

what the
CHURCH
gets wrong

BUT JESUS MAKES RIGHT

GROWTH GROUP STUDIES

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What The Church Gets Wrong

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What The Church Gets Wrong, But Jesus Makes Right

The Church.

What flashes through your head when you hear those two words? An 80s Aussie rock band? A stuffy institution full of disconnected people peddling archaic ideas?

A power hungry bunch, of mostly white men, who will do anything to cling to power, including covering up atrocities and trampling over people they disagree with?

A political group seeking to wield disproportionate power over the political landscape – imposing their own views on others? A building that fills up with boring people doing boring things on a Sunday? A bunch of people who are disconnected from reality, who have nothing to say on real issues?

What should flash through your head when you hear these two words: The Church?

Jesus.

According to the story of the Bible the Church is the people gathered by God to be part of his Kingdom. The redeemed children of God, bought at an incredible price, united with Christ, given the Holy Spirit, equipped to live transformed lives in God's world as a testimony to his King, Jesus.

Unless people make this connection — *seeing Jesus when they see the Church* — we, the Church, are getting something wrong. We've stuffed up. This shouldn't surprise us – not those of us who turned to Jesus to save us because we know we're broken people who live messy lives in a broken world. A world Jesus came to make right.

"The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the



cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.”

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Unless people see Jesus in us, and in our approach to the big issues of our time, we're getting something wrong, we're stuffing up, and when we stuff up, especially in ways that stop people seeing Jesus, it's time to 'fess up, to apologise. To humbly admit we've got it wrong, and that we'll keep getting it wrong. We need to admit the world is very broken, it's full of complex, broken situations, and rushing in to try to solve this brokenness without Jesus is wrong. Without him we have no answers to the broken world.

In this series we're tackling some complex issues. Issues where the world is very broken. Issues where the church, historically, has both been an agent of hope, and a cause of despair. Complex issues. Human issues. Issues that involve real people, experiencing real pain, in a broken world. Issues that we are confident the Bible says something about, and that it says loudest in Jesus. Issues where we need to apologise for getting in the way. Issues where we need to look for a radical pattern for transformation in Jesus.

Our approach to these complex issues must start with acknowledging their complexity. Acknowledging the pain felt by real people. Maybe even by you. As we open up these topics we know they will affect some of you, we know they affect people you know and love. In the next few pages you'll read about how this material works, and how your Growth Group can be a safe place to work through this pain and sorrow.

This will be a series that gives space for us to reflect on this pain, on the broken world we live in, to lament, to cry out to God,

but also to look to God for the solution to this pain. We'll see that honest, heart-felt prayer is how we turn to God, looking for solutions to these issues.

We'll see that these issues are real, that they affect real people and cause real pain.

We'll work through what the Bible says about how the world was made to be, how God wants it to be, what Jesus says about how it should be, and what it will be when the world is made new.

We'll see how religion gets in the way — as we see how Jesus interacts with the Pharisees.

We'll see how the Cross of Jesus provides a pattern for us when we engage with the broken world, and we'll see how the resurrection of Jesus changes everything.

We'll see that God has a plan for the broken world, a plan to redeem it, a plan to comfort the afflicted — through Jesus, and through his church, and that as part of the church, we can be a part of that solution.

We'll encourage you to take real steps, practical steps, as a Growth Group, and as people living in this broken world, to be part of the solution, to get 'being the church' right, to change what people think of when they hear those two words, to help people see how only the life, death, resurrection, and rule of Jesus solves these complex issues, and are key to transforming the broken world we live in.

How These Studies Work

How we live, as people, tells a story, and our ethics shape this story. This is a series on ethics — how we live — it’s a series where we want to explore what it looks like to have our ethics shaped by the Cross, so that we live out the story of the Cross. God’s story.

So each study in this book invites you to consider God’s story, how these issues affect the lives and stories of people both inside and outside the Church, and how God’s invitation for us to live out the story of the Cross shapes the way we live. We’ve split these stories into “head,” “heart” and “hands” — you’re invited to know God’s story, feel God’s story, and live out God’s story in each of these areas.

This is a bumper set of Growth Group material. It might appear overwhelming. It might even be overwhelming. But we’re tackling a range of big topics and one of the things the Church gets wrong about these topics is treating them as simple. We hope this book — and the online material that supports it — will be a resource for you, and others, as you navigate these issues, or how to live as Christians in this world.

We know there is no way you’ll get through all the material in one Growth Group meeting, but we want to make sure you have a resource on hand to answer questions you have as they arise.

The opening questions in each study are the same, and they’re designed to shape the rest of the study — a bit like a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book, if a group wants to think about how to live out the story of

the Gospel in response to a particular issue you might skim through the head section, pick out some key bits to discuss, and then move to watching a story about the topic, which then shapes the concrete steps you want to take. While there’s a lot of material in the head section, we think this is a series where a bigger investment of time into the heart and Hands will pay off.

Head

We’ve tried to provide a pretty comprehensive overview of what the Bible says about each of these topics, following the story of the Bible from how God created things to be, how sin wrecks things, how God plans to fix them, and how Jesus makes things right. If you were here for the *All About Me* series last year you’ll recognize some similarities in the shape of this story as it moves through the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, to Jesus.

Stanley Hauerwas is a Christian thinker who writes about ethics, he says:

“Ethics is not primarily about rules and principles, rather it is about how the self must be transformed to see the world truthfully. For Christians, such seeing develops through schooling in a narrative, which teaches us how to use the language of sin not only about others, but about ourselves.”

This is the aim of the head part each week — for us to see ourselves, without Jesus, as part of the problem with the world, and Jesus as the solution both to our problem, and the world’s problems, because he is God’s solution for sin.

There’s a summary of this overview printed at the start of each study, and a more in depth version on the web. If you chose

to read every Bible reference in these overviews it could take days, or hours. They're designed so that you can dip in and get a sense of how this story shapes our story, or dig deeper, especially if you want to pursue one of these issues in more depth.

There's lots here, but don't spend all your time working through all this stuff on the night of your Growth Group. You will run out of time.

If your group isn't in the habit of reading ahead or preparing, it might be worth trying for this series. That way, if anything interests you and you want to spend some time reading the passages referenced in the Old Testament, you can. If preparing won't work for your group, then maybe start with Jesus, and come back to the other bits as the back-story that fleshes out why Jesus says and does the things he says and does.

There might be weeks where you choose to read the content together, but don't do this at the expense of the other material.

Heart

In the heart section we're inviting you to watch or read stories of how the Church approaches this topic in the real world, or how this issue shapes real lives. These stories (videos and news articles) can be found on the web page for each week (listed at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw).

This series deals with some challenging issues and some of these stories will be confronting. They may trigger strong responses from you, or from others in your group. We've included a couple of pages in this book that look at how to approach this in your Growth Group, how to create

a safe place for real, heart-to-heart relationships. If Growth Group can't be a safe place for you to discuss these issues, please contact your Growth Group Leader, or your Campus Pastor.

Hands

We want transformed heads and hearts to lead to transformed lives. We want the result of these studies to be people engaging with tough issues, to be proclaiming the Gospel — to speak it, and to live it, with love. We genuinely think there are things the Church needs to apologise for on these topics — not just the “church out there” or the “church up the road,” but our church, you, me. It may be that these studies move you to get in touch with your friends, neighbours, or family to apologise and seek forgiveness, that's a great *Hands* response.

The Hands questions are designed to help your group find concrete ways to respond. They're suggestions. Don't feel limited to them. Sometimes working out what you'd say to someone hurt by the Church, or who you know disagrees with what the Bible says on one of these topics is a great place to start, so occasionally we've suggested groups write something about an issue. We'll be putting content that you can share on Social Media (if that's your thing) on the web pages for each talk, and we'd be very encouraged to see Christians discussing these issues in Cross shaped ways on the Internet.

It would be great for your group to think about one or two of these issues you might adopt year round, to turn these issues into a project. If you do that, we're hoping this book becomes a resource you can come back to as you try to live out the story of the Cross in response to that issue.

Prayer

Each study ends with a prayer. This is the prayer the preacher at your campus will be praying after the Sermon. We hope these prayers will help your Growth Group pray in response to this material, and help you pray during the week. There's a space at the end of each study for you to write down your own prayer. The best way to respond to the brokenness in this world is to cry out to God for him to fix it, for his Kingdom to come. God has the answers to these problems. Prayer is also an opportunity to thank God for the way Jesus shows the way forward in these areas. The way we pray shapes the way we live. We'd encourage you to use this series as an opportunity to pray, from the heart, because that's where real solutions to life in this world.

Our prayer for this series is that it will be worth the effort, that as we are confronted by God's story, the story of the Cross, and his generous invitation to us to become part of this story, this will radically shape the way we live. This will be a hard series, an emotionally taxing series, it will provoke all of us to think about what it means to follow Jesus — and we might all come to different conclusions — but that's alright, we are a group of broken and imperfect people trying to tell the story of the perfect person who was broken for us, and for others. We don't need to get everything right, because he made everything right for us.



Notes

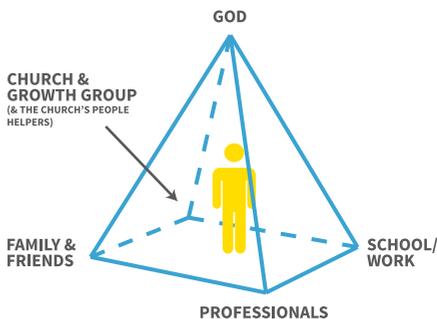
How To Have Effective Pastoral Conversations Within Your Growth Group

The Ethics Series covers topics that may well result in you and others in growth group wanting to talk about very significant life issues. You might find yourself asking, “How can I raise this life issue in a safe way?” Or you may ask, “How can I listen and respond in a helpful way?” This section gives you some guidelines, which are drawn from the ministry of Dr John Warlow (a psychiatrist with significant experience in Christian counselling).

The key phrase that sums-up this approach is, “Connect and Understand before Responding.” Three of the shapes or pictures John Warlow uses appear below as a guide for us as we speak and listen in our growth groups when significant life issues are raised.

Read over these pages a few times over the coming weeks and reflect on them. It takes time to let all this sink in, so be patient. As you reflect on this, try to not be overwhelmed by the detail. Remember it’s all built around the main idea of “Connecting and Understanding before Responding.”

Don't Panic — You're Not On Your Own



The **pyramid shape** pictures the key relationships in a person’s life. Imagine yourself, or the person you’re listening to, standing in the middle of a pyramid shape. You ask, how are they going on each corner? How are they going in their relationship with: God; family and friends; their school or work; the local church with its growth groups and its people helpers; and with professionals (i.e. their doctor, psychologist, lawyer etc.)?

Growth and change ideally occur in a supportive structure of good and helpful connections on all 5 corners of the person’s pyramid, and also between all the corners.

At this point you might feel overwhelmed in trying to listen as a person speaks about a big life issue. Don’t panic, you’re not on your own. Ask yourself, “Which is my one corner in this person’s life?” You can’t be every corner, and you certainly can’t be God for that person! Our role is to know our corner in the person’s life and to do our best to help them by doing ‘our bit’ on that corner of their pyramid. You and your growth group (and the church) can also help a person make changes to improve things on their other corners.

Here's a real-life example:

A man who is isolated from immediate family and living in another city was helped when people from church asked his friends to make deliberate efforts to take him out for coffee etc. he was showing serious signs of depression, so the church's pastor ensured the man's "professionals" corner was 'populated' (that he was seeing a good Christian counsellor and that he had spoken with his GP about his depression). The man had recently lost his job, so a ministry worker from church was helping him take his next steps in seeking employment or education/ retraining. Understandably, the man's situation meant he was losing motivation and so he was irregular at church and growth group. His group leader and members encouraged him to keep involved in church and growth group. They contacted him when he was absent, and his good connections with people in the church and growth group corner of his pyramid gradually improved.

If at any point you feel unsure about next steps, as you've listened to a person talk about a significant life issue, remember your growth group and your leader are there to help. Talk with your growth group leader as a next step. The church corner isn't just you. It's your whole church and your growth group with you on that corner of your growth group member's pyramid. In doing this it's important to remember that care for the other person treats private matters confidentially and gains their consent before sharing these things with a third party.

The most important corner of a person's pyramid is the top corner, the God corner.

We look at that next.

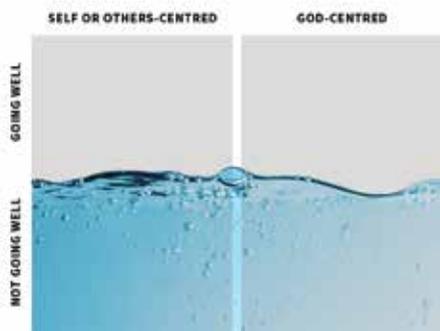
God-centredness is crucial (the top corner of the pyramid)

In Matthew chapter 22 a Jewish expert in the Old Testament Law tested Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Notice that the second commandment assumes that it is entirely normal and right for people to love both themselves and others (see also Ephesians 2:28). BUT, notice that Jesus says this is the "second" commandment. The first commandment is to love God with your whole existence.

One of the results of human rebellion against God (Genesis 3; Ephesians 2:1-3) is that we make loving self and/or loving others our first commandment. The normally good thing of loving self and others becomes a substitute for loving God (what the Bible calls an "idol"). We were created by God to be centred on him. Our love of self and others was meant to be expressed in a God-centred way. But, human rebellion against God (what the Bible calls sin) results in self-centredness and others-centredness becoming substitutes for God-centredness. We come back to God-centredness through the message of the cross of Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-10). This happens when we become a follower of Jesus. After we become a follower of Jesus, this process keeps on happening, when in specific areas of our life we realise we're not living in a God-centred way (what the Bible calls "repentance").

Only through the power of the message of the cross, the message of complete forgiveness and acceptance with God, can we be truly God-centred.

The **square shape** pictures these different ways of living.

