINE

Receiving

For weeks your practices have asked you to *do* something. This one asks you to *stop* — and receive.

Restoration is not achieved. It is received. And for those of us who earn everything, receiving can be the hardest work of all.

HOW

Once this week, let yourself receive something you cannot earn — help, rest, a compliment, prayer, grace. Don't deflect it, repay it, or minimize it. Simply say "thank you," and let it in.

The rhythm turns: from striving to receiving. This is the heart of restoration.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 Where have you believed you were too far gone?

02 What lie are you beginning to name — and what's the truth over it?

03 What's hard about receiving something you can't earn?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read **Chapter Eleven — “The Secret”** and **Chapter Twelve — “The Shepherd and the Whole Person.”** Keep receiving this week. Come ready to be led — to rest you may have been refusing for years.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Ten: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

This week is about rest and being led. Many are exhausted from leading themselves. Model unhurriedness tonight.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people receive Psalm 23 as whole-person care.
- Invite them to be led — especially into rest.
- Make the gathering itself feel restful.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Rest can feel indulgent or unsafe to the driven. Some struggle to slow down — that's the invitation.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Chronic over-functioning; guilt around rest.
- Anyone using busyness to avoid the deeper work.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Which line of Psalm 23 does your soul most need to be true right now?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone equates rest with laziness,
reframe: the Shepherd "makes us lie down." Rest is trust, not sloth.

If someone resists slowing down,
don't push; model it yourself and let the pace preach.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray Psalm 23 slowly over the group; ask God to lead each into the rest they've refused.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Pray Psalm 23 aloud together in the first person, slowly, as the closing.

WEEK TEN

The Shepherd and the Whole Person

We read Psalm 23 at funerals, but it was never a poem about dying. It is about living — how God cares for the whole person: body and soul, emotion and spirit, through green pastures and dark valleys alike. This week, we learn what it is to be shepherded whole.

THIS WEEK

We stop leading ourselves and let ourselves be led — to rest, to still water, and to a table set in the presence of everything we fear.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalm 23 · Philippians 4:11–13

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures... he refreshes my soul.” — Psalm 23:1–3

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

You are my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

You lead me to rest I keep refusing.

You restore my soul.

Through the valley, You are with me.

Your rod and staff comfort me.

I will stop striving now.

Here, I let myself be led.

THE READING

The Secret

from Fully Human

There is a version of Christianity built entirely on performance, and if you grew up in the church you probably know it well.

It works something like a school grading system. You are told, explicitly or implicitly, that if you work hard enough — read your Bible enough, pray enough, serve enough, attend enough, give enough, resist temptation enough — you will do well. And if you don't, you won't. The currency of the relationship with God is effort. The measure of spiritual health is output. The evidence of real faith is visible, sustained, measurable performance.

This is not the gospel. But it has been dressed in gospel language for so long that many people cannot tell the difference.

The exhaustion you feel — that particular kind of religious exhaustion, the bone-deep weariness of someone who has been trying to be good enough for years and keeps coming up short — is the fruit of a performance-based faith. It is what happens when you build your entire spiritual life on a foundation that was never designed to hold weight.

The Apostle Paul knew this dynamic intimately. He had been, by his own account, among the most rigorous performers the Jewish tradition had produced. Blameless under the law, he says in Philippians. Zealous. Advancing beyond his peers. And then he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and everything he had built his identity on turned out to be the wrong foundation for something far more important.

He writes to a young church in Colossae — a city full of competing philosophies and spiritual options — to help them avoid the same mistake. And in doing so, he articulates the most important truth about Christian transformation that most of us have never fully received.

Before we get to that truth, let's name the false foundations that Paul is writing against. Because they are the same foundations that were available in Colossae and are available to us now.

The first is family tradition. My grandmother built a church. My mother was a minister. I was raised in the faith. There is a genuine beauty in a multigenerational faith — it is a gift, not a liability. But a faith inherited from your family is not a faith owned by you. You can perform the practices of a tradition without having a living relationship with the God the tradition is about. And when the tradition is your foundation, the moment life becomes genuinely difficult — genuinely threatening to your certainty — the tradition alone may not be enough to hold you.

The second is feelings. I feel God when life is good and don't feel him when it's hard. When I'm in worship and the music is right and I'm emotionally open and everything is aligned — I feel it. When I'm depleted and circumstances are bad and nothing seems to be working — I don't. And if feelings are my foundation, then my faith rises and falls with my emotional state. Real. But not stable enough to be a foundation.

The third is fear of hell. This one is worth being precise about. Fear of God — reverence, awe, the recognition of God's holiness and your own creaturely dependence — is a legitimate and healthy dimension of faith. But fear of hell as the primary motivation for following Jesus is not worship. It is avoidance. And a faith rooted in avoidance produces not transformation but compliance. You perform to stay out of trouble, not to be drawn into relationship. That is not the same thing.

None of these foundations — tradition, feelings, or fear — are strong enough to hold what a full human life will require of your faith. Something else is needed.

Paul addresses the Colossians with a theology of the supremacy of Christ that is as comprehensive and breathtaking as any passage in the New Testament. He tells them that Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, the one through whom everything was created, the one who holds all creation together, the one who is first in everything.

But he doesn't stop with the cosmic. He brings it home. He moves from the supremacy of Christ in the universe to the relevance of Christ for the individual. And in verse 27, he arrives at what he calls the secret that has been hidden for ages but is now revealed:

And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

— Colossians 1:27

Christ lives in you.

Not: Christ is available to you, if you perform adequately.

Not: Christ will be with you, as long as you maintain your commitment.

Not: Christ is theoretically accessible through the proper spiritual practices.

Christ lives in you. Present tense. Residential. Not visiting. Not waiting to be invited. Already there, already inside, already at work.

This is the secret that dismantles every performance-based foundation. Because if Christ is in you, then your identity is not determined by your output. It is established by his residence. You are not what you produce. You are where he lives.