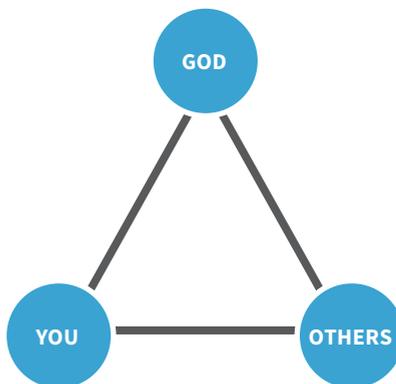


There are two columns: the left-hand column represents living in a self or others centred way, the right-hand column represents being God centred. In the horizontal direction we have 'above the waterline' and 'below the waterline'. A person below the waterline is 'not going well'. A person above the waterline is 'going well'. Therefore, a person could be going well, or not going well in either a self/others centred way or in a God centred way. This four part square applies to our life as a whole. It also applies to the various parts of our life (e.g. the corners on the pyramid shape). A real Christian is overall a God-centred person, but we often think and behave in particular areas of our lives in self-centred or others-centred ways, instead of God centred ways. Repentance is to admit to God what's going on, rely on God's forgiveness in the cross of Jesus, and begin living in a new God-centred way in that area of our life. Lastly, where would you place Job in his sufferings (Job 2:7-10) or Jesus crying out in the Garden of Gethsemane

(Luke 22:44)? Emotionally they were in the bottom right-hand corner, suffering in a God-centred way. God-centredness is most important.

'You' questions, not you advice

The **triangle shape** pictures how a person's connections with God and others happen at one and the same time. Each of the connections in the triangle will have an impact on the other connections. We ask, "How are things with you and others? How are things with you and God? How are things with you + others and God?" We do more listening than talking or questioning, because we're aiming to: "Connect and Understand before Responding."



The five steps for pastoral conversations

The key phrase to keep in mind as someone is speaking with you about an important life issue is: “Connect and Understand before Responding.” Each step needs to stay in place for the next step to be effective. We need to stay “connected” with the person while we’re “understanding” them. When we start to “respond”, we need to make sure our “connecting” with and “understanding” of the person hasn’t slipped away! You can remember these steps by the word “**CURE**”: **C**onnect; **U**nderstand; **R**espond; Engage help + Evaluate.



1 Connect in S.A.F.E.T.Y: Connecting as someone is speaking with you about an important life issue comes first and needs to keep happening as we listen, understand and respond. How could we define this kind of connection? It is to be truly ‘with’ another person in a relationship where no defensive ‘walls’ or excuses are needed to feel safe. The acronym S.A.F.E.T.Y. gives us the key factors for safe connecting:

S — Size: smaller the group, the easier it is to safely connect (e.g. one-on-one over a coffee).

A — Attitude: attitudes of care, confidentiality and consent.

F — Face: being real about the person and facing the issue — no faking, fleeing, fighting, freaking, or flopping (also, sometimes bringing the humanness of a sense of humour to the issue being faced may be helpful in certain circumstances to help with perspective — remember this using the word “fun”).

E — Empathy: we try to get a sense of what it’s like to be in the other person’s shoes, head, heart, and eyes.

T — Time: it takes time to connect, it can’t be rushed.

Y — You: you questions, not you advice. For example, we can find our own words to ask these kinds of questions: “Where are you in terms of the triangle and the pyramid shapes? How are you going in these relationships? How are things with you and others? How are things with you and God? How are things with you + others and God? How was that for you in that experience/event you’ve been speaking with me about?” Notice that these are open, not closed questions (closed questions can be answered with a “yes” or a “no”).

2 Understand the person and their problem: We tend to jump in too quickly to fix people’s problems and remove their pain. We tend to respond before truly connecting with the person and understanding them and their issue. “Connecting and Understanding before Responding” is a great way to seek to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work as he brings about good change in the other person’s life. Through taking the time to “understand” we can respond to what’s really going on.

3 Respond to the issue with the person to facilitate change:

Having connected and understood, we ask what skills the person themselves has to deal with the problem. We also ask what skills your corner (you, your growth group, the church and its people helpers) has to help.

4 Engage help, because we can never do it all ourselves: How

can help be enlisted on the other corners of the person's pyramid? This can be a good time to pray with the person, seeking God's wisdom and power in the gospel. You could ask for guidance from your growth group leader regarding help from the other corners. But even as the other corners help, you and your corner need to keep doing your bit in the person's life. You and your growth group stay involved.

5 Evaluate what has happened:

Evaluate how you went at "Connecting and Understanding before Responding". Evaluate how you and your growth group went seeking the help of the person's pyramid 'corners'. A 'debriefing' conversation with your growth group leader is a good way to do this.

A practical example of C.U.R.E.

Here's an example given by one growth group leader who is already using "Connecting and Understanding before Responding" in their pastoral conversations.

"The following points outline how I approach pastoral conversations within my growth group ministry:

1. *A growth group member shares with me a significant issue in their life. I ask myself, 'Which is my one corner on this person's pyramid?' I realise that me and my growth group can't be every corner for them.*
2. *As growth group leader I arrange for me or someone else in the group to speak with the growth group member one-on-one (to "Connect and Understand before Responding").*
3. *As I talk one-on-one I work hard to really "Connect" by using the S.A.F.E.T.Y. factors.*
4. *I try not to jump in too quickly to fix their problem or remove their pain. Instead I work hard to really "Understand" the person and their problem. I use the shapes to build a picture in my mind of the person and their problem. I build a picture of their pyramid and what's happening on each corner. I also think of the square shape, asking myself, "Are they above or below the waterline? Are they being God-centred or self/others-centred?" When asking them questions I think of the triangle shape, asking how things are going between them, others and God. I try to ask open, not closed questions (closed questions can be answered with a "yes" or a "no"). Most importantly, I do a lot more listening than talking or questioning.*
5. *Having connected and understood, I then think about the relevant skills in my corner of their pyramid (growth group, our church and its people helpers). I think about what skills the person already has that might help. I then specifically offer my corner's help, and I also encourage them to use the specific skills they already have.*

6. *But I don't stop there, because I try to enlist good help from the other corners of the person's pyramid shape. Often I'll pray with the person, focusing on the secure place that each Christian already has with God in Jesus. This is often the time I'd ask for guidance and help from my growth group coach. But I'm not just passing them on at this point. Even as other corners help, I as a leader and my growth group stay involved and keep 'doing our bit' on our corner of the person's pyramid. (By the way, if something serious has happened or I'm uncertain, I make sure I confidentially talk with my growth group coach about this and ask for their guidance and help.)*
7. *Lastly I ask myself, "How did it go? What can I learn for the future?" I evaluate how I went at "Connecting and Understanding before Responding" and how we as a growth group (with the help of our coach) went in seeking the help of each of the person's pyramid 'corners'. I always treat what people tell me in these conversations with confidentiality, asking their permission before speaking to other people (except when I feel their or someone else's safety is in danger). I find that a conversation with my growth group coach can really help in evaluating how it all went. I also remember that when it seems the law has been broken (e.g. child abuse or domestic violence), I always speak with my coach, who will speak with the Connect-Grow-Serve Pathway Director (who will confidentially refer the issue on to the relevant authorities, whilst recruiting appropriate support for the person, their growth group leader and the coach)."*

Where can I find help for a person on their professionals corner?

The person's doctor?

It is important that the person talks with their GP about any mental health issues, so their doctor's medical help takes account of those issues.

Looking for counselling options?

There are likely to be other counselling options in your area. If you'd like to find out more about options near you, please contact your church's office or speak with one of your pastors. For further Christian counselling options please enquire with the Christian Counselling Association of Australia <http://www.ccaa.net.au/>

Want to learn more about C.U.R.E?

John Warlow has posted some videos and information on this website:

www.livingwholeness.org

Further reading/ resources:

Larry Crabb: 'Encouragement, the key to caring' and 'Understanding People, why we long for relationship'

Paul David Tripp: 'Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, people in need of change helping people in need of change'

What The Church Gets Wrong about Judging Others, but Jesus makes right...

The Church gets judging others wrong when we forget who we are. We forget that we are sinners, generously adopted into God's family, through Jesus. We forget that this isn't because of who we are, but because of who he is. We get judging others wrong when we expect others to think or act like Christians.

Jesus gets judging others right by living a perfect life, which gives him the right to judge, and by lovingly laying his life down for those who rely on him.

***“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”
Matthew 7:1***

1. What impacted or challenged you from the talk on Sunday?

2. What do you think the church gets wrong about judging others?



Head

The story of the Bible is the story of God judging and defeating evil, and punishing sin, while gathering a people for himself, and doing all this through Jesus.

In the beginning...

This begins with Adam and Eve, who are created to bear his image and to rule over the world as his representatives (Genesis 1).

Where things go wrong

Adam and Eve turn their backs on God. They reject his rule and try to rule for and represent themselves (Genesis 3). From this point on our hearts are turned away from God. Our hearts are described as “evil all the time” and God says “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood,” (Genesis 6:5, 8:21). This corruption is enough to earn us a death sentence, as we see when God judges Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:19-24), and whole the world in Noah’s day (Genesis 6:11-13, 7:21-23).

God’s plan to fix things

God rescues Noah from his judgment and promises to withhold this sort of judgment from people “as long as the earth endures” (Genesis 8:20-22). God re-establishes a relationship with Noah, where his descendants are invited, once more, to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1-7).

God sets out to recreate a nation of people who will represent him. A people who will even be a blessing to the nations around them — nations full of people not following God (Genesis 12).

This nation, Israel, is created to be a “Kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19). They are given the Old Testament law to mark them out as different from the nations around them, so that they might carry out this special job. This is so that the nations might say “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people,” (Deuteronomy 4:5-9). Israel is called to obey God because of what he has done for them — and will do for them (Deuteronomy 6:20-25). They aren’t chosen for being extra good, but because God wants to use them to bless the world, and for his glory (Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

The Church often takes hold of Old Testament laws and wields them to judge the behaviour of those outside the Church. This is despite the original intention of the Laws, which was to teach God’s people, Israel, about what obedience looked like as a response to what God has done for them. They don’t make sense without this story.

Israel does a terrible job of being the Kingdom of Priests. Even at the highest point in Israel’s story, the reign of David, we’re one generation away from disaster. David himself is a disaster when it comes to the Ten Commandments, the most basic of the Laws. As a result of their disobedience, Israel is kicked out of the land — just as God promised they would be, and just as Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden. The Prophets tell us this is because Israel has missed the point of the Law, and they’ve become just like the nations (Micah 6:3-16).

Even though it appears everything has fallen apart — God promises to restore his people from exile, and restore their hearts, for the sake of his name (Ezekiel 36:16-32).

How Jesus makes things right...

When we arrive in the New Testament, Israel is a nation again, back in their Land, but their hearts are still far from God. They are still ruled by a foreign king. Their exile is not over — their hearts have not yet been transformed — and they seem to have forgotten their history. Again. It seems they've forgotten what the law is all about. They're quick to judge others, forgetting the judgement they themselves deserve. Forgetting God's mercy to them.

Jesus tells the leaders of Israel that God's law can be summed up as "love the Lord your God with all your heart," and "love your neighbour as yourself," (Matthew 22:34-40). When Jesus speaks judgementally, he speaks against the religious leaders who think they've got it all together. He rebukes the teachers of the law for focusing on judging others, he says they "shut the door of the Kingdom of heaven in people's faces," and worry about giving a tenth of their spice rack, when they should be focusing on "the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and faithfulness." (Matthew 23:13, 23-24). The religious establishment is so keen to pass judgment on others, they've forgotten about themselves.

They even judge Jesus, and ultimately, execute him on the Cross. Jesus doesn't meet their standards. But even in this ultimate act of wrongly judging another, God is working to restore his people. Jesus' death, resurrection, gift of the Holy Spirit, and his ascension are the signs the exile has ended. The people of God have transformed heads and hearts. We, the people of God, have been transformed in to a "nation of priests" (1 Peter 2:9-10),

called to be members of his Kingdom, the Church. People claimed by Jesus and shaped by the cross. We become restored people, not chosen on merit, because we're better, or more holy, than anyone else, but chosen by God's grace, to give Glory to God. This story of God's mercy to us leaves us without any ability to stand in judgment of others, but invites us to share the story of God's mercy for people like them, who are really people like us.

For a longer version of this story — with more background — visit creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/judging-others

3. Read Matthew 7:1-5. In the light of what Jesus says here, and Israel's history, what right do Israel or the Pharisees have to judge others? How should they understand the Law, and their place in the world? How should we, the Church, think about judging others in the light of who we were when God saved us?

4. Read Matthew 9:9-13. What did Jesus come to do? Where does he do this? How does the cross shape our understanding of Jesus' mission? How does this show us how seriously God takes judgment? What does this mean for us when it comes to judging others?

5. Read Romans 12:1-2. What happens to the way we see the world when we follow Jesus? Can we expect people not following Jesus to see the world the way we do now, without the Holy Spirit?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. How might this help us to understand the posture the church is to adopt towards those who don't follow Jesus? How might it help us understand who we should be judging?

Heart

7. Where does our church get judging others wrong? Where do you get judging others wrong? How can we treat sin as seriously as God, while treating people the way Jesus treats us at the Cross?

8. In a McCrindle Research study of ‘belief blockers’ that stop non-Christians in Australia going to church, 69% of Australians say that Christians “judging others” negatively influences their decision to go to church to a “massive” or “significant” extent. How might we start to address this in conversations with our friends?

Read this public statement from an Australian church about homosexuality

“i) All homosexual practice (and lesbianism) is an utter defiling abomination before the holiness and goodness of God, never in any circumstances to be justified.

ii) That to accept homosexual practice (even de facto) is a sin that the Church of Jesus Christ must publicly condemn and from which it should disassociate itself.

iii) Each individual, and the nation as a whole should uphold the Biblical standard of heterosexual chastity before marriage and heterosexual fidelity within marriage to the exclusion of all other sexual practices and preferences.”

9. How do you think a homosexual person, or a non-Christian with homosexual friends or family members, who reads this statement might feel about the Church? How might they feel about Jesus? What does this statement emphasise? How does this make you feel?

10. How should we treat people who do things God disagrees with in a way that acknowledges both the seriousness of God's judgment, our own brokenness, and God's love for us revealed in Jesus?

Hands

11. In your group, select an issue where you think the Church judges others. Come up with a short statement about the issue which expresses love for those who might feel judged, showing how Jesus makes things right. Think about how you might share this with your friends either online, or in conversation with people in your life who don't follow Jesus.
12. Are there people in your life who you have judged who may have been turned off Church, and Jesus, because of this? How might you apologise for this and seek forgiveness? What tone would you use? What would you definitely say? What would you not say?

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before you grateful for Jesus. Thank you that he turned judgmentalism upside down. Thank you that he welcomed the judged — sinners — people who knew they were broken. Thank you that he challenged the judges who were also sinners — people blind to their brokenness. Thank you that Jesus came to rescue sinners like us though his loving death on a cross. Thank you that he came to build a people — his church — who would live transformed lives from transformed hearts.

Father, we know that we will get things wrong if we take our eyes off the cross of Jesus. We know that we will get things wrong if our hearts are not changed by the cross of Jesus. Father we thank you that at the cross, Jesus puts things right. Please, by your Spirit, help us to live lives shaped by the cross. Shape our hearts at the cross to learn the truth about ourselves, so we will only ever speak with humility the truth to others. Please shape us at the cross to live and speak the truth of the gospel in humility, gentleness, compassion, love and mercy.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Jesus you have loved and bought me
By your death my debts are paid
I am yours, I stand beside you
Fearless face the coming day.*

Grace Awaiting Me

Your Prayer

FAMILY GROWTH

Judging Others

Big Idea

Do not criticise others, remember Jesus forgave you.

Bible Reading

Matthew 7: 1 – 5

Pre-Primary & Primary

Each family member needs a blank sheet of paper which they roll it up into a ball. One family member volunteers to pretend that they were caught committing a terrible crime. (For older kids you might want to explain that sinners who committed certain crimes in Jesus' day were 'stoned to death'). Then 'pelt the sinner' with your paper balls. Ask:

Was it fun?

Did you feel good about it?

Then give each family member another blank sheet of paper and a pencil. Have everyone think of a recent time that they sinned such as telling a lie about their homework, arguing with their parents, or a time they were disobedient, etc. Tell them to write that sin on the paper. Younger kids can draw pictures of something they did. Next, have everyone think of how many times they sinned during the past week. Write the number down on the piece of paper. Now scrunch that piece of paper in a ball like before.

Ask:

Do you think it's ok to now 'pelt the sinner' with the paper balls?

How does it make you feel to 'pelt the sinner' when you have sins yourself?

Before we judge someone else for doing wrong, we need to look at our own lives and ask ourselves if we are really any better. Jesus says it's like trying to get a speck of dust out of our friend's eye, while we have a huge stick in our own eye. First we should take care of our own faults, before we tell others how to fix theirs. We should remember the forgiveness we get from Jesus.

High School

Have a discussion about the following statement:

“Aren't we all sinners? What gives us the right to make moral judgments about someone else? Isn't that God's job?”

In the Bible passage Jesus is not permitting us to avoid making hard decisions or take difficult stands. But he is warning us not to have a bitter, hypercritical, fault-finding spirit. We need to remember that each of us has been forgiven so much by Jesus. If we remember Jesus, and the forgiveness he offers, then we begin to see others differently. Rather than seeing them as terrible people who break God's rules, but as sinners who need forgiveness from Jesus. Just like us.

Prayer

Thank God for showing you mercy and forgiving you your sins undeservedly.

Ask God to help you not to judge others.

Ask God to give you a gentle spirit that speaks to others in love.

What The Church Gets Wrong About Gay Marriage, But Jesus Makes Right...

The Bible is clear that marriage is a relationship between two people, one man and one woman, and that it is the created relationship for enjoying sex. The Church gets gay marriage wrong when we worship marriage and speak about sex as though it satisfies the real longings of our human spirit. We get gay marriage wrong when we equate natural temptation or attraction with action, or sexual identity. We get gay marriage wrong when we speak as though heterosexuality is less affected by our sinful nature than homosexuality.

Jesus shows us where our true longings should point to, where true satisfaction is found, and calls us to transform and reorient our sexuality as a result of finding our identity and fulfilment as his people. His bride. The church.

1. What impacted or challenged you from the talk on Sunday?
2. What do you think the church gets wrong about gay marriage, or sexuality, that Jesus makes right?



Head

The story of the Bible is the story of God acting in love gathering a people for himself who find their greatest satisfaction, and their identity, in him, through the cross of Jesus, in a way that redefines our approach to human relationships, marriage, and sexuality.

In the beginning...

God made people in his image — as male and female — he made us to represent him, to rule under him, to communicate, to love, and to create. He creates life, and then instructs people to become co-creators of life, to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28). When God made humanity he said “let us make man in our image” and he makes humanity male and female (Genesis 1:26), we’re made to relate to each other in the same way that the persons of the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy spirit — relate to each other. In the garden this is expressed in Adam and Eve becoming one flesh. Marriage is a picture of relationships in the Trinity. This doesn’t mean marriage is essential to being fully human — in Genesis the two complete individuals join together to become one (Genesis 2:24).

Where things go wrong

In Genesis 3, things start to unravel. People were created to represent God, by ruling, communicating, loving, and creating like him, especially creating life. This all gets frustrated (Genesis 3:16-19) when an unloving act of broken communication leads Adam and Eve to seek to rule in God’s place (Genesis 3:1-6). This frustration, this brokenness, a result of this pattern of behaviour we call

sin, extends to our relationships — the relationships at the heart of creation — with each other (Genesis 3:7) and with God (Genesis 3:8-10). This breakdown is first evident in marriage (Genesis 3:16), but we also see it play out in a relationship between brothers (Genesis 4), and then in just about every other relationship in the Old Testament.

In Genesis, at creation, we see that the marriage relationship — between one man and one woman — is created by God as a good gift, but beyond the Garden of Eden, marriage is broken, full of sin, riddled with deception, we see all sorts of examples of this in the Old Testament story. Marriage is broken because it is an expression of our broken, sinful, hearts. People are born broken, and this brokenness affects human relationships, including marriage. It affects every part of our humanity, including our sexuality. Ultimately it affects our relationship with God, and our ability to bear his image.

Homosexual sex is a result of this brokenness. It is an expression of relationships between people, and relationships between God and humanity, not being what they were made to be. The Bible consistently speaks about homosexual sex as being outside God’s design for human sexuality — the one flesh relationship between a man and a woman — established at creation. *But*. This is not the only form of broken sexuality the Bible talks about. In fact, it never speaks about homosexuality in isolation from other forms of sexual brokenness (Romans 1:24-32, 1 Corinthians 6:8-11, Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20). All of us experience sexual attraction in bodies and minds broken by sin, our sexual desire always occurs after Eden, in a broken world. This does not mean that

the Bible considers same sex attraction, or any sexual attraction, sinful. Christians run into great difficulty when we define temptation as sin, because, as Hebrews tells us, Jesus shared in what it means to be human, and was tempted “in every way, just as we are” (Hebrews 2:14-18, Hebrews 4:14-16). It’s pretty important for the gospel that Jesus did not sin, the jump to treating temptation as sin is theologically dangerous, because, as Paul says “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God’s plan to fix things

After the breakdown of Adam and Eve’s relationship with God, and the frustration of the way they were created to relate to one another, God plans to restore his relationship with humanity, and our capacity to relate to one another. He starts the process of creating a nation, a “Kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6), who will represent him again. These people are to take up Adam’s job — to be fruitful and multiply — this starts with Noah, and includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel (Genesis 9:1, 17:6, 26:24, 28:3, 35:11, Exodus 1:7, Leviticus 26:9).

Israel is called keep their sexual practice to marriage (Exodus 20:14), and to be different from the nations around them, especially in how they practice their sexuality (Leviticus 18). But they fail. Over and over again. Even the heroes of the story — men like Abraham, Isaac, Judah, and David — show that our sexuality is completely broken by sin. The Old Testament uses adultery and prostitution as metaphors for how we treat God and his faithful love, but these metaphors are the reality in the lives of God’s people. Sexual expression outside of marriage

doesn’t just demonstrate that God’s people aren’t committed to one another the way they should be, but that their commitment to being God’s people is not what it should be, sexual immorality and idolatry (often linked) are the two big indicators that humanity, Israel, and individuals from Israel’s history were not living the lives they were created for, and that they desperately need intervention from God. God’s people find their identity and satisfaction in idolatry and sex, rather than in God, so they are punished, and taken into exile.

But all is not lost, because God is like a faithful, loving, and forgiving spouse — Jeremiah includes the hope that, as a result, God will reverse the impacts of the curse from Genesis 3 (Jeremiah 31:21-34).

In the Old Testament, fruitfulness was linked to offspring — to the growth and expansion of God’s people, and this is spoken about as the result of God’s generous love for his people, and something he provides for them (Ezekiel 36:8-15, 37-38), God’s commitment is to dwell with Israel, in relationship with them, as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden, and as he did with Israel in the temple (Ezekiel 37:14-28), only this time he will change their hearts (Ezekiel 37:24-32). The Psalms anticipate a time when those who fear the Lord are described using the picture of a faithful and fruitful marriage (Psalm 128). Fruitfulness, the way God designed it in the garden, always flows, first, out of the relationship between people and God, not marriage.

How Jesus makes things right...

Jesus doesn’t say anything about homosexuality directly — but he does say

plenty about sexual immorality. When he talks about sex he never walks away from the standards of the Old Testament, rather, he goes so far as to say that lust is committing adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28). The Old Testament is clear about God's design for sexuality, and the natural, born this way, brokenness of our human experience and desires. Jesus says God's design for marriage, one man and one woman becoming one flesh, has been around from the beginning (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus says his Kingdom redefines how we approach marriage, sexuality, and our desires (Matthew 19:10-12). Our future reality — where there is no marriage — helps us understand what relationships should define us in the present (Matthew 22:23-33). Jesus redefines what fruitfulness looks like — children of God are now born of the spirit (Romans 8:5-17), and

God's people are fruitful in the way we were created to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, when the gospel is preached to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Being part of God's Kingdom, and receiving the Holy Spirit changes the way we see and understand everything in the world, including our sexuality, so that we start to see things the way Jesus does. While we might be naturally oriented towards sinful expressions of sexuality — our heart is naturally inclined to sinful sexuality, no matter who we are attracted to — Jesus has the power to change us so that we are first oriented towards him, so that we find our identity in him, not ourselves, other people, or acting out our sexual desires.

Read more of this story:
creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/gay-marriage

3. Read Matthew 19:3-12. Jesus talks here about the relationship between marriage, sexuality and the Kingdom of God, when he speaks of people who did not have sex (eunuchs), he says some are “born this way” and some “choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven.” What implications might this have for how we think about where our sexuality fits in with the Kingdom of God?

4. Read Matthew 22:23-33. How does this shape our understanding of where marriage fits into the scheme of eternity? How does this help us put our relationships, and our sexuality, into perspective?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. What hope does Paul see for sexually broken people? Where is this hope found? How is restoration achieved?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, and 7:25-40. How does Paul apply Jesus’ words from Matthew 19? Is it possible that sometimes the way we talk about marriage makes it sound like singleness is less than ideal, or that marriage is the ultimate goal for a Christian? What are we communicating to people who are single when we do this?

7. Jesus says not everyone will accept his words in Matthew 19:11-12, flick back to 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (from last week). If transformation of sexually broken lives requires Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit, how does this influence how we speak about sexuality, and what should we expect sexuality to look like for people outside the church? What do these people need most from us?

8. Both Jesus and Paul teach that it is possible for Christians to choose singleness if our identity is found in the Kingdom of God, but neither of them suggest this is going to be easy. How can we love our brothers and sisters in Christ who are single, including who experience same sex attraction? What do Jesus and Paul teach us about speaking about marriage?

Heart

9. How does God's faithful love for you, shown at the cross of Jesus, need to change the way you think about relationships, marriage, and the question of gay marriage?

10. When the Bible talks about homosexual sex it is always mentioned in a list of other sins, do you think the church appears to single out homosexuality and gay marriage rather than other things on these lists? Why?

11. Where should all Christians, married or otherwise, be finding our identity? What should we really be longing for? How might you re-orient your life, and your relationships, around Jesus rather than your relationships or your sexual orientation?

12. Romans 1 describes a tendency to turn good things God has made into idols that pull people away from him. Is it possible that we speak of marriage in a way that confuses people about where to find wholeness? Is your approach to your marriage, or your desire for marriage possibly a case of 'serving the created thing,' marriage, rather than the creator'?

13. How can we speak about God's design for human sexuality being marriage, and marriage being the lifelong commitment between one man and one woman, to people who don't find their identity in Jesus?

14. Watch or read one of the stories at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/gay-marriage. Do you think this story shows the church getting gay marriage right, or wrong? How might you feel about this story if you were a same sex attracted Christian? Or a person in a gay relationship?

15. If a non-Christian friend, family member or colleague also watched or read this story, what questions or concerns might they raise? How would you respond?

Hands

Think and pray about whether sharing this video/article (or one of the other ones listed) might be a good opportunity for you to begin discussions with your non-Christian friends that will show them the love and hope found in Jesus.

16. How might we talk to a friend who experiences same sex attraction, who has been hurt by the way Christians have spoken about homosexuality, in a way that is a gracious, winsome, invitation to find their identity in Jesus, not their sexuality? What are some examples of things you might say? What sort of attitude or tone should we adopt?
17. How might you respond when a gay friend, neighbour, family member, or colleague, asks you about gay marriage? Especially if they suggest God wants people to be happy, and marriage is a key to their happiness?
18. How might you respond to a family member who “comes out”? How might you respond if a gay family member invited you to their wedding?

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We are sorry. Sorry for the times that we have been so keen to value your good gifts of marriage and sex that we have turned them into things that we worship. We are sorry for way we take good things you give us and break them, or use them to break others. We're sorry for the times that the way we've spoken about marriage and sex has stopped people hearing about your love for them. We're sorry when our hearts and attitudes get in the way of showing people your great promise of a relationship with you that brings true wholeness and joy and transforms all our other relationships in the process.

Lord, help us not to think more highly of ourselves, and our relationships, than we ought. Help us not to pursue our identity, our satisfaction, or our joy in another person, or in sex, help us to find the key to our longing in you, in the promise of an eternity with you, a promise secured at the cross.

Help us, as we speak about marriage and sex to be faithful to your word, not just in how we define marriage, but in how we see its limits, and our own limits — that each of us approaches our sexuality from a position of brokenness, not wholeness. Help us find our wholeness in you. Help us not to speak as though marriage is the end goal of our humanity, the thing that completes us, but instead to celebrate marriage as you created it, a picture of your love, the love you ultimately show us in Jesus.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Grace — that's greater than our failings
oh there is grace awaiting me*

Grace Awaiting Me

Your Prayer

FAMILY GROWTH

Relationships

Big Idea

Our relationship with Jesus should be more important to us than any other type of relationship or family.

Bible Reading

Matthew 10: 37 – 39

Pre-Primary & Primary

Draw the cross of Jesus. Or you can check out a fancy way to make a cross out of paper with one cut. Just do an internet search on **'make a paper cross'**.