The distinction between performance-based faith and identity-based transformation is not subtle, but it is easy to miss because the behaviors can look similar on the surface. Both the person who performs for God and the person who is being transformed by God might attend church, read Scripture, serve others, and resist obvious sin.

The difference is in the source and the sustainability.

Performance-based faith is sustained by effort. It runs on your energy, your discipline, your will. When those resources are depleted — when life is hard enough, or the season is long enough, or the gap between who you're trying to be and who you keep becoming is wide enough — performance-based faith collapses. It is not built to last because it is built on something that runs out.

Identity-based transformation is sustained by a different source. Paul says it in his prayer for the Colossians: we ask that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. The power source is not you. It is him. And a power source that does not run out can sustain a life that your own resources cannot.

The path from performance to transformation is not the addition of more effort. It is the shift from doing for God to living from God. From trying harder to abiding deeper. From presenting a version of yourself that God might accept to receiving the truth that God already lives in the version you actually are.

Paul tells the Colossians that the key to a fruitful life that honors God is not rules or rituals or mystical secrets. It is knowing him, trusting him, and drawing strength from him.

Knowing him. Not knowing about him — accumulating theological information or doctrinal correctness. Actually knowing him, the way you come to know a person through time and conversation and shared experience and honesty. A relationship in which you are not performing for him but being genuinely present with him.

Trusting him. Not just believing propositions about him — agreeing intellectually that he is good and powerful and sovereign. But the kind of trust that hands things over. That releases control. That says: I don't know how this is going to work out, and I am choosing to trust that you do. That kind of trust is formed through the practice of surrender, and it grows as you discover, over and over, that he is trustworthy.

Drawing strength from him. Not generating your own spiritual energy through spiritual discipline, and then presenting it to God as evidence of your commitment. But accessing something that is already in you — the power of Christ who lives there — and letting that power animate your life rather than running on your own reserves.

The message version of Colossians 1:18-20 says: all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe — people and things, animals and atoms — get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

All the broken and dislocated pieces. Properly fixed. Fit together.

The reintegration we described in chapter six. The healing we named in chapter nine. The whole-person salvation we traced in chapter ten. All of it — all of it — because of him. Because of the one who lives in you.

You are not a person trying to earn your way to God. You are a person in whom God has taken up residence.

That changes what faith looks like. It changes what failure means. It changes what transformation requires.

God is not interested in rearranging your life. He is interested in rewriting your identity.

And the secret is that he has already moved in to do it.

THE READING

The Shepherd and the Whole Person

from Fully Human

Psalm 23 is the most memorized passage in Scripture and, quite possibly, the most misunderstood.

We read it at funerals. We cross-stitch it onto pillows. We recite it in hospital rooms when we want to offer something true and beautiful and comforting in the presence of death or suffering. And in all of that use, we have come to associate it primarily with the end — with the valley of the shadow of death and the house of the Lord and the green pastures as a picture of heaven.

But Psalm 23 is not primarily a poem about dying. It is a poem about living. It is David's account of how God cares for the whole person — body and soul, emotion and spirit, past and future, identity and purpose — in the actual ongoing experience of a human life.

Read it with fresh eyes. Because what David is describing, verse by verse, is something very close to what we have been tracing in this book: the comprehensive, integrated, whole-person care that God extends to every human being who will receive it.

The Lord is my shepherd.

This is an identity statement before it is anything else. David is not primarily making a claim about what God does, though that follows. He is making a claim about who God is in relation to him. My shepherd. Not a shepherd in general. Not a shepherd who tends flocks indifferently. My shepherd. Personal. Specific. Oriented toward me.

The soul needs belonging before it needs anything else. Before it needs instruction or correction or improvement, it needs to know that it is known. That there is someone who is for it. That the universe is not indifferent to its existence. That God, who made it, is also watching over it — not as a manager watches over productivity, but as a shepherd watches over a sheep. With attention, with intention, with a willingness to go wherever the sheep has wandered to bring it back.

The psalmist leads with belonging because belonging is what makes everything else possible. If you do not know you are known and cared for, you will spend your life performing for an audience that isn't watching rather than resting in the care of the one who is.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Notice what he makes him do. Not what he asks him to do, or suggests he might consider doing, or makes available as an option if he's interested. Makes. There is a pastoral wisdom here that we in our productivity-obsessed culture tend to resist: sometimes the sheep will not lie down on their own. Sometimes the person who most needs rest is the last person who will choose to take it. And God, who knows the design of the creature he is shepherding, does not merely provide the pasture. He leads his sheep to it and insists they use it.

The body is part of the soul. Rest is not a luxury for the spiritual life — it is a condition for it. You cannot sustain the kind of inner attentiveness that intimacy with God requires when your body is chronically depleted. You cannot hear the still small voice when your nervous system is running at maximum capacity. You cannot experience the restoration of the soul when you have refused the restoration of the body.

The green pasture is not a spiritual metaphor for heaven. It is God's provision for your body's actual need for recovery. And the shepherd who loves you is not impressed by how little rest you need. He is insisting you take it.

He leads me beside quiet waters.

The Hebrew image here is of gently flowing water — not a roaring river, not the kind of water that overstimulates and demands navigation, but water that is calm enough to approach, safe enough to drink from, quiet enough to restore. The soul needs stillness. Not the stillness of disconnection or dissociation, but the specific, intentional stillness of a mind that has been pulled out of the noise long enough to hear something quieter.

Emotional calm is a dimension of soul care that we undervalue. The chronic overstimulation of a connected, always-on life is not neutral. It wears something down — the capacity for depth, for reflection, for genuine attention to what is happening in your interior world. The shepherd leads beside quiet waters because quiet is where the parched soul can finally drink.

He restores my soul.

This is the center of the psalm. Everything before it has been preparation for this, and everything after it is the fruit of it. The restoration of the soul — the *nephesh*, the whole person — is God's work, not ours.

Restoration implies that something was lost, or damaged, or displaced. The soul does not need restoration when it is functioning as designed. It needs restoration after what we have described in this book: after the distortion of sin, after the fragmentation of disintegration, after the accumulation of concealed wounds, after years of performing and proving and pretending and projecting. After all of that, the soul needs not just encouragement or instruction but actual restoration — the return of what was lost, the reintegration of what was scattered, the healing of what was wounded.

And God does it. Not because we have qualified for it. Not because we have performed sufficiently. He restores the soul of a person who is exhausted and disoriented and probably wandering, because that is what shepherds do for sheep.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

After restoration comes guidance. This is the order that matters. God does not send a fragmented person on a calling. He does not give a broken identity a mission. He restores first — and then he leads.

The implications of this for how we think about purpose are significant. Many of us are trying to find our calling before we have submitted to the restoration that would make us capable of carrying it. We want the assignment before the preparation. We want the purpose before the healing. But God's order is different: rest, stillness, restoration, and then — then — guidance. The paths of righteousness come after the green pastures, not before.

Your calling flows from your capacity. Your capacity flows from your wholeness. And your wholeness is God's work, not yours.

The psalm ends with a confident declaration about the future: surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

But it gets there through the valley of the shadow of death. David does not pretend the dark valleys don't exist. He does not offer a theology of suffering that removes the suffering. He walks through it — with a rod and a staff that offer both protection and guidance, with a table prepared in the presence of enemies, with an anointed head and an overflowing cup.

The provision of God does not eliminate difficulty. It meets you in the middle of it.

This is the pastoral care that God extends to the whole person: not a promise that the valley won't come, but a promise that you will not walk through it alone. Not a guarantee that the wounds will never happen, but the committed presence of a shepherd who goes to the dark places and does not abandon the wounded there.

The wholeness that this book has been describing is not a state you arrive at and then maintain effortlessly. It is a life lived under the care of a shepherd who knows exactly what you need, in exactly the right order, and who will insist on giving it to you even when you would rather keep moving.

Let him make you lie down. Let him lead you beside the quiet water. Let him restore what has been broken.

The paths of righteousness are waiting. But they come after the restoration, not instead of it.

Part Five

The Invitation

Living It Out

SIT WITH THE WORD

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.”

PSALM 23:1-3

Read it as if for the first time — not as a funeral poem, but as a description of how God tends the whole of you, right now, in the middle of your actual life. You are not shepherded in pieces. You are shepherded whole.

REFLECT

Let it land

Which line of Psalm 23 does your soul most need to be true right now?

Where have you been leading yourself — into striving, into depletion — when you were meant to be led?

GO INWARD

Psalm 23, in your own life

Let the psalm become personal — not a poem about a shepherd, but about your Shepherd, and your life.

Where do you most need to be led right now — to rest, to still water, or through a valley?

What would it look like, practically, to let God lead you there this week?

Rewrite one line of Psalm 23 in your own words, for your own soul.

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The rest I keep refusing myself is...”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

Shepherd, I am so tired of leading myself.

*I have called striving faithfulness,
and refused the rest You kept offering.*

Lead me to green pastures.

Make me lie down.

Restore my soul.

I will follow where You go.

AMEN.

PRACTICE TEN

Green Pastures

Your Shepherd “makes you lie down.” Sometimes rest is not something we find — it’s something we finally allow.

This practice is simply to let yourself be led into rest, as an act of trust rather than laziness.

HOW

Set aside one unhurried stretch this week — an hour, an evening, a morning — to do nothing productive. Walk, rest, sit in silence, pray Psalm 23 slowly in the first person. Let yourself be led beside still water.

Noticing, naming, honoring, asking, unmasking, examen, honest prayer, tending, receiving — and now rest. A whole rule of life, nearly complete.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 Which line of Psalm 23 does your soul most need right now?

02 Where have you been leading yourself instead of being led?

03 What rest have you been refusing — and why?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

We enter the final movement: **Movement Five — The Invitation.** Read **Chapter Thirteen — “Stop Bringing Pieces.”** The whole journey has been leading here — and toward the evening that completes it: The Fully Human Experience.

MOVEMENT FIVE

The Invitation

*Learning to stop bringing pieces — and
to bring your whole self, unhidden, into
the presence of God and one another.*

WEEKS ELEVEN & TWELVE

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Eleven: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

The journey comes to its point tonight: bringing the whole self, not the pieces — and beginning to prepare hearts for The Experience.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Move people from presenting needs to presenting themselves.
- Begin concrete preparation for The Experience.
- Reinforce that no one goes to The Experience alone.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Anticipation and some anxiety about The Experience — excitement mixed with fear of being that honest.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone anxious or hesitant about The Experience — reassure and walk with them.
- Who's still holding back — invite gently.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"What have you been bringing God your problems about, without ever bringing Him yourself?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone is anxious about The Experience,
normalize it and promise you'll be beside them. Fear is not disqualifying.

If someone plans to skip The Experience,
explore gently; it is the culmination — encourage without pressure.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray that each person would come to The Experience ready to bring their whole self.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Have each person begin a "What I'm bringing" sentence to carry into The Experience.

WEEK ELEVEN

Stop Bringing Pieces

We have gotten very good at bringing God our problems — a tidy list of requests — and stayed strangers to bringing God ourselves. This week, the whole journey comes to its point: stop bringing pieces. Bring the whole self, unhidden, to the One who has already seen all of it and stayed.

THIS WEEK

We move from presenting our needs to presenting ourselves — and begin preparing to bring our whole selves to The Experience.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Mark 5:1–20 · Psalm 139:23–24

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” — Matthew 11:28

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I have brought You my problems for years,
but rarely brought You myself.

I have offered the tidy parts,
and hidden the rest.

No more pieces.

I bring the whole of me.