In the center of the cross write Jesus in big letters. Then write (or draw for younger kids) down every person you have a relationship with e.g. The names of your family, friends, teachers at school etc. Remember to write your own name as well. Now draw lines connecting every one's names you have written down to Jesus.

Our most important relationship should be the one between Jesus and ourselves. God desires to be in and around all of our relationships. Do you make him part of all your relationships?

High School

In the Bible passage we have read it is very clear: if you love your own family more than Christ, you cannot be his disciple. This is not to say that we Christians cannot love our family. Most of us love our family deeply, as deeply as humanly possible. But the word of God tells us that we are to love our family less than God. This does not diminish our love for our family but encourages us to love God even more

deeply than our family. Besides, who gave us our family in the first place?

When we put our relationship with Jesus first, it will shape the decisions we make about other relationships. We all know there are many broken relationships, we might even know people who are in same sex relationships. How should we as Christians react? Are we allowed to judge?

In the Bible it's clear: we should show all people the love of Christ first, just as Christ loves us in our sinful state. We can pray for the people around us who are in relationships that are broken. We can seek to show them what a God-honouring relationship is.

Discuss with your family how you can show others that your relationship with Jesus comes first and how this may effect relationships with your peers at school.

Prayer

Pray that your relationship with Jesus will grow stronger everyday.

Pray for restoration in broken relationships around you.

Pray that God will help you to show his love to all people and not to just walk away because it's the easier option.

Head

The Bible tells the story of God giving life to his people. He is the author of life. He values life. He is the Life-Giver. When sin enters the world it brings death. As a result, our hearts are tainted so that we experience death, and bring death into our relationships. Life in the world becomes painful. We inflict brokenness on one another. This brokenness leads us to idolise life or to believe we should be in control of its beginning and end. God brings new life through Jesus, who mends our brokenness and mends the broken world.

In the Beginning

In Genesis we see that humanity is the pinnacle of God's good creation. God is in the business of creating life, giving the "breath of life" to all creatures (Genesis 1:30). Humans, made in his image, are to rule over all these living things (Genesis 1:26-28). We see God instructing humans to "be fruitful and multiply," an instruction to create new life (Genesis 1:28). In Genesis 2 God gives humanity life, emphatically, by breathing the breath of life into Adam directly (Genesis 2:7). God is our Life-Giver.

Where things go wrong

Creating new life is an honour given to us by our Life-Giver. When the relationship between people and God is fractured (Genesis 3) this essential part of the role we share as humans — multiplication — is also frustrated. This frustration is partly, as we saw last week, our relationships are broken... but is also because giving birth to, feeding and raising children — multiplying — suddenly becomes more painful (Genesis 3:16-20). Life now involves

suffering and painful toil. The world we were meant to rule over has turned against us (Genesis 1:29, 3:17-18). Disease and death are now part of life (Genesis 3:19-22).

God's plan to fix things

God gives Israel his Law in order to protect life (Exodus 20:13, 21:12-29, Numbers 35), and so that his chosen people might choose life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Even though all people reject God and inflict brokenness on each other, God continues to give life by his breath (Isaiah 42:5). The Psalms celebrate God's careful construction of human life (Psalm 139) but also lament that we are sinful from the time we are conceived (Psalm 51).

This is the drama of every human life. We are this combination of sinfulness and God's good creativity. We are designed to bear his image and yet incapable of doing so, because our hearts pull us away from him. God creates and is sovereign over every life — from the moment life begins in the womb to the moment breath exits the body for the last time. In the of Israel's history, the sinful part of their hearts wins out (Ezekiel 22:1- 16, 36:26-27) and so they are exiled, as 'dry bones', empty of life. But God, because he is committed to giving life, promises to restore these bones with his breath — his Spirit — so that they might live for his name again (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

How Jesus makes things right...

God delights in creating life. He ultimately re-creates life — eternal life — in Jesus. Jesus came as the author of life (Acts 3:15) to bring dead hearts back to life (John 1:4, 3:16, 4:14, 5:19-27, 6:26-37, 10:10). Jesus invites us to live transformed, hopeful,

lives that reach beyond death; lives that see a world beyond the pain and suffering of this world (1 Peter 1:3-9, Revelation 21:1-7, 22:1-5). Jesus came to bring us new life, by laying his life down for us (John 10:11-18). he stepped into a broken world and was broken by the world: crucified by those he came to save. God, in the giving of his own Son Jesus, is the ultimate Life-Giver.

In being broken, Jesus offers complete forgiveness to those who have attempted to author their own lives, and to those who attempt to rewrite the beginning or ending of the lives of others. Jesus offers forgiveness and hope to all who have turned away from God, yet turn back to him. Jesus sends the Church into the world as ambassadors, ministers of reconciliation, people who proclaim God's message of forgiveness — that he no longer counts people's sin against them if they turn to follow Jesus. He invites the Church to live as 'new creations' in him, people being conformed to the image of his Son. Our new lives are shaped by the ultimate Life-Giver, the God-man who brings healing and mending to a broken and dying world (1 Corinthians 15:20-27, 45-49, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 5:14-21).

Decisions about ending a life, whether through abortion or euthanasia, are always taken by people responding in a broken world. A terminally ill man considering euthanasia as a response to pain is responding to the frustration of the world brought about in Genesis 3. A pregnant woman might be considering an abortion based on advice about poor health outcomes for her or her baby, her ability to cope with raising a child as a single mother, or she may be pregnant as a result of sexual assault. These decisions are taken in a world that is not as God made it to be, and is not what it will be.

Loneliness, trauma and tragedy often cloud such decision-making. Living in a broken world poses challenges for us as we love these people and as we seek to love our society. As we seek to protect the vulnerable, like the unborn and the elderly, we must remember that many making these decisions are also vulnerable people, made in God's image yet struggling to live in a broken world.

Abortion is not an unforgivable sin. In Luke 7:36-50 Jesus meets a woman who "lived a sinful life". The woman in this story is a prostitute. Jesus offered acceptance, love, and forgiveness to prostitutes (Matthew 21:31-32). We know that prostitutes in first century Rome could not afford to raise children, and so often resorted to abortion or exposed their children to the elements. These children would often be collected by people who raised them to be prostitutes. The relationship between sin and brokenness in this world is sometimes clearly a vicious cycle. But in Matthew we see the Gospel is good news for everybody. After interacting with this woman in a way that shows her love for Jesus, and his love for her, Jesus says to this woman "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

We can all find forgiveness and peace in the same place — at the cross of Jesus — no matter what we've done. His offer of eternal life is not determined by what we do, but what he has done. He brings forgiveness to all those who call on his name. God, through Jesus, is our ultimate Life-Giver!

For more of this story visit:
creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/abortion

8. How might this approach to life help us when we interact with people not coping with pain and suffering, or those terrified at the idea of raising a child? How might we be part of the solution for people faced with the brokenness of the world, rather than the problem?

Heart

9. Do you value life the way God does at the Cross? Do you value your life the same way Jesus values his at the Cross?
10. How might the realisation that the whole world (including pregnancy) is broken by our sin and God's curse help us as we talk with people who are worried about pregnancy and raising children?
11. Read Luke 7:36-50. Do you think this woman's experience of love and forgiveness would happen if she heard Christians speaking about abortion? What if she came to our church?

12. A significant number of abortions come as a result of rape, many women do not report rape and are unlikely, in this case, to tell people why they are having an abortion. How should that change the way we speak about abortion? What can we offer these women that Jesus also offers them?

Read or watch the story of Pastor Lee Jong-Rak at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/abortion.

13. What might it look like to learn from Lee Jong-Rak (and the early church, who adopted abandoned babies to combat the practice of infanticide), as we deal with questions of life and death? What options do we offer people faced with life and death decisions as an alternative? What are some obstacles to stories like this happening in Australia?

Think and pray about whether sharing this video/article (or one of the other ones listed) might be a good opportunity for you to begin discussions with your non-Christian friends that will show them the love and hope found in Jesus.

14. How might we find radical ways to show our love for life, in ways that shows that this love flows out of our love for the giver of life? What steps might we take to live out this love for life and the life-giver? How might we share the burdens of others, rather than adding to them?
15. How can we speak lovingly to those who have chosen to have an abortion, who feel the pain of that decision and might feel unwelcome or unloved in our community because of the way the church has spoken about abortion?

Hands

16. As a group, write a letter that speaks about the hope Jesus offers in a broken world, with compassion and empathy, to either:
- A pregnant woman considering an abortion
 - A woman who has had an abortion who is investigating Christianity, or who has become a Christian and still feels guilty about that choice.
 - A terminally ill, elderly person, in chronic pain who is considering euthanasia.
 - A doctor considering their stance on abortion and euthanasia.
 - A politician making decisions about abortion, euthanasia, or adoption laws.

Pastoral Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

We honour you as the Creator of all life: the one who makes life, who loves life, who gives life, and who takes life: our Life-Giver. Thank you for the gift of life you have given to each of us. We praise you for knitting us together in our mother's womb, for counting the hairs on our heads, for numbering our days, for holding our lives in your hands... for dignifying each and every life you have made by creating us all in your image. We, as your people, as your church, praise you: the Life-Giver and the Life-Taker, for the giving of all life.

Father, today we confess our wrongs before you. Some of us have taken life into our own hands, and taken life with our own hands. But some of us Lord, have murdered others with our words. And according to your son Jesus, all of us, in our anger, have murdered others in our hearts. Some of us have judged others harshly; we have been judgemental. Some of us have written others off as fools;

we have been foolish. All of us Lord, in different ways and to various degree, have worshipped life rather than the Life-Giver. Please forgive us.

As a church Lord, as your people, we have not loved as we ought. We have not had compassion as we ought. We have not cared as we ought. We have not sacrificed our own comforts to comfort those grappling with difficult pregnancies, or terrible dilemmas, or the trauma of rape, or extreme pain, or extended and debilitating disease. We have idolized and exalted the comfort and convenience of our own lives, rather than our Life-Giver. Please forgive us Lord.

Please forgive us for our wrongdoing. Our wrong thinking. Our misguided actions. Our poor choice of words. Our lack of compassion, both for the unborn and elderly, and for those pregnant and distressed. Forgive us for worshipping the religious life of good appearances, respectability, of reputation, of convenience.

Forgive us Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, for worshipping life instead of the Life-Giver.

Thank you for Jesus, who teaches us that we do indeed have very good reasons to worry in this life. That he not only acknowledges the mess in our lives, but joins us in it. Thank you for Jesus, who teaches us that in him, through him, because of him, we have even better reasons not to worry. Comfort us Father, in the knowledge that if we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, cleansing us from all or unrighteousness.

Help us Lord, to worship you, the Life-Giver; to love others, together, as a loving community of believers in Jesus; to bring real comfort to those struggling with life and death, and living in-between.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Judgement's done, atonement's made
the ransom's paid, no guilt remains
now there is grace awaiting me,
awaiting me!*

Grace Awaiting Me

Your Prayer

FAMILY GROWTH

Life & Death

Big Idea

Every person is made by God and is precious to him. Every person should be precious to us too.

Preparation

You need some playdough/dough/pipe cleaners for pre-primary and primary

Bible Passage

Psalm 139:13-17

Pre-Primary & Primary

From your materials (playdough, gingerbread dough, pipe cleaners) make a person. Talk about your creation and how they are individual. Imagine what kind of characteristics your person might have. You know about your person because you made it.

God made us. God knows all about us, from the very beginning to the very end, and he is in control of when we begin and end this life. People are very precious to God, so much that Jesus died so we can be God's friends forever.

High School

Discussion:

You are precious to God. There is no-one like you in the whole world. God made you just who you are at this point in history.

How does knowing that you are precious to God impact how you live your life?

Have you known anyone who has committed suicide? Do you know anyone who thinks they are worthless? How can we pray and love others, and point them to Jesus, who thought we were so precious that he died for us so we can be restored to God?

Reflection activity:
Make Psalm 139:13 into an Instagram artwork, or a poster for your wall. Share on social media.

Prayer idea

Hold hands as a family and pray together, thank God that he has made each of us individual and precious, and ask for help to let us show that love to others.

What The Church Gets Wrong About Abuse, But Jesus Makes Right...

Abuse is the strong preying on the weak, be it domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, or abuse in the workplace. There is no place for abuse in the Church. The Church gets abuse wrong when it does not use its power to protect the abused, when it allows abuse to stay in darkness, or worse, tries to cover it up.

Jesus shows that there is no place for abuse, or cover-ups, in the church. Jesus is strong, but suffers abuse for the sake of the weak.

1. What impacted or challenged you from the talk on Sunday?
2. What do you think the Church gets wrong about abuse, that Jesus makes right?



Head

The Bible is the story of God defeating evil, and our desire to cover it up. It is the story of God bringing light into the darkness. God does this through Jesus — the one who holds all things together experiencing the ultimate evil, the ultimate abuse, as he lays down his life to defeat evil for eternity.

In the beginning...

We've seen in the last few weeks that God created humans to rule his world, to use power, authority, and creativity, to "rule over" the things he made, to "be fruitful, fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:26-30) — humanity is created to wield power, just like God did in creating the world, and in creating life, but to do it in his service.

Where things go wrong

Things get messy almost as soon as the Serpent enters the garden, wielding power in an insidious way to corrupt Adam and Eve's rule of God's word. The serpent lies to them, offering something Adam and Eve already enjoy as the fruit of their relationship with God (Genesis 3:5), Adam and Eve are already "like God" — but the serpent invites them to grasp for more power. And they do.

This sets a pattern for human behaviour that occurs over and over again in the Old Testament — people grasping for power, and abusing others to get it. It happens again in the very next chapter as Cain kills Abel. Cain gets angry with God (and Abel) after God accepts Abel's offering, but not his, and, God speaks to him in his anger, saying "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7) This is Cain's

chance to decide to 'rule' the way God wants us to rule, but he chooses, instead, to kill his brother (Genesis 4:8). Just like Adam and Eve before him, Cain tries to cover up his behaviour (Genesis 3:8-13, 4:9-10). This becomes default human behaviour — a default use of power — but this behaviour is a perversion of what we were created to do. The final five laws of the Ten Commandments, given by God to mark out his nation (Exodus 19:3-6), are designed to counteract this corrupted default human behaviour.

God's plan to fix things

When we think how the Old Testament law was meant to help Israel live, it's worth remembering this idea, expressed best by Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham that:

"The law represents the floor below which human behaviour must not sink. The ethical ceiling is as high as heaven itself, for a key principle of biblical ethics is the imitation of God."