All of it. Bowed before You.
Here, I stop hiding for good.

THE READING

Stop Bringing Pieces

from Fully Human

There is a difference between bringing Jesus your problems and bringing Jesus yourself.

Most of us have become very good at the first and very poor at the second. We have developed a liturgy of presenting our needs — a practiced, sometimes polished way of bringing the things we want addressed to God in prayer, in worship, in moments of desperation. We bring the anxiety. We bring the broken relationship. We bring the habit we cannot seem to break. We bring the specific request, the defined need, the identified problem.

And then we wonder why, after all the bringing, something feels like it hasn't quite moved.

The man in Mark 5 did not bring Jesus his problem. He was the problem, by anyone's external assessment — violent, uncontainable, self-destructive, beyond the reach of every intervention the community had tried. He had no tidy request to make. He had no specific item on a list. He came out of the tombs, ran across the hillside, and fell at the feet of Jesus with the whole wrecked and fragmented reality of himself. He brought himself.

And he walked away with his life back. Not a better set of circumstances. His life.

I want to be direct with you about something that may be uncomfortable to hear.

Many of us have been praying for change for years. We have brought our anxiety to God, repeatedly, and still struggled with anxiety. We have brought our pattern of behavior to God, repented of it sincerely, and still returned to it. We have brought our wounds to God and still found them shaping us.

And the question we rarely ask — because it feels presumptuous, or because we're afraid of the answer — is: have I been bringing pieces, or have I been bringing myself?

Partial surrender produces partial transformation. Not because God's power is partial, but because we have not given him the full thing to work with. We have handed over the parts we decided he was allowed to touch and protected the parts we are not ready to give. We have offered the symptom while guarding the source. We have brought the behavior while hiding the wound that drives it.

Jesus is not a problem-management consultant. He is a shepherd who came to restore the whole sheep. And the whole sheep is what he's asking for.

The posture of the man at Jesus' feet in Mark 5 teaches us something about how to come to God that no amount of theological instruction can quite capture. There are four movements in the text:

He came. The man came out of the tombs. He left the place of death and moved toward the living. This is the first and in some ways the hardest movement — the decision to stop existing in the dead places, the familiar places, the places that feel like home because you have been there so long, and to move toward something you do not yet fully understand. Coming to God is not always a church moment. Sometimes it is the quiet, private decision to stop staying where you are.

He saw. The man saw Jesus while he was still some distance away. Before any words were spoken, before any miraculous intervention had occurred, the man saw him. Recognition is a gift. The capacity to see Jesus — to perceive, across the distance of your current condition, the one who has the power to do what no one else has been able to do — is something the Spirit makes possible. You cannot see your way to God on your own. But when your eyes are opened to who he is, what you see will change what you do next.

He ran. He ran to meet him. Not walked cautiously. Not approached tentatively. Ran. The desperation of his need and the recognition of who Jesus was produced in him not hesitation but urgency. There is a kind of spiritual paralysis that masquerades as reverence — an endless circling of the possibility of full surrender without ever committing to it. The man in Mark 5 had been too broken for too long to afford that kind of hesitation. He ran.

He bowed. He fell at Jesus' feet. Not just the anxiety at Jesus' feet. Not just the specific request. Himself. The whole wild, fractured, chain-breaking, howling reality of himself, bowed at the feet of the only one with the authority and the willingness to do something about it.

Come. See. Run. Bow.

Not a religious formula. A posture. The posture of a person who has run out of other options and has stopped pretending otherwise. The posture of someone who has decided that the healing on the other side of full surrender is worth what it costs to get there.

You will never experience full restoration while offering partial surrender. I want to say that one more time, not as a judgment but as an invitation.

Because the man in Mark 5 received what he did not deserve, had not earned, had given no prior indication of being able to steward. He received wholeness not because he had prepared himself for it but because he brought himself — all of himself, in all of his brokenness — to the one who could actually give it.

What have you been protecting from God?

What is the part of you that has remained behind the boundary you drew around what Jesus is allowed to touch? The wound that is too old, too deep, too defining? The pattern that you've almost made peace with because the thought of it actually changing is more disorienting than the thought of continuing to live around it? The identity that has been built on the distortion for so long that you're not sure who you would be without it?

That is the part he's asking for.

Not because he wants to take something from you. Because he wants to give you something in exchange. And what he gives is not a cleaned-up version of what you had before. It is what you were designed for before anything went wrong.

The man in the tombs didn't walk away from that hillside with a slightly improved version of his previous life. He didn't walk away with better coping strategies or a helpful support group or a prescription that managed the symptoms. He walked away with his life. The original one. The one that had been buried under Legion and chains and years in the tombs. He walked away himself.

That is what is available to you.

Stop bringing Jesus pieces. Bring him you.

All of you. The parts that are doing well and the parts that are not. The public self and the private one. The wounds you've named and the ones you haven't. The history you're proud of and the history you'd rather forget. The version of yourself you present to the world and the version you go home to every night.

Bring all of it. Bow with all of it. And watch what he does with the whole.

REFLECT

Let it land

What have you been bringing God your *problems* about, without ever bringing Him *yourself*?

What would it actually mean, this week, to bring the whole of you — not the polished pieces?

GO INWARD · PREPARING

What I'm bringing

The Experience is near. This is where you begin to gather what you'll carry into that evening — not to perform, but to bring.

Over these weeks, what has surfaced that you've never fully brought to God?

What would you like to lay down at The Experience — a wound, a lie, a mask, a weight?

Write a single sentence you could pray that night. Begin: *"God, I bring You all of me, including..."*

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *“The piece of myself I’ve been most afraid to bring is…”*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

God, I'm done bringing You fragments.

*You never wanted my tidy list —
You wanted me.*

So here I am. All of it.

*The wounds, the masks, the fear,
the hope I barely let myself feel.*

*I bring the whole of me, and I bow.
Do with it what only You can.*

AMEN.

PRACTICE ELEVEN

Bringing Your Whole Self

Every practice so far has led here. This week, you bring it all together — literally.

To bring your whole self to God is the opposite of the liturgy of pieces. It is honesty made into prayer.

HOW

Each day, take a few minutes to bring your *whole* self to God — not a request list, but you. Say what's true: the good, the hidden, the tender, the ashamed. Bring all of it, and simply stay in His presence with it.

Every practice has been preparing you for this: to come whole, and unhidden. Keep it up as you move toward The Experience.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

-
- 01 What have you brought God your problems about, without ever bringing Him yourself?
-
- 02 What do you want to lay down at The Experience?
-
- 03 How can this circle help one another come ready to bring their whole selves?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Read the final chapter: **Chapter Fourteen — “The Whole Soul Life.”** Keep bringing your whole self this week. Next week we look back at how far you’ve come — and prepare, together, for The Fully Human Experience.

FOR LEADERS · PREPARE

Week Twelve: Leading Well

THE BIG IDEA

The final week. Celebrate how far people have come, consolidate the rule of life, and send them into The Experience ready.

LEADER OBJECTIVES

- Help people take stock via the re-assessment.
- Consolidate practices into a keepable rule of life.
- Prepare hearts and logistics for The Experience.

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Reflection, gratitude, and some grief that the weekly rhythm is ending. Affirm the growth; point to what's next.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Anyone discouraged by the re-assessment — reframe: growth isn't linear.
- Who needs continued support after the journey ends.

FOR LEADERS · FACILITATE**WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Don't rush to fix, reassure, or advise — witness instead.
- Don't fill the silences; let them breathe.
- Don't let one voice dominate; gently draw the quiet ones in.
- Don't become the counselor — refer when something is beyond the group.

DISCUSSION FLOW · ABOUT 90 MINUTES

5 min	Gather & liturgy	Settle the room; read the week's opening liturgy together.
10 min	Check-in	A word or sentence from each person: how are you arriving tonight?
20 min	The reading	Discuss the chapter. Open with: <i>"Looking back at Week One, where have you grown the most?"</i>
30 min	Reflection	Move into Reflect & Go Inward. Share strictly by invitation.
15 min	Practice & prayer	Introduce the week's practice; close with the guided prayer.
10 min	Send-off	Preview next week; remind them of the practice.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

If someone feels they "didn't change enough,"
 reframe: awareness itself is growth; formation is slow and real.

If someone's wounds are still raw,
 affirm the courage it took, and connect them to ongoing care.

WEEKLY PRAYER FOCUS

Pray gratitude for the journey and readiness for The Experience — that each would come whole and unhidden.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE

Have each person name one practice they're committing to keep as their rule of life.

WEEK TWELVE

The Whole Soul Life

Wholeness is not a destination you arrive at and rest in forever. It is a way of living — unhidden, integrated, fully alive. This week we look back at how far you've come, name the life you're being invited into, and get ready to bring your whole self before God at The Experience.

THIS WEEK

We take stock of the journey, consolidate the rhythms into a way of life, and prepare our hearts for The Experience.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thessalonians 5:23 · Philippians 3:12–14

MEMORY SCRIPTURE

“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless.” — 1 Thessalonians 5:23

TO BEGIN, TOGETHER

I did not arrive here whole.

But I am no longer hiding.

I have been noticed, named, and known.

And I am still becoming.

This is the whole soul life:

not perfect, but present.

Lead me on in it.

Here, I choose to keep becoming.

THE READING

The Whole Soul Life

from Fully Human

Wholeness is not a destination you arrive at and then rest in forever.

I want to begin there because the way we talk about healing — about wholeness, about restoration, about becoming fully human — can create an impression that it is a singular event. You go through the process, you do the work, you make the surrender, and then you are whole. And then you stay that way.

That is not how it works. Not because the restoration God offers is incomplete, but because human beings are not static. You keep living. Life keeps happening. New seasons bring new pressures, new losses, new places where the old wounds get touched again, new challenges to the identity you've been recovering. Wholeness is not a fixed state. It is a direction. A consistent orientation of the whole person — body and soul, emotion and mind, private and public — toward the source from which all integration flows.

Paul describes it as a process: not yet perfect, pressing on toward the goal, straining forward to what lies ahead. The person who is becoming whole knows they are not yet arrived and does not pretend otherwise. But they are moving. And the movement itself is the life.

What does it look like, practically, to live as a whole soul?

It looks like emotional honesty. Not emotional performance — not the manufactured cheerfulness of a person who has learned to present a certain face because it keeps the peace or meets expectations. Not the performed brokenness of a person who has discovered that vulnerability can also be a kind of performance. Actual honesty — the willingness to know what you feel, to name it accurately, to not abandon yourself in the presence of people who would rather you did.

Emotional honesty begins with yourself. Before you can be honest with anyone else about what is happening inside you, you have to be willing to look. To check in with the roots rather than just managing the branches. To ask, regularly: what am I actually feeling right now? Not what am I supposed to feel, or what would be spiritually appropriate to feel, but what am I actually experiencing in the whole of my person right now?

It looks like spiritual rootedness. Not spiritual performance — not the accumulation of practices and disciplines and attendance and service that produces religious busyness but not necessarily intimacy with God. Actual rootedness: a relationship with God that is honest enough to include your doubts, your anger, your confusion, your questions. A faith that is built not on feeling God close in every moment but on trusting his presence when you don't feel it. A prayer life that sounds less like a polished presentation and more like the psalms — raw, questioning, sometimes desperate, always reaching.

It looks like physical care. Your body is part of your soul. What you do with your body is soul care. Sleeping enough is soul care. Eating in ways that sustain rather than harm is soul care. Moving your body regularly is soul care. Attending to the signals your nervous system is sending — the tension, the depletion, the activation — is soul care. God made you embodied, and the shepherd who makes you lie down in green pastures is not indifferent to what is happening in your body.