Imitating God leaves no room for abusing the weak. God's Law is designed to fight this human tendency to abuse. Directing people to imitate and love God, and imitate God by loving their neighbours. When Moses restates the law in Leviticus, God tells him to introduce the law saying "Be holy because I the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2), and includes the command to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). These are words that Jesus will quote later as the summary of the Law that "all the Law and the Prophets hang off" (Matthew 22:36-40) along with the command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

The Old Testament story shows us that Israel didn't keep these laws very well. They didn't imitate God very well. Even King David repeats Adam and Eve's pattern of abuse and cover up. Eventually, Israel is judged for becoming just like the abusive nations who had oppressed them — they don't protect the vulnerable, the widows, the fatherless, or those seeking refuge (e.g. Isaiah 1:16-30). As a result of this abuse, and a failure to care for the abused, Israel is punished just like Adam and Eve were — exiled (Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 5:26-31, Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah 22:1-10, Ezekiel 22:1-6).

Despite the exile, there is a hope that God will step in on behalf of those Israel has forgotten (Psalm 82), being the sort of King who does not abuse (Psalm 146, Ezekiel 34). Isaiah says eventually faithful Israel will share their food with the hungry, provide the poor wanderer with shelter, clothe the naked, spend themselves to satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then their "light will rise in the darkness" (Isaiah 58) and their relationship with God would be restored.

How Jesus makes things right...

Jesus came as God's good king, to proclaim good news to the poor, and to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18-19). He is God arriving on the scene as king. He came to win the war against sin (1 John 3:8). He came as the light of the world (John 1), who came to shine light into darkness, ending the culture of cover ups (John 1:5, 3:19-21). He did not reach out and grasp things like every person who came before Him (Luke 4:1-13), but laid down his life, on the Cross, to defeat sin as part of God's plans for the world, and in a display of God's power (Luke 22:39-44, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants where the tenants murder the son of the vineyard owner to steal his inheritance, then says they "devour widows houses" (Mark 12:1-12, 38-40). Rather than repenting, and coming into the light, the religious establishment in Israel is so keen to grasp hold of their power, and to continue their abuse that they kill God's Son. Jesus comes to end abuse, but instead, is abused by the very people who should have been welcoming him — the priests and teachers of the law (Matthew 26:59-68), the people of Jerusalem (Matthew 27:20-27), and even his disciples abandon him (Matthew 26:56, 69-75). He is handed over to the soldiers who abuse him, then execute him in the most abusive way possible (Matthew 27:27-31). This is Adam and Eve's pattern of behaviour in blinking neon lights.

The heart of all the oppression and abuse in the world is sin; the pattern of not doing what God created us to do, but instead desiring and grasping at things that are not ours, at the expense of others, followed by a cover up. Sin is an expression of the evil God set out to destroy. This pattern of behaviour ends in death (James 1:14-15). Though we were made to exercise power for good, fruitful, outcomes in God's battle against sin, chaos, darkness, and death, we side with the Serpent. The Cross is where Jesus defeats abuse, sin, and the Serpent (Revelation 12:9-12, 13:8).

As he goes to the Cross, where he takes his throne, Jesus fulfils the Old Testament promise of a king who sides with the abused and frees the oppressed. He breaks the human pattern of behaviour. He does not desire, or grasp hold of power, he lays it down, he does not abuse,

10. Read Ephesians 5:21-33. People have sometimes used Ephesians 5:22 (and verses like it), to allow domestic violence, or not to encourage a wife to flee abuse. Christian marriage is meant to be a picture of the Gospel. Jesus lays down his life for the Church, he doesn't abuse it. Jesus is stronger than his abusers. His decision to submit to abuse is a decision not to exercise his strength, for the sake of the weak. What might we say to vulnerable people who stay in abusive situations, because they think this is imitating Jesus? What is the loving thing to do for an abuser who claims to be a Christian in this horrible situation (see 5:11-13)?
11. Statistically, most physical abuse is perpetrated by men. Read 1 Timothy 2:8, what should men in God's church be doing with their hands?

Heart

12. How should the Cross, where Jesus does not desire, grasp, abuse, and cover up, but lays down his life in love to expose the true cost of sin shape our approach to Abuse in the Church? What about outside the Church?

Read one of the stories of abuse at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/abuse.

13. How does this story make you feel? How would Jesus respond to the abuse described in this story? How should we respond?

14. If a non-Christian friend, family member or colleague also read this story what questions or concerns might they raise? How would you respond?

Think and pray about whether sharing this article might be a good opportunity for you to begin discussions with your non-Christian friends that will show them the love and hope found in Jesus.

Hands

15. Read Creek Road's statement regarding the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse: creekroad.org.au/response-royal-commission-child-abuse, how might we work to ensure there is no place for abuse in our church?

16. Who are our widows, orphans, foreigners and oppressed people? How can we be a church that protects vulnerable people in our society?

Pastoral Prayer

Your Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We praise you Lord Jesus that your light enables us to live truthfully and well in the sight of God. We are grieved by our world, where people habitually use their power to abuse the weak. We thank you that in Jesus the new world that is to come has broken into this world — where the weak are honoured, rescued, protected and empowered through the strong. And so we realise that abuse does not belong amongst those who follow Jesus — that there is no place for abuse in the churches.

We confess our part in the wrong, whenever we have participated in abuse or simply ignored the strong preying on the weak, be it in domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, or abuse in the workplace. We ask that our churches will be different to the pattern of our world, that our churches will use their power to protect the abused, will not allow abuse to stay in darkness, and will not try to cover it up. We ask that we will be real followers of Jesus, who show that there is no place for abuse, or cover-ups in the churches. May we be like Jesus, who suffered abuse from the powerful to save the weak. We pray for those who have been abused and also for abusers. Enable our growth groups and churches to be safe places where people and their family members can reach out for help. In the name of Jesus, the Light of the World we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*I will see the world to come
For one has suffered in my place
Now there is grace awaiting me,
awaiting me.*

Grace Awaiting Me

FAMILY GROWTH

Loving Others Like Jesus

Big Idea

We should love others because Jesus loved us first.

Bible Reading

1 John 4:16b — 21

All Ages

All schools have bullies at them. Primary schools. High schools. They can bully people with their actions or their words. What sort of bullies have you seen at your school?

Get some members of your family to act out bullying at school.

Get someone to be the bully, and someone to be the bullied person.

How did it feel to be bullied?

How did it feel to the bully?

What part does fear play in bullying?

Jesus shows us a completely different way. The way of love. Write out your favourite part of the Bible passage here:

If we should love others should we ever bully anyone?

If we should love others how should we respond when we see others being bullied?

If we should love others how should we respond when we are being bullied?

We love bullies by standing up to them. Loving them is helping them stop bullying. We should always tell someone when

we are bullied. Even if we are bullied by adults make sure you tell another adult you trust.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you that you sent Jesus to earth.

Thank you that Jesus let himself be bullied and killed so that we could be your friends again.

Thank you loved us even when we were still you enemies.

Thank you for showing your love by sending Jesus to die on the cross.

Please help us show love in everything we do. Please help us to love others by standing up to bullies we see, and to people who might be bullying us. Help us to love other people around us.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

What The Church Gets Wrong About **Feminism**, But Jesus Makes Right...

*Our world is not a safe place for women.
Feminism comes in many forms, but is ultimately
a reaction against injustice faced by women.
The church gets feminism wrong when it attacks
feminism, rather than attacking the injustice it
reacts to.*

*Jesus gets feminism right by showing, in
his death and resurrection, that God loves
everyone equally and hates all injustice.
Jesus came to restore our relationships with
God, and with each other, and to overturn
unjust systems developed by sinful humans.*

1. What impacted or challenged you from the talk on Sunday?
2. What do you think the church gets wrong about feminism, that Jesus makes right?



Head

The Bible is the story of God making all things new, restoring broken human relationships and eradicating injustice through the Cross, and by uniting his people in Jesus. It is the story of God making a safe place where all his people — male and female — are equally loved, and equally valued.

In the Beginning...

God made people — male and female — with equal value, to bear his image (Genesis 1:27). The God of the Bible is Triune, one God in three persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The persons of the Trinity are eternally engaged in a relationship of self-giving love for one another. When God says “let us make man in our own image” the *us* and *our* are plural. Our gender is part of what it means to be human, and what it means for us to bear the image of the Trinity, together.

The Triune God creates us to enjoy loving relationships, as different people (male and female), physically complemented — with the capacity to enter loving unions with one another (Genesis 2:24). We bear the image of God as we co-operate in being fruitful, increasing in number, filling and subduing the earth. This happens through marriage, but not exclusively through marriage. Marriage is not mentioned until Genesis 2. Genesis 1 envisages males and females functioning together, in co-operation. The picture of this sort of co-operation in Genesis 1 is God’s creative act, where Father, Son, and Spirit act in complete harmony (Genesis 1:2, 26, see also John 1:1-5 and Colossians 1:15-17).

When Genesis 2 zooms in on the relationship between two people — Adam and Eve — we

get a taste of the sort of relationships God intended males and females to share. Adam and Eve are created to share in the task God gives as equals, in a safe environment, where they are able to be naked without shame (or fear) (Genesis 2:25).

We’re made to co-operate in a partnership that reflects the creative partnership of the Trinity, working as equals towards the same goals, God’s goals, while playing different roles. This partnership happens in safety, and creates safety, for both Adam and Eve. This is God’s design for human flourishing in his good world.

Where things went wrong

It doesn’t take long before something goes wrong. The safety of the garden is shattered. This co-operative relationship breaks down as Adam and Eve turn on God, and then each other. When the serpent enters the Garden (Genesis 3) it’s pretty clear that all is not well, Adam was instructed to take care of it, and here is this dangerously deceitful creature talking to his wife (Genesis 3:1). The Garden is no longer safe. Adam has let his guard down. Worse. He hasn’t told Eve what God said to him. Adam was given some specific instructions about life in the garden before Eve is on the scene (Genesis 2:16-17), and she hasn’t had them passed on clearly (Genesis 3:2). Things quickly spiral out of control. While Eve was created by God to be a “helper” for Adam in God’s creative work, expanding the safety of the Garden everywhere, they help themselves to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They refuse to settle for life under God (Genesis 3:6-7), and in that instant everything changes. Everything falls apart. Their relationship of co-operation begins to fall apart (compare Genesis 2:25 with 3:7). This is complete when God arrives to

judge Adam and Eve for turning away from him (Genesis 3:16-19). Adam establishes a pattern that will carry on generation after generation; he blames Eve for the mess (Genesis 3:12).

From here on in, our experience of human relationships will not be what they were created to be. From now on our environments won't be safe — the earth itself is against us, but worse, we've turned on each other, male and female. Our relationships will be tainted by this curse. Since this moment, the way we experience, and think of, gender, and male-female relationships, is the product of this brokenness.

God's Plan to fix things

This brokenness plays out in just about every relationship between males and females in the Old Testament — even in marriage, and especially in God's promised line, which begins with Abraham. God gives the Law to help restore relationships, but Israel are terrible at implementing the Law. The law is implemented by sinful humans, specifically, in most cases, sinful men — Patriarchs, Priests, Judges and Kings. These men use God's law as a tool to further their own agendas, often at the expense of women. The patriarchs in Genesis all fail to provide safety and love for their wives in different ways. Even King David treats women horribly — first Saul's daughter Michal, then Bathsheba, and his sons Amnon and Absalom are worse. This failure to provide safety, this abuse, is not something the Old Testament affirms, it is part of the Old Testament describing our broken world. When the Old Testament describes aspects of a patriarchal society where men mistreat women, when it depicts misogyny, abuse, polygamy, or

adultery, it is not to affirm these things, but to show how far people have strayed from the pattern of relationships before sin.

When we read the Old Testament we need to remember three things.

1. The first thing the Bible says about people is that we're all made in the image of God.
2. Everything after Genesis 3 describes life in a world where our relationships are broken by sin and not what they were made to be.
3. The Law describes what to do when things go wrong — to stop people doing wrong — not just what doing right looks like. In the words of Jesus, doing right, according to the law, is to love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Our understanding of gender roles is a product of the broken world — this is true now, as it was in Israel. The relationships we read about in the Old Testament are relationships that reflect Genesis 3:16, cursed relationships, not the relationships God created us to enjoy. These relationships are not safe. These relationships follow the pattern of Adam and Eve's response to getting caught out by God. When things go wrong we see victim blaming, we see shame, and we see why nakedness is no longer safe after Genesis 3. People take and wield power over one another, setting up social structures that reflect this broken world.

But. Amidst this brokenness, in a world where co-operation has been replaced with chaos, God sets about restoring things. Despite the patriarchy and the brokenness described in the Old

Testament, women enjoy a special place in God's plans of salvation. Genesis 3 tells us that it is Eve's offspring who will crush the Serpent. We meet women like Shiprah and Puah, the Israelite midwives, who defy the patriarchy of Pharaoh, disobeying his evil order to slaughter Israelite babies (Exodus 1:15-21), or Miriam, Moses' sister who watches over Moses and uses her initiative to see him stay connected to his Israelite family when he is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:1-13), or Deborah, a "prophet" and judge, who leads Israel and refers to herself as a "mother in Israel" (Judges 4-5, especially 5:7), and Esther who wisely guides a foreign king, her husband, in order to preserve Israel (Esther), women like the daughters of Zelophehad who advocated for inheritance rights for women in Israel (Numbers 27:1-11). Then there are the women in God's line of promise — the genealogy of Jesus — who, though they are often mistreated by men (including their husbands) are co-operators in God's plans for fruitfulness. These are women like Sarah (Genesis 18), Rebekah (Genesis 24-28), Leah (Genesis 29), Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2), and Ruth (Ruth), and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 1 Kings 1). These women are committed to God's promises, but are not blameless in Genesis, they're often caught up in deception, or responding badly to the bad behaviour of the men. This is a vicious cycle. It's not the way God's image bearers were meant to work together in his world.

The story of the Bible gives us a framework for understanding inequality and injustice, including inequality and injustice between males and females — in our relationships, in our institutions, and in our culture — as the product of our rejection of God's design for human flourishing.

How Jesus makes things right...