It looks like mental clarity. Taking your thought life seriously. Recognizing the difference between thoughts that are true and thoughts that feel true but are actually the voice of the distortion. Learning to identify the lies that have embedded themselves in your self-understanding and to answer them with what is actually true. Not suppressing your thoughts but examining them — holding them up to the light and asking: is this actually the truth about who I am and what is real, or is this what sin has been telling me for years?

It looks like relational health. Specifically, it looks like the willingness to be known. Not to perform for relationship, but to actually show up in it. To let people see the real version rather than the managed one. To be in community not as an audience for your spiritual highlight reel but as a genuine participant in shared human life, with all its mess and beauty and failure and grace. You were not designed to be whole alone. The nephesh is inherently relational. Integration happens not in isolation but in the presence of other people who are also, imperfectly, trying to become whole.

Community is not optional for the whole soul life. This is one of the places where the individualism of Western culture and the communal design of human beings are most directly in conflict.

We tend to think of our spiritual and emotional formation as a personal project. Something we manage privately, work on individually, bring to God in the solitude of our own inner lives. And the private dimension is real and irreplaceable. There is no substitute for the work that happens between you and God alone.

But the soul that was designed for relationship cannot be fully integrated in isolation. You need people who know you — who know the real version, not the curated one. People who have enough access to your actual life to notice when something is off, to call you forward when you're retreating, to remind you of what is true when the distortion is loudest. People in whose presence you can be seen without being destroyed by the being seen.

Isolation fragments. Community integrates. Not because community is always comfortable — it is often the opposite — but because the friction and the intimacy and the accountability and the love of genuine community do for the soul what the shepherd's rod and staff do for the sheep. They keep the integration from drifting back into fragmentation.

If you are trying to become whole alone, you are working against your design.

There is one more thing I want to say before this book ends, and it is the most important thing I know about the whole soul life.

This is not perfection. This is formation.

You will have days — probably more than you'd like — when the old patterns resurface. When the wound that was healing opens again. When you find yourself performing or proving or pretending or projecting, and you thought you were past that. When your body is too depleted for your soul to access what it knows. When the disintegration feels more real than the integration.

Those are not failures. Those are your soul asking for care.

The whole soul life is not a life without struggle. It is a life where you have developed enough honesty with yourself and enough trust in God to bring the struggle to the right place rather than managing it in the wrong one. It is a life where you know the difference between suppression and surrender. Where you've learned that the feeling of being not enough is a cue to run toward God, not away from him. Where you understand that the wilderness — the season of depletion and confusion and unanswered questions — is not evidence of abandonment but often the very place where your deepest formation happens.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. Not abandoned there. Led. The same Spirit who descended on him at the Jordan and declared him beloved took him to the hard place. Because the hard place was necessary for what he was becoming.

The hard places in your life are not outside the shepherd's care. The valley of the shadow of death is where the rod and the staff are most needed, and the shepherd does not withdraw them there.

We started this book with a question that most of us have asked ourselves at one point or another, in one form or another, in the aftermath of one failure or another.

What is wrong with me?

I hope by now you have a different answer than the one you started with.

Nothing is wrong with you that is not wrong with every human being who has ever lived on this side of Genesis 3. You are an image-bearer of God, made in his likeness, called very good, distorted by sin, disintegrated by the weight of what has broken you, carrying wounds that are real and deserve to be treated, living inside survival strategies that served you once and are costing you now.

And you are being restored.

Not because you have earned it. Not because you have finally performed well enough. Not because you have worked harder or prayed longer or done enough to qualify. Because God decided, before the foundation of the world, to shape your life along the lines of the life of his Son — to bring you to the original and intended shape of your humanity, recovered from everything that has distorted it.

That is what salvation means. Not just the forgiveness of sin. Not just the promise of heaven. The restoration of the whole person. The reintegration of what was scattered. The healing of what was broken. The recovery of the design.

You are not a problem to be solved. You were never a problem to be solved. You are a design to be recovered, and the one who holds the original design has not given up on recovering it.

Jesus did not just come to fix what you did. He came to restore who you are.

The whole of who you are.

Body and soul. Emotion and mind. Past and future. Public and private. The parts you've shown the world and the parts you've hidden from everyone, including yourself.

All of it.

The shepherd is still calling. Not: where have you been? Not: how could you have gone so far? But: where are you? Come out from behind the fig leaves. Come out of the tombs. Run toward the one who is already running toward you.

Wholeness is waiting. Not as a reward. As a gift.

Fully human. Fully alive. Fully his.

That is what you were designed for. And by his grace, it is what you are becoming.

SIT WITH THE WORD

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23

Notice the word: *whole*. Not your spirit rescued out of your body — your whole spirit, soul, and body, kept and healed together. This is the life you were designed for, and by grace, the life you are being brought into.

GO INWARD · REVISITED

The Honest Starting Line, revisited

In Week One, you answered these same six statements. Answer them again now, honestly — then notice what has moved.

WHERE I AM NOW

The gap between who I am and who I let people see feels small.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I can name what I'm feeling, and I believe my feelings matter to God.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I treat my body, emotions, and needs as part of me God made — not as the enemy.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

There is at least one person who has seen the real me and stayed.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

When I'm struggling, I bring my whole self to God — not just a tidy list of requests.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

I believe I am loved by God as I actually am, not as I pretend to be.

NOT YET ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FULLY TRUE

Where have you grown the most? Where do you still long to grow?

JOURNAL

In your own words

Perhaps begin: *"When I look back on who I was in Week One, what has changed is..."*

A PRAYER TO CLOSE THE WEEK

God, I am not who I was twelve weeks ago.

*You met the ache, remembered the design,
held the wounds, and began to make me whole.*

I have not arrived — and that is alright.

*Keep me on the whole soul life:
unhidden, honest, fully alive.*

Now ready my heart for what comes next.

AMEN.

PRACTICE TWELVE

A Rule of Life

This week's practice is not one more thing to add. It is the gathering up of everything into a life you can keep.

You have built, week by week, a rhythm of formation. Now name it as your own — a rule of life to carry long after this guide is closed.

HOW

Read back through your practices: Noticing, Naming, Honoring the body, Asking, Unmasking, the Examen, Praying honestly, Tending, Receiving, Rest, and Bringing your whole self. Circle the three or four that most gave you life. Write them where you'll see them. Commit to keep them — not as assignments, but as a way of living.

This is the point of it all: not to finish a guide, but to adopt a way of life. The rhythm is yours now.

THE JOURNEY BECOMES AN EXPERIENCE

You're ready.

Everything from Week One has been quietly preparing you for this. The Fully Human Experience is not another meeting. It is the graduation of this journey — an evening of worship, confession, prayer, healing, and release.

How to come: bring your whole self — not your polished pieces. Bring this guide, an open heart, and the truth you've been learning to tell. The people who walked these weeks with you will be standing beside you.

Stop bringing pieces. Bring your whole self — and go free.

BRING TO GROUP

For the circle

01 Looking back at Week One, where have you grown the most?

02 What rhythms do you want to carry forward as a way of life?

03 What are you bringing to The Experience — and how can we stand with you in it?

BEFORE NEXT WEEK

Come to **The Fully Human Experience** ready to bring your whole self. Rest well beforehand. Trust what God has been doing. This is the evening the whole journey has been leading toward — and you do not walk into it alone.

THE CULMINATION

The Fully Human Experience

Not another meeting. The graduation of the journey — an evening to bring your whole self before God.

WHERE THE JOURNEY HAS BEEN LEADING

YOU'VE ARRIVED

This is the day it all led to.

For twelve weeks you have told the truth — naming the ache, remembering the design, surfacing the wounds, receiving restoration, learning to bring your whole self. The Fully Human Experience is where it all lands.

It is an evening set apart for worship, confession, prayer, and healing — not a performance to watch, but a threshold to walk through, surrounded by the very people who journeyed here with you. Come as you are. Bring all of it. And watch what God does with the whole.

HOW TO COME · WHAT TO EXPECT

Bring your whole self

There is nothing to prepare or perform. Come rested, come open, and bring what you named in Week Eleven — the wound, the lie, the mask, the weight you’re ready to lay down.

Worship	Unhurried, uninterrupted. The room where the guard finally comes down.
Teaching	The lies named and confronted, held up against the truth of the gospel.
Confession	The hidden thing brought into the light, where it loses its power.
Prayer circles	No one prays alone. Your group stands with you as freedom is received.
Healing prayer	Space to be prayed over, tenderly, for whatever you carry.
Communion	The table — grace made tangible, received with your whole self.
Response	Time to receive, to rest, and to let the gospel land.

People don’t leave with more information. They leave lighter.

DURING & AFTER

Tonight, before God

Use this space during or after the evening — a record of what God did, and what you brought Him.

What did I bring? What did I finally lay down?

What lie was confronted — and what truth did I receive in its place?

Where did I sense God meeting me tonight?

A BLESSING, AS YOU'RE SENT

May you leave lighter than you came.

*May the truth you told tonight
keep telling itself in you.*

*May you go on unhidden —
fully known, and fully loved.*

You are not a problem that was solved.

You are a design being recovered.

GO IN PEACE.

FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Appendices

A resource to keep — to return to, pray through, and carry into the rest of your life.

APPENDIX I

The Rule of Life

The twelve practices of the Journey, gathered as one rhythm. Not assignments — a way of living.
Keep what gives you life.

One · Noticing	Notice when you shift from present to performing.
Two · Naming	Name one true thing about your inner state each day.
Three · Honoring the Body	Tend one bodily need you'd normally override.
Four · Asking	Voice a real need — to God and to one person.
Five · Unmasking	Let one trusted person see something you'd normally hide.
Six · The Examen	Each evening, review the day honestly with God.
Seven · Praying Honestly	Bring one raw, unedited feeling to God.
Eight · Tending	Be present to a tender place with kindness, not attack.
Nine · Receiving	Let yourself receive something you cannot earn.
Ten · Green Pastures	Set aside unhurried time simply to be led into rest.
Eleven · Bringing Your Whole Self	Bring the whole of you to God — not a request list, but you.
Twelve · A Rule of Life	Keep the three or four practices that most give you life.

APPENDIX II

Memory Scripture

One verse for each week — the Scripture that anchors the movement. Return to these to hide the Word in your heart.

Week 1 <i>Psalm 139:14</i>	“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”
Week 2 <i>1 John 3:1</i>	“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.”
Week 3 <i>Genesis 2:7</i>	“The Lord God formed the man... and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”
Week 4 <i>Philippians 4:19</i>	“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”
Week 5 <i>Psalm 139:23</i>	“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”
Week 6 <i>Psalm 32:3, 5</i>	“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave.”

APPENDIX II

Memory Scripture • continued

Week 7 <i>Psalms 62:8</i>	“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”
Week 8 <i>Psalms 34:18</i>	“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
Week 9 <i>2 Corinthians 5:17</i>	“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”
Week 10 <i>Psalms 23:1–3</i>	“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing... he refreshes my soul.”
Week 11 <i>Matthew 11:28</i>	“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Week 12 <i>1 Thessalonians 5:23</i>	“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless.”

APPENDIX III

Guided Prayers

The closing prayer from each week, gathered here to pray again. (The full prayers appear within each week.)

WEEK 1 · THE ACHE

Remind me I am not a problem to be solved, but a design You have not given up on.

WEEK 2

Let me hear the name You gave me, and learn to live from it.

WEEK 3

Teach me to receive myself the way You do — not in pieces, but whole.