When Jesus arrives in the world he shows us what living life bearing God's image really looks like (Colossians 1:15). Jesus avoids the patterns of behaviour that broke the world and crippled both the families of the Patriarchs, and the reign of David and his descendants. In his interactions with women — recorded through the Gospels, he creates life — healing illness (Luke 4:38-39, 8:43-48, 13:10-17), raising the dead (Luke 7:11-15, 8:50-56, John 11:1-44), and forgiving sins (Luke 7:36-50) — he calls women to join his mission (Luke 8:1-3), he creates safe space for women (Luke 10:38-42), especially those who are shunned or judged by the patriarchy, the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, who view adultery and sexual sin as sins of the women they judge, with no mention of the men involved (John 8:1-11, Luke 7:36-50, also John 4). Jesus loves women, and is loved by them — his feet are washed and anointed by women on at least two occasions (recorded in John 12:1-8, Mark 14:3-9, Matthew 26:6-13, and Luke 7:36-50).

While the Old Testament promises were typically made first to men, Jesus privileges women. The first person to hear of Jesus' birth is a woman, his mother (Luke 1:26-38). Jesus calls himself the Messiah for the first time in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4). After the resurrection the first people he appears to, the first people who worship him, the first members of the Church, are women (Matthew 28:1-10, Luke 24:1-8).

To read more of this story visit creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/feminism

3. Read John 8:1-11, and flick back over Luke 7:36-50. The men in these stories are quick to condemn these women. How does Jesus surprise them? How does he treat the women? What do you notice about his words, and his actions? What does he do to make the environment safe for these women?

4. Read Matthew 12:46-50, and Luke 8:1-3. What do these verses show us about how women fit into Jesus' life and ministry?

5. Read Matthew 28:1-10. After Jesus is raised from the dead, the first witnesses on the scene are women. What does this suggest about the value God places on women in his Kingdom, the Church, that its first post-resurrection recruits are women?

6. Read Matthew 28:18-20. How is this similar to Genesis 1:28? What does being fruitful look like now? How are God's people trying to co-operate to "fill the earth" together now? Do you think our churches are places where men and women co-operate in this task?

In 2014 a public discussion took place about how the world is not a safe place for women, it used a hashtag, #yesallwomen, to link stories about inequality, violence, and this lack of safety. Some Christian women shared their stories.

Read one of the stories at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/feminism

14. While this story might not describe your experience of Church, as a man or woman, it is the experience of many women in our churches and in our world. How does this make you feel? How do you think Jesus would respond to this story?
15. How might we find ways to show our love for both men and women, and make our Church a place where all people feel safe, and can co-operate in God's mission?

Think and pray about whether sharing one of these stories might be a good opportunity for you to begin discussions with your non-Christian friends that will show them the love and hope found in Jesus.

Hands

16. Creating a safe, and Christ-centred loving environment for women begins with speaking up about the injustices faced by women, including sexism, and the objectification or sexualisation of women, both in our Church community and the world. What are some situations where you have, or haven't, done this in the past? How should the Cross change what you do in these situations?

Check out Collective Shout for some campaigns against sexualisation or objectification that you might join (collectiveshout.org).

Pastoral Prayer

Your Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that at the cross you have put all of us on the same level — as sinners in need of your love and grace. Thank you that our true freedom, and true identity, is found as we come to the foot of the cross. Thank you that Jesus died to restore and reconcile our relationship with you, and that he has brought us together — as male and female — to build a people — the church — to live transformed lives from transformed hearts.

Father, we confess that we get things wrong when we stop looking to the cross of Jesus. We confess that we get things wrong when our lives aren't shaped by the cross of Jesus. We thank you that at the cross, Jesus puts things right. By your Spirit, help us to live lives shaped by the cross of Jesus. Help us to live like Jesus did, by loving and serving one another. Help us to value every person — male and female — as created by you to bear your image. Please shape us at the cross to speak the truth in love, and speak the truth of the gospel with humility and gentleness.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*All who call upon the Lord
will rise to life with peace assured*

Grace Awaiting Me

FAMILY GROWTH

Boys N Girls

Big Idea

God created people as male and female. We are different but neither is better than the other.

Bible Reading

Genesis 1:26-28

Pre-Primary & Primary

Preparation — you will need some paper & marker pens. Make a chart to compare/contrast boys and girls. What are their similarities? What are their differences? Discuss examples in your own family.

Sometimes your friends or other adults will tell you that boys are better than girls, or girls are better than boys. But this isn't what God thinks! God loves boys just as much as he loves girls. And he loves girls just as much as he loves boys. God loves everyone just the same. He wants everyone to represent him and to love him.

Jesus treats us all equally.

How does thinking about boys and girls like this change how you might other people?

High School

What are some of the pre-conceived ideas people have about male/female roles in our society?

How does that change as you grow older (from child to teen to adult)?

When is it fair/unfair how boys and girls are treated?

Search on YouTube for the '#likeagirl' video & watch it.

How are your perceptions changed?

Jesus treats us all equally.

How will that change how you interact with your friends tomorrow?

Prayer

Make everyone in your family the same height (adults may need to kneel or children may need to stand on chairs).

Thank God that we are created differently but equal. Thank God that Jesus died for everyone, boys and girls, and that all have access to our great God.

What The Church Gets Wrong About Asylum Seekers & Refugees, But Jesus Makes Right...

Asylum Seekers and refugees are people who have fled their homes because they no longer feel safe, to find refuge somewhere else. The Church gets the issue of asylum seekers and refugees wrong when we treat it as a simple issue with simple solutions, or as though it is a national issue not a global issue, or a global issue not a local issue. We get this issue wrong when we forget that the asylum seeker or refugee is our neighbour, who we are called to love.

Jesus makes this issue right by providing safety, and citizenship in heaven, for anyone who seeks refuge in him.

1. What impacted or challenged you from the talk on Sunday?
2. What do you think the church gets wrong about Asylum Seekers and Refugees, that Jesus makes right?



Head

The Bible is the story of God acting to rescue people from sin and death when they call out to him for help. It is the story of God creating a nation of people who were meant to be a refuge for people, providing a place where God dwelled to guarantee security and love for those who flee death. God provides this place at the Cross, where Jesus dies to offer a means to escape death and judgment, and an invitation to become citizens of his Kingdom.

In the beginning

All people are made in God's image. God's intention, in creating the world, was for humanity to increase in number, to spread over the face of the earth (Genesis 1:26-29), and to enjoy a restful relationship with him. The day of rest in Genesis 2 does not begin and end like the first six days, it is how God intends his creation to end, as a place where he rests with his people as they enjoy life in the Garden (Genesis 2:2-3). God's people are tasked with spreading the boundaries of the Garden of Eden around the world, as they subdue the world and fill it with people. God's people are to rule and create as God does (Genesis 1:28, 2:15). God gives his people safety, and access to life (Genesis 2:9, 16) so that they can do this restful work.

Where things go wrong

Adam and Eve decide to live for their own name, that they would like to replace God, and as a result God no longer dwells with them — he withdraws his guarantee of safety and life (Genesis 3:4-9, 22-24). After Adam and Eve turn their backs on God, the rest of Old Testament is the story of God restoring this broken relationship with him,

because he is the source of life (Genesis 1:30, 2:7). This restoration begins with Noah, and God's act of recreation, through the flood, where God gives Noah a refuge from his judgment, and then appoints Noah to do what he appointed Adam and Eve to do, the flood story is a story of God's rescue and recreation (Genesis 7:1-9:11). Noah's children give birth to many nations — nations who fulfil God's commission, spreading over the earth (Genesis 10:32). Yet these nations, these people, fail to bear God's image. They universally fail to live for his name, preferring to live for their own. Eventually they conspire to do almost exactly what Adam and Eve did, this time, at Babel, building a great tower in attempt to elevate themselves to the heavens, for the glory of their own name, to avoid spreading over the whole earth — as God instructed them to, so God scatters them and creates new nations and languages (Genesis 11:1-9).

God's plan to fix things

God remains committed to restoring the world, and to providing life through this relationship. He remains committed to providing a safe place for people, where he will dwell to guarantee safety for any who seek refuge. This starts with his promises to Abraham, and his creation of his nation, Israel (Genesis 12-18). Israel is created from a people who flee oppression in Egypt and seek refuge (Exodus 1-15). Israel were called to love their neighbours and foreigners in their midst — remembering that they were once slaves, but God acted to rescue them (Exodus 20:1-2, 22:21, 23:9). Foreigners who wanted to sojourn (or seek refuge) in Israel were to be treated as Israelites and loved (Leviticus 19:33-34, Exodus 22:21-24, Deuteronomy 10:18-20, 24:17-18, 27:19, Ezekiel 22:7, 22:29), in fact, Israel were always to think of themselves as

sojourners in their land, remembering that the land belonged to God (Leviticus 25:23).

God provides generously for his people so that they might be generous, in turn, to those who need refuge. They are to provide places of refuge for people accused unjustly of murder (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19), refuge for slaves who run away from their oppressive masters (Deuteronomy 23:15-16), and for those from the nations who want to participate in God's plans for the world (Deuteronomy 10:14-22, see the story of Rahab in Joshua 2, or Ruth in Ruth 1:16-18, 2:12).

God loves the nations, and wants to bless them through Israel, by drawing them in to a relationship with him, in many cases this happens as individuals seek refuge in Israel.

Being a member of God's people, a child who inherits the benefits of his promises, is about reconnecting with God. It is about being part of his plans to create a fruitful people who cover the earth. God says these people will be his treasured possession, "although the whole earth is mine," people who represent him again as a "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:3-6).

The Psalms celebrate the idea that God is a refuge and source of security to Israel, 29 different Psalms make reference to God being a refuge, and yet, Israel increasingly seeks refuge in the strength of the surrounding nations and their idols (2 Kings 16-17, 20, 24). Both the Law and the Prophets warn Israel against seeking refuge with these nations or idols (Deuteronomy 30:15-18, Isaiah 31), so Israel is carried off into exile (2 Kings 25). The Old Testament consistently holds out the hope that things will change. That Israel will be restored to the land, restored to faithfulness, and that the nations

will flock to Israel again, where God will provide refuge, rest, and blessing to the nations again (Psalm 96, Isaiah 2:2-4, 45:22, 56:6-8, 62:10-11, 66:18-21, Zechariah 8:13-23, 14:8-9, 16-19).

God's story of the restoration of humanity in Jesus is one of including the excluded, every person rejects God, so by rights should be excluded. Any member of the Church who is not of Jewish descent is an adopted member of the family (Romans 9), with the privilege of a full inheritance that comes because we are now children of promise. Every one of us who turns to God and cries out for him to be our refuge is an asylum seeker.

How Jesus makes things right...

This hope — the hope for the curse of Genesis 3 to be reversed, the hope for all people to be restored to God, to be restored to the relationship they were created to enjoy, to find their rest in him as his Kingdom spreads over the face of the earth, is realised in Jesus. Jesus brings rest to any who come to him (Matthew 11:28-30, Hebrews 3:6-4:16), Jesus commands his disciples to spread his Kingdom of rest and restored relationships to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus changes how we think about fruitfulness and multiplication, God's promises to Abraham about numerous descendants are caught up in Jesus and applied to the Church (Romans 9-10). God's nation now goes beyond the boundaries of human Kingdoms. Jesus redefines what it means to be God's people, he radically alters concepts of "citizenship," "nationhood," and "who is our neighbour."

Jesus creates a new people of God, the

Church, who have been brought near, united in one new humanity, created by Jesus (Ephesians 2:13-16), as a result of the same message being preached to everyone (Ephesians 2:17-18), a message that means we are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens, and fellow members of God's household, his dwelling place, the Temple, the place where his rest is experienced, in the context of a life-giving relationship with him (Ephesians 2:19-22, Philippians 3:20).

In Jesus, and the Cross, we have refuge from God's judgment, in him, and his Church, we have the means by which we can participate in God's plans for the whole world — plans for people of every tribe and tongue and nation. God's Kingdom, as we see it in the book of Revelation, in the throne room of God, involves people from every tribe and tongue and nation being gathered together, singing as one (Revelation 7). People who have been brought near, united in a new humanity created by Jesus, brought together through the same good news, as citizens of the same new Kingdom (Ephesians 2:13-22), we now live as citizens of this Kingdom as we wait for Jesus to return (Philippians 3:20).

While nations who aren't Israel are not Israel (so are not to be equated with the Kingdom of God), the concept of God's Kingdom now transcends national borders, and the Old Testament's approach to foreigners carries over into the New. The nation of Australia is not the Kingdom of God. We can't, and shouldn't, expect our government to act as though our nation is the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is not longer nationalistic. It transcends borders. It is a different type of Kingdom. The Church is God's Kingdom and we are its citizens. So we must carefully consider how our citizenship in heaven, and our

status as exiles in this world, and therefore the nation we live in, shapes our approach to our neighbours. We must ask how this prompts us to care for those fleeing oppression, those who come to our shores, and those who languish in refugee camps around the world. We must ponder how we respond to those forced out of their homes through various conflicts, including persecution for following Jesus. And these are questions we must ask in the light of God's generosity to us.

God's story of the restoration of humanity in Jesus is one of including the excluded, every person rejects God, so by rights should be excluded. Every one of us who turns to God and cries out for him to be our refuge is an asylum seeker. How we, as Christians, speak about and love the refugees in our midst, and those not in our midst, scattered around the world, is an opportunity for us to speak and live out the Gospel, where God turned us from his enemies into his children, through the death and resurrection of his Son.

To read more of this story visit creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/asylum-seekers

8. Read Ephesians 2. What stands out for you as relevant to how we treat those seeking asylum? What do we have to offer? If we love asylum seekers like Jesus does, what is our desire for them? What might this look like in practice?

Heart

9. How does the refuge God provides for us at the Cross, and your new citizenship, shape the way you approach asylum seekers and refugees?
10. How do you feel about rapidly growing number of people in our world who, have been forced to flee their homes who are now seeking asylum?

Watch or read one of the stories at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/asylum-seekers.

11. How does this story make you feel? How do you think Jesus feels about the way people talk about Asylum Seekers? How can we be generous to asylum seekers in our city, what about the millions in refugee camps who seem beyond our reach?

12. If a non-Christian friend, family member or colleague also read this story what questions or concerns might they raise? How would you respond?

Think and pray about whether sharing this video/article (or one of the other ones listed) might be a good opportunity for you to begin discussions with your non-Christian friends that will show them the love and hope found in Jesus.

Hands

13. How might you respond generously, as a neighbour, to asylum seekers in our world, in our city, in our church?
14. Do you, or someone you know, fear asylum seekers? Do you or they worry that they will change our culture? That accepting them will cost us something? That they will make our communities dangerous? If so, how might Jesus respond to these concerns? What might you say to someone who raised these concerns?
15. Have you had a meal at an Afgahni restaurant? Or a Sri Lankan meal? Make a reservation & use the time to talk about what it would be like to be so far away from home.