WEEK 4

Meet me at the point of my need, and teach me to bring my hunger to You first.

WEEK 5

Give me the courage of the truly loved — to be known, and to stop performing.

WEEK 6

Make me whole. Make me one. Lead me back to the undivided life.

APPENDIX III

Guided Prayers • continued

WEEK 7

Be my refuge. Meet me in what's real.

WEEK 8

Be close to my broken heart. Begin, in Your gentleness, to heal.

WEEK 9

Gather my scattered pieces, and set me down — clothed, and in my right mind.

WEEK 10

Lead me to green pastures. Make me lie down. Restore my soul.

WEEK 11

I bring the whole of me, and I bow. Do with it what only You can.

WEEK 12

Keep me on the whole soul life: unhidden, honest, fully alive.

APPENDIX IV

Scripture Index

Every passage engaged across the Journey, for quick reference and further study.

Genesis 2:7	Week 3
Genesis 2:25–3:10	Week 6
Psalms 23	Week 10
Psalms 32:3–5	Week 6
Psalms 34:18	Week 8
Psalms 42	Week 7
Psalms 51:6	Week 5
Psalms 62:8	Week 7
Psalms 139:13–16	Weeks 1, 3
Psalms 139:23–24	Weeks 5, 11
Isaiah 61:1–3	Weeks 8, 9
Matthew 4:1–4	Week 4

APPENDIX IV

Scripture Index · continued

Matthew 11:28	Week 11
---------------	---------

Mark 5:1–20	Weeks 9, 11
-------------	-------------

John 11:35	Week 7
------------	--------

2 Corinthians 5:17	Week 9
--------------------	--------

Ephesians 2:10	Week 2
----------------	--------

Philippians 4:11–13	Week 10
---------------------	---------

Philippians 4:19	Week 4
------------------	--------

1 Thessalonians 5:23	Week 12
----------------------	---------

1 John 3:1–2	Week 2
--------------	--------

APPENDIX V

Journaling Prompts

Each week's central prompt, gathered for return. Revisit any of them at any time.

Week 1	<i>The thing I've made sure no one sees.</i>
Week 2	<i>The version of me I'm most tired of performing.</i>
Week 3	<i>The part of me I've treated as the enemy.</i>
Week 4	<i>The need I find hardest to admit.</i>
Week 5	<i>The self I'm most afraid to let anyone see.</i>
Week 6	<i>The part of my life that feels most divided.</i>
Week 7	<i>The feeling I've been afraid to bring to God.</i>
Week 8	<i>What I've never really let myself grieve.</i>
Week 9	<i>The part of me I'd given up on.</i>
Week 10	<i>The rest I keep refusing myself.</i>
Week 11	<i>The piece of myself I've been most afraid to bring.</i>
Week 12	<i>Who I was in Week One, and what has changed.</i>

APPENDIX VI

Topic Index & Quick Reference

Find the heart of the Journey by theme.

The ache / what's wrong	Week 1
Identity & the true self	Week 2
The soul / the body	Week 3
Needs & desire	Week 4
The false self / masks	Week 5
Hiding & integration	Week 6
Emotions & feelings	Week 7
Wounds & grief	Week 8
Restoration	Weeks 9–10
Rest & being led	Week 10
Bringing your whole self	Week 11
Wholeness as a way of life	Week 12
Confession	Weeks 5, 8; The Experience
Prayer & the Examen	Weeks 6–7; Appendices

APPENDIX VII

Glossary

The language of the Journey — biblical, theological, and psychological.

Nephesh

The Hebrew word for “soul” — the whole, embodied person, not a separate spiritual part.

Imago Dei

The image of God; the truth that every person bears God’s likeness and inherent worth.

Integration

Wholeness; the inner and outer self in agreement. From the Latin *integer*, “undivided.”

Disintegration

The fragmenting of the self — living split between the self we show and the self we hide.

Formation

The lifelong process of being shaped toward wholeness and Christlikeness. Not information, but transformation.

The Examen

An ancient evening prayer of gently reviewing the day *with* God, not before a judge.

Lament

Honest, unedited prayer of sorrow or protest brought to God, as in the Psalms.

APPENDIX VII

Glossary · continued

Psychological safety

An environment safe enough to bring your real self without fear of shame or rejection.

Dysregulation

A nervous-system state of being overwhelmed or activated — not a moral failing.

Shame

The belief that one is fundamentally flawed or unlovable, distinct from guilt (which concerns actions).

Confession

Bringing the hidden into the light, where it loses its power.

Restoration

Being made whole; the recovery of the person God designed.

Rule of Life

A chosen set of practices and rhythms that shape a person toward wholeness over time.

APPENDIX VIII

The Journey Covenant

The promises we made to one another at the start — worth keeping for every honest room, for the rest of your life.

1 · Tell the truth.	We bring our real selves — not the managed version.
2 · Protect confidentiality.	What is said here stays here. Always.
3 · Listen before fixing.	We witness one another’s stories.
4 · Show up consistently.	We keep coming back.
5 · Participate with honesty.	We engage as far as we’re able, never by force.
6 · Honor one another’s stories.	Every person is an image-bearer with a sacred story.

APPENDIX IX

What’s Next?

The Experience is not the end. Wholeness is a way of living, and the truest work begins the morning after. Here is how to keep going.

Keep your rule of life	Hold onto the three or four practices that gave you life. A rhythm kept is a life slowly changed.
Stay in community	Don’t heal alone. Keep a few people who’ve seen the real you — and let them keep seeing.
Return to this guide	Reread a chapter. Repray a prayer. Revisit a prompt. Formation is not linear — come back as often as you need.
Seek help when you need it	If wounds surface that are more than a group can hold, a good counselor is a gift, not a failure.
Go first for someone else	The most changed are often the ones ready to go first for another. Consider walking someone else through this journey.

You are not a problem to be solved. You are a design being recovered — and by his grace, it is what you are becoming.