Pastoral Prayer

Your Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for being a refuge for us even though we were your enemies. Thank you that you generously provided us with a safe place to escape judgment and death. Thank you that you willingly paid the cost to give us this refuge and to make us your people, to make us citizens of your Kingdom.

Father we pray for those around the world who have been forced to flee their homes, and their families, to seek refuge. Lord, move us to generosity when it comes to this tragedy. We pray that you would give us, and our government, wisdom in knowing how to respond to this incredibly complicated issue with compassion. Help us, as your people, to love our neighbours, whether they are local neighbours, national neighbours, or global neighbours. Help us love people generously, carrying the cost, particularly so that those who are oppressed and in need might see that you meet their real needs.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*All who call upon the Lord
will rise to life with peace assured
For there is grace awaiting me,
awaiting me.*

Grace Awaiting Me

FAMILY GROWTH

Love In Action

Big Idea

Don't just talk about loving others like Jesus loves us. Put your love into action.

Preparation

You need access to a computer or device to view videos.

Bible Reading

Luke 10:25-37

Pre-Primary & Primary

Search online for the **'Max 7 Good Samaritan'** video and watch it.

Who was the man's neighbour? Who helped the most?

Jesus commands us to love others, and that means not just talking about it, but doing it. No excuses. Can you think of a way you can help someone tomorrow? Write it down and put it on the fridge, and see if you meet your goal.

High School

Search online for the **'Ishmael a refugee story Dave Miers'**. Go to the page and watch the video.

Do you know anyone at school who is a refugee?

What are some practical ways we can support refugees in Australia?

Did you know Jesus' family had to flee to another country when he was very young? (King Herod commanded that all baby boys were to be killed, and Mary and Joseph fled with Jesus to Egypt for a while as commanded by God).

Jesus commands us to love others, and that means not just talking about it, but doing it.

No excuses.

Search on YouTube for '**Psalm 91 Sons of Korah**'. Listen to the song.

Prayer

Pray that all people will find refuge in Jesus. Pray for people you know who are refugees. Pray that you will be able to help people who are suffering or struggling.

Head

The Bible is the story of God redeeming the good world he created for people to enjoy, a world that is broken by our rebellion. God sets about restoring the world through Jesus, who becomes human and goes to the Cross to demonstrate God's commitment to broken people and his broken world. This begins the process of renewal, through his people, which will be completed when he returns to dwell with his people again, making all things new.

In the beginning

In the beginning God makes a very good world. He creates from nothing (Genesis 1:1), and brings light, order and life to chaos, darkness and emptiness. Before God starts working on the blank canvas he creates in Genesis 1:1, the world is literally void, dark, and deep (Genesis 1:2) — words that struck fear into its first readers. But God doesn't leave things that way. He fills the void. He forms the universe, what we know as our environment (Genesis 1:2-13), and then he fills it with light and life (Genesis 1:14-25). Everything is good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Then God makes people to live in this good environment, and “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). This idea is developed in Genesis 2, where God plants a Garden. The earth is good, but the garden is better. The tree of life is there, and the Garden is a source of life for the rest of the world as rivers flow out of it (Genesis 2:8-14). Adam, whose name literally means “of the earth,” is made, from the earth (Genesis 2:7) to be a gardener (Genesis 2:15) to work it and take care of it — literally to “cultivate” and “guard” — which is an application, in the garden context, of the

ideas of “filling” and “subduing.” These same words are later used to describe the role of the priests in the Temple. God's dwelling places in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle, and the Temple, are designed to reflect the Garden. God asks Adam and Eve to look after the Garden, and presumably as the “fill the earth and subdue it” to extend its boundaries across the whole world. Adam and Eve were to join God's mission to bring light and life to the world.

Where things go wrong

God created the world, and humanity, with a plan to defeat evil, ultimately through Jesus, “the lamb slain before the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Evil had no place in the Garden, but it enters in the form of the Serpent, the Devil. If Adam and Eve were guarding the garden and expanding its borders there would be no place for the Serpent to speak. Instead of protecting the garden they let the Serpent in. Instead of representing God they join the Serpent in trying to overthrow him. God responds with judgment. Now, instead of God providing food in abundance, humans must painfully toil, and thorns replace fruit. The ground we were to cultivate, that brought life, turns against us, and we will be returned to it (Genesis 3:17-19). These curses specifically frustrate the role people were made to play in God's world, and our sinful hearts change the way we approach subduing the earth. As a result of our corrupt hearts the world itself is corrupted (Genesis 6:5-13).

God's plan to fix things

While we've trashed the place God made for us, the story doesn't end there. God is committed to restoring his people and his world. God's mission, both before these events, and afterwards, isn't just to make

the whole world into a pretty garden, but to physically dwell again with his people in his good world.

God commissions people to carry out the task Adam and Eve were meant to, first Noah, then Abraham, then Jacob, then Moses, and David. Each time he appoints these people to be fruitful and multiply they respond by building something that represents his presence with them (Genesis 8:18-9:17, Genesis 12:7-8, 13:18, 28:10-22, 35:1-15, Exodus 23:20-24:7). The things they build become more permanent as they move towards the Promised Land, where the effects of the curse will be reversed (Deuteronomy 11:10-15, 28:1-14), where eventually they build the Temple (1 Kings 8:1-61). Both the Tabernacle and the Temple reflect the Garden, decorated in gold and fruitful trees (Exodus 25:31-38, 37:17-22).

Israel's relationship with God and their presence in the Promised Land depends on their keeping evil out of the Land. They are to remove the idols of the nations (Exodus 23, Leviticus 26:27-35, Deuteronomy 7). The Promised Land is to be the place God dwells in, in his Temple. If Israel does turn away from God they will be cursed, just like Adam and Eve were cursed (Deuteronomy 28:15-24). The environment will turn against them (Deuteronomy 28:38-42), God will send enemies to them who will destroy the land and make it uninhabitable (Deuteronomy 28:53-63). But because he is faithful to this restoration of creation, through his people, when he restores Israel he promises to restore the land (Deuteronomy 30:8-10).

The special relationship Israel enjoys with creation includes laws that govern how they live fruitful lives that subdue the land — they are to care for animals (Deuteronomy 22:4, 25:4, Exodus 23:4-5,

Proverbs 12:10), and to give them Sabbath rest (Exodus 23:12), they're also to give the land rest one year in seven, as a Sabbath (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22, Nehemiah 10:31).

Under David, and then Solomon, things look good. At least at first. Solomon has a good relationship with the world, collecting wisdom about how God's world works — especially about the environment, for a brief moment his relationship with the world looks like the sort of relationship Adam and Eve were created to enjoy. His wisdom even attracts people from all the nations (1 Kings 4:29-34).

Solomon builds the Temple, which God enters in order to dwell with his people (1 Kings 8:10-13). as he dedicates the Temple is that it will be a place the nations might come to know God (1 Kings 8:41-43). But from here on, Israel do exactly what they're told not to do — they pursue foreign Gods — which God promised Solomon would be the undoing of the Temple (1 Kings 9:6-9). Right from the start — Solomon, who builds the Temple, spends more time and money on his own house than on God's (1 Kings 6:37-7:1), the palace is bigger than the Temple (1 Kings 6:2, 7:2). Then Solomon takes up foreign Gods, and allows their altars and high places to infest Israel (1 Kings 11:1-13). Each king after Solomon repeats his mistake, they set up idols (1 Kings 12:25-33, 22:43, 2 Kings 16:1-4, 21:1-9), give the Temple's treasury to foreign powers (2 Kings 14:14, 18:16), and remodel God's Temple based on a foreign temple (2 Kings 16:10-18).

God wants to dwell in his world, with his people — but like in Eden, they don't want a bar of it. They'd rather live with anyone else. Eventually God grants them this wish, they are carried off to exile in Babylon. The king's house is destroyed, as is the Temple

(2 Kings 24:13-14, 25:8-12). The climate changes again as powerful nations lay waste to it (Ezekiel 14:12-21).

Israel's prophets see a time when God's dwelling place will be restored, and cover the whole earth (Isaiah 54:2-3). Ezekiel talks about the return from Exile being a re-creation, and a return to Eden, where God's sanctuary will be in a Temple-Garden which flows with the waters of rivers of life, and where he will dwell with his people forever (Ezekiel 37:24-28, 43:1-12, 47:7-12). God's commitment is to restore this good world.

How Jesus makes things right...

Jesus came to mend our broken hearts, and the broken world, by bringing in God's Kingdom, which will ultimately end in the New Creation. He is the one who is able to do this work (Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:3), work he undertakes in a very physical way — the word that created the world becomes flesh, entering the world to dwell, literally to tabernacle, with us (John 1:1-14), as God's fullness dwells in him and he reconciles all things, "whether things on earth, or things in heaven" to himself (Colossians 1:19-20). God's will was to bring all things in heaven and earth, under Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-23). Jesus comes as the true Son of David who builds God's house. He reinvents our understanding of the Temple, first identifying himself as the Temple (John 2:13-21), then us, as God now dwells in us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22). Through Jesus the earth becomes our inheritance (Matthew 5:5), as we become God's children and the answer to the longing expectation of our groaning world (Romans 8:19).

In Romans 1 we see that there are two mistakes we make with the world. God made the world to reveal himself, and it's a mistake for Christians not to see a link between how we use the world and how we live out God's story. But God made the world, and he alone is to be worshipped, we should steer clear of turning the environment into an object of worship. In the Old Testament, the state of the Promised Land is a marker of Israel's faithfulness — when they're faithful it's a place of fruitfulness, when they're unfaithful it is a dry, desolate wasteland (Deuteronomy 8:7-11, 28:20-63). The reality is not so cut and dried for us, outside of Israel. God controls the whole of creation and "sends rain to the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:43-47), and this world is broken by sin generally (Romans 8:19), and we evidentially damage it, as individuals, when we live as sinners, selfishly consuming it for our own ends. The world "groans" as it waits for the Children of God to be revealed (Romans 8:20-21). We are children of God, our mortal bodies are given life by God's Spirit (Romans 8:10-11, 14-17) Our participation in God's Kingdom, his Church, is not just spiritual. How we live and treat the environment is a testimony to God's commitment to the physical restoration of this world, and an opportunity to love our neighbours.

Beyond the debate about the relationship between carbon production and the environment, the link between unloving, self-seeking, consumption and environmental damage is clear-cut. In the Old Testament, God's people were to show their love for the environment and their neighbour by not over-harvesting, they were to leave food in the field for the poor and the oppressed (Leviticus 19:9-10), they were to give the land a Sabbath

rest, one year in seven (Leviticus 25:1-7), these aren't rules for cultivating the land outside of Israel's covenant relationship with God in the Promised Land, but they are examples of what loving one's neighbour, and "subduing" the earth looks like. How much more should Christians be motivated to live out the self-giving love of Jesus displayed at the Cross in how we love others, and treat God's world?

The Garden, the Tabernacle, and the Temple all anticipate the new creation where God will spread Eden all over the world, as he brings the new Jerusalem to Earth, and establishes a Garden-City-Temple, where

he will dwell with his people, for ever. Where he will live with us in the world where evil has been defeated and the Serpent destroyed (Revelation 21-22). he will destroy the brokenness in the world, purifying and restoring it to be a place where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:3-15). God's restoration plan includes the world. God's mission is to dwell with people, physically, in a life-giving, paradise. Here on earth. God's promises of eternal life are never removed from the good world he made.

To read more of this story visit creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/climate-change

3. Read Matthew 6:19-34. How is God's love for the animals he created reassuring to us as we follow Jesus? How should we think rightly about the treasures of this world? What is the promise for those who seek God's Kingdom?
4. Read Romans 8:14-25. What does this say about the state of the planet (and why is it like this)? What role has humanity played? What is creation longing for? Who meets that longing? What is our hope? How should we live out this hope in a physical way?
5. Read Revelation 21:1-7 and 21:22-22:5. What do these passages tell us about God's intention for the world? How should we treat the world in the light of this?

6. Read Matthew 19:27-30. What does Jesus say will happen when he sits on the throne? How should this shape the way we treat “all things” if Jesus now sits on his throne after the Cross, and we are waiting for God to dwell with us on earth forever?

Heart

7. How does the story of the Cross of Jesus show God’s commitment to changing the climate of this world? How does our sharing in this story change your commitment to the world?
8. Read 1 Kings 4:29-34. Before his rapid downward spiral, at the moment that God’s promises to Abraham seem to be coming true, Solomon was committed to understanding the way the environment works, this wisdom about the world brought the nations to Israel. How do you feel about climate science? How does the apparent scientific consensus about climate change fit the picture of the world, and our relationship to it, that we read in the Bible? How should we approach climate science, as Christians?
9. Christians sometimes suggest that the world is so broken it can’t be fixed, or that there are plenty of other people to worry about the world, and we should just focus on saving souls (read the article on creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/climate-change), how do you think Jesus would respond to this idea?

10. How is does caring for the environment relate to what Jesus calls the greatest commandment, loving God, and loving our neighbour as ourselves? How often do you think about the way your consumption of resources loves others?

Hands

11. Stopping the climate changing might seem beyond our control as individuals, or even as a relatively small nation, but changing the way you habitually treat or consume the environment as an expression of God's love for the world, and your love for God's world, is not. What changes could you make to how you live and consume things that will help you live out the Gospel as you live in God's world?
12. What are some positive things you can do (rather than wrong things you can change) to love and care for others as you care for God's world? How can we use God's good creation to tell the story of God's goodness? What are some ways to appreciate the good world God has made and share that appreciation with non-Christians in your life?

Pastoral Prayer

Your Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We praise you God, as the good Creator of everything that exists. We confess that human rebellion against you has brought trouble and frustration into our relationship with this planet Earth in which we live. We praise you for the hope found in the gospel of Jesus — that a day is coming when this planet and all creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God, by the power of the risen Lord Jesus, at his return.

We confess that we often do not live with that day in mind — that we participate in harming this environment that Jesus will one day make new. Enable us to treat the environment as we should treat our own bodies and those of others — anticipating the day when all things shall be made new. Give us minds, hearts and hands that care for our physical world, in acts of faith and worship, believing that your same power that raised Jesus from the dead will one day renew the entire universe, and us with it.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*I will see the world to come
For one has suffered in my place*

Grace Awaiting Me

FAMILY GROWTH

God's World

Big Idea

God promises to restore our broken relationship with him and the world. He wants us to treat it well until he comes to make it new.

Bible Reading

Genesis 2:15

Older children may also want to read
Romans 8:18-25

Pre-Primary & Primary

The Bible clearly tells us in Genesis that God placed Adam in his garden to take care of his creation.

In the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God's creation was beautiful and perfect. Man's relationship with God, and with God's creation was beautiful and perfect.

Thinking about our relationship with God's creation today, is it beautiful and perfect? Why or why not?

Why do you think our relationship with God's creation is no longer beautiful and perfect?

What are some of the ways we abuse God's creation?

List, or draw a picture of some of the practical ways you can help to take care of God's world (these might include recycling, not littering, not wasting water, turning off lights, walking instead of driving).

High School

To help you think of some ways to help care for God's creation, it might be useful to calculate your carbon footprint — that is a measure of the impact your lifestyle has on the earth. Search online for '**WWF footprint calculator Australia**' and fill it in to see your impact on the world.

How do you think reducing our carbon footprint helps look after God's creation?

How do you think living with Jesus as our Lord and Saviour should shape how we treat God's world?

Prayer

You might like to:

Thank God for his creation, and the privilege we have of living in it and taking care of it.

Say sorry for when our sin distorts our relationship with God and his creation, and leads us to abuse his world.

Ask for help in finding ways to care for his creation.

Ask for patience as we wait for him to return and restore a perfect relationship with him and his creation.

What The Church Gets Wrong About Human Trafficking, But Jesus Makes Right...

Human Trafficking is modern day slavery. It involves the commoditisation of people who are enslaved in forced labour, or various forms of the sex industry.

The Church has long been at the fore in the fight against slavery and human trafficking. However, we get slavery and human trafficking wrong when we fight against the industry while ignoring the behaviours — our behaviours — that fuel demand for the industry. If we want cheap products, then somebody has to pay.

Jesus makes this right by generously deciding to pay the cost for others at the cross, rather than making others pay for his decisions.

1. What did you find challenging from the talk on Sunday?

2. What do you think the church gets wrong about human trafficking?



Head

The Bible is the story of God rescuing people from slavery and oppression, which are symptoms of our rejection of him and our slavery to sin. At the Cross, Jesus pays the cost for our freedom and brings us rest.

Slavery in the Bible is related to, but not the same thing that we might think of when we talk about modern slavery. There are some helpful things to think through when reading about slavery in the Bible at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/human-trafficking/slavery.

In the beginning...

God made people to freely enjoy life in his good world. He generously supplied his people with everything they needed for flourishing, in his good creation (Genesis 1:29). People were designed to live in relationships of loving community with each other, and with God, in this freedom. Adam and Eve were given the run of the garden, free to enjoy God's goodness — free to do anything except break this loving community by consuming what they were asked not to consume (Genesis 2:15-17). They were free to enjoy his good rest in his good creation — the seventh day does not end like the others — there is no evening and morning mentioned (Genesis 2:2-3).

Adam and Eve were created as free people in a world where God provided freely and generously, acting with selfless, life-creating, love. Adam and Eve were created to act with the same love, in their relationship with one another and with God.

Where things go wrong

Adam and Eve give up this freedom when they become slaves to their desire to be

“like God,” becoming slaves to the lies of the Serpent (Genesis 3:1-6). The result of this decision is that we, as Jesus later describes it, become slaves to sin (John 8:34). With slavery comes fear, shame, and broken relationships (Genesis 3:7-10). Work is no longer a free expression of co-creating in God's good Garden (Genesis 2:15), but an exercise of sweat and frustration (Genesis 3:17-19). When God confronts Adam and Eve in the Garden, Adam's response is not selfless, but selfish (Genesis 3:12).

As people move further and further away from the Garden of Eden, human hearts are diagnosed as “only evil all the time,” from birth (Genesis 6:5, 8:21). Slavery is a symptom of this problem and it becomes more significant as the Bible's story unfolds.

When Noah and his family disembark from the Ark, they enter a scene reminiscent of Eden. God commissions Noah and his family (Genesis 9:6-16), just as he commissioned people in Genesis 1, but we see that the Flood hasn't fixed humanity's heart problems or our relationships with each other. When Noah's son Canaan shames Noah, he curses him saying “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.” (Genesis 9:20-27). This, the first mention of slavery in the Bible's story, is slavery as a curse. Any slavery that happens in the Bible from this point onwards is shaped by this link between curse and slavery.

God's plan to fix things...

God's rescue plan begins with the promise that a descendant of Eve will crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), and continues as God promises to bless Abraham's descendants, Israel. God demonstrates his commitment to rescue by forming Israel — rescuing them from slavery in Egypt.

People sometimes suggest that the Bible supports slavery — but there is no slavery in Eden, and none in the New Creation. When the Old Testament describes and legislates for life in this world it is describing and legislating for humans who are fundamentally broken. While the Old Testament Law allows slavery, and provides laws for how slaves might be taken, and how they must be treated, this is not the same as supporting slavery.

We saw a few weeks ago that the Law is the ‘floor’ when it comes to Old Testament ethics, while loving God, imitating him, and remembering that he acted to deliver Israel from slavery and oppression, by loving one’s neighbours is the ethical ‘ceiling.’ That’s what Israel is meant to aim for with the Law. It is to prevent them from becoming like the Godless, idolatrous, nations that God booted out of the Promised Land. For Israel, becoming like God, and representing him to the nations, meant remembering who they were, that they weren’t chosen because they are particularly good or Godly, and it means remembering where they came from.

When God loves people and acts to save them he doesn’t add misery to misery, he generously liberates and restores.

Israel was enslaved and oppressed in Egypt (Exodus 1:11, 5:6, 5:10, 5:13-14), and cried out to God to be freed (Exodus 2:23). God hears this prayer and act (Exodus 3:7, 6:6). he gives Israel the Passover to remember and celebrate this rescue (Exodus 13:3-14). This is the story of how they became a nation, and is the specific rationale given time and time again when Israel is told how to treat slaves. Foreign slaves in Israel were able to take part in the Passover — this reminder of God acting to free Israel from slavery (Exodus 12:44) — they were also to be circumcised, marked and treated as

part of God’s people (Genesis 17:9-14).

When God gives Israel the Law he gives it to them with the reminder not to forget that God delivered them from slavery (Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:1-6, 6:1-12). They are told not to worship idols because this would mean turning away from the God who rescued them from slavery (Deuteronomy 13:5-10), and result in a return to slavery (Deuteronomy 28:58-68).

Israel’s history is the rationale for God’s instructions to them to love and provide for the poor, the foreigner, widow, and orphan in their midst (Deuteronomy 24:17-18, Leviticus 25:35-38). These provisions were, in part, to prevent the poor from a need to enslave themselves (Deuteronomy 24:10-22). The Law, for example, prevents Israelites from taking advantage of each through loan-sharking — they’re to charge no interest (Exodus 22:25-27, Leviticus 25:36-37, Deuteronomy 23:20-21), there are rules about what can be taken as security against a loan (Deuteronomy 24:6, 10-13, 17), and how quickly workers — especially poor workers, are to be paid (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The poor are to be helped so they may “continue to live among” Israel (Leviticus 25:35), they are to be sold food at cost price (Leviticus 25:37), and not the source of profit for those helping out (Leviticus 25:36). Slavery, in Israel, is a last resort (Leviticus 25:39-43), and temporary — slaves can be redeemed at any time, or will be freed in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39-42, 54, Exodus 21:2).

Israelite slaves were to be cared for, treated like a “hired worker” (Leviticus 25:40), because they too belong to God who freed them from Egypt (Leviticus 25:55). The challenging part of the Law for us to understand is that Israelites were permitted to buy slaves from foreign lands

and nations, and these slaves could be treated as property (Leviticus 25:44-46). But, it seems these slaves were also to be circumcised, to be treated as part of Israel, and to share in God's story of rescue. Slaves were people who belonged in Israel. They celebrated Passover. They were protected by, and benefited from Israel's Law. They enjoyed the rest and refreshment of the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They shared the hope of Jubilee. When a slave was released at Jubilee their master was to provide for them lavishly (Deuteronomy 15:12).

When we read bits of the Bible like these passages, and we're offended by the existence of slavery, that's a good thing. We should remember, as Israelites who read the Law should have remembered, that slavery wasn't part of God's design for the world, for humanity, or for his people. Slavery is a product of sin and curse.

While the Old Testament Law contains rules about how to treat slaves (to ensure they are treated as people and cared for), it unequivocally condemns those who traffic others. Any person who kidnapped someone and sold them into slavery against their will was to be put to death (Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7).

God's people were to live as people liberated from slavery, people enjoying the sort of freedom Adam and Eve were created to enjoy in his good land (Deuteronomy 6, 8:1-18). God promises Israel that if they don't live out his story, if they turn to Gods that enslave, idols they will be removed from the land and taken into a captivity worse than their original slavery (Deuteronomy 8:19-20, Deuteronomy 28:58-68).

We see this when Israel asks for a "king like the nations" — a rejection of God as

king in favour of one who would eventually enslave his own people (1 Samuel 8:8-18). Israel forgets God, and their rescue from slavery as they turn to idols (Jeremiah 2). They ignore the laws that reflect their story, especially the Jubilee Years (Jeremiah 34), and so they're sent back into slavery in exile (Jeremiah 27, Nehemiah 9:36-37), where they long for the freedom and restoration God promised in the Law and the Prophets (Ezekiel 36-37, Jeremiah 30-33).

When Ezekiel reflects on why Israel is in exile they have particularly strong words for Israel's shepherds, the leaders of God's people, who are condemned because they "only take care of themselves," oppressing others to enjoy the best of everything — the best clothes, the best food. They enjoy these luxuries while ignoring the real needs of the flock (Ezekiel 34:1-9). But God remains committed to giving rest, and freedom, so he promises to step in and rescue the flock again, to be a true shepherd, through a good king (Ezekiel 34:10-31).

This picture of Israel's failed shepherds sounds very similar to the way we behave in our pursuit of cheap comfort or luxury, comforts that come at the expense of those whose labour produces the things we enjoy.

God remains committed to Israel enjoying the year of God's favour — Jubilee (Isaiah 61) — and to restoring his people to his place, where they might enjoy good rest — the Sabbath — again (Ezekiel 34:11-31). The Passover, where God rescued his people from slavery because the price for their sin was paid by a lamb's blood is a story that Israel is to celebrate again when they are restored (Ezekiel 45:21), because this restoration will come from God, and it won't be at their cost or through their efforts.

How Jesus makes things right...

When Jesus begins his ministry he links his arrival with the year of Jubilee, the year of God's favour (Luke 4:16-21, quoting Isaiah 61). Jesus is the good shepherd (John 10), separating "the sheep from the goats" — those who oppress or fail to provide for others from those who follow him (Matthew 25:31-46).

He's not only the Good Shepherd, he is also the Passover Lamb, who pays the price to redeem us. Jesus' death, at Passover, replaces that meal as the sign of God's rescue (1 Corinthians 5:7). Just as Israel is told to remember that God freed them from slavery at the Passover, and that they are to live a life that tells

this story, those who follow Jesus are told to break bread and share wine in remembrance of Jesus and his sacrifice (Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Like the Passover, this is no empty ritual, but is meant to shape the way we live, and the way we love (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Jesus is God's ultimate plan to end slavery — our slavery to sin, and to lives that enslave others. He is the ultimate Passover Lamb. His death is the ultimate reminder that God is a God who brings forgiveness, rescue, and freedom. He is the one who brings the ultimate Jubilee. And he invites us to join our story to his story, to live lives as his people, the Church, that tell the story of his rescue.

Read more of this story at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/human-trafficking

3. Read John 8:31-44. What does Jesus say about people who sin? Who do people belong to if they don't belong to Jesus? What is the difference between being a slave to a master and being a child of a father?
4. Read Matthew 11:28-12:14. What sort of King is Jesus? What sort of Kingdom does he create?
5. Read Ezekiel 34 and John 10:1-18. What is Jesus claiming in this passage? What does he suggest being a good shepherd looks like?

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We are sorry for the times when we enslave others, when we live as though we are slaves to sin when you have freed us to not just be slaves to righteousness, but members of your family who share in a rich inheritance. Thank you that you have been so generous to us, through Jesus. Thank you that you paid the price to redeem us from slavery.

Father we pray that we would live lives that tell your rescue story, we pray that we would love others as you loved us rather than enslaving others through self-interest. Help us not to be cheap in a way that costs others, but to be generous, to be wise and loving in the way we live. Help us to fight against the temptation to enslave others through our desires, or to become slaves ourselves.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*I will see the world to come
For one has suffered in my place*

Grace Awaiting Me

Your Prayer

FAMILY GROWTH

Set Free

Big Idea

We have been set free from sin by what Jesus has done so now the Holy Spirit should control the way we live. We are free to treat others like he treated us.

Bible Reading

Romans 8:1-9

Pre-Primary & Primary

There are many ways we can treat people badly. Some of them are easy to see but others are harder to spot. Sometimes when we buy products cheaply, the person who made it might be a slave, or the farmers who grow produce aren't treated fairly.

Have a talk about (or look up on the internet) some of the ways people may have been treated badly in the making of a product. Some examples are:

Cheap t-shirt workers — unsafe factory conditions, poor pay

Chocolate child slavery — children forced to work to grow cocoa beans for our chocolate

Apple iPad factory workers — terrible working conditions

High School

Slaveryfootprint.org lets you calculate how many exploited workers it takes to contribute to your current lifestyle. It is a good way to see some of the things we consume that might lead to workers being treated badly, and a starting platform for thinking about how we can use our freedom in Christ to change the way we live.

All Ages

In Romans, we are told that Jesus died to set us free from our sin. So we are free to treat others the way he treated us — with love & mercy. The way we treat people should be shaped by what Jesus did for us, so we should start to think about how our actions may unknowingly affect other people.

What do you think motivates people to buy cheap products, or things that have been made by treating people badly?

How do you think Jesus dying on the cross should shape our decisions?

What are some of the ways you can help treat others with more love and mercy (this doesn't have to relate to exploitation!)?

Prayer

You might like to:

Thank God for sending Jesus to set us free from our sin

Ask God to change our heart from one of consumerism and materialism.

Ask God that he might help people in slavery & exploited positions to know his love, and the freedom that Jesus' death and resurrection brings.

What The Church Gets Wrong About Greed, But Jesus Makes Right...

Greed is when we desire and grasp hold of things for our own sake. Greed happens when we think of ourselves as big, but God and others as small.

The Church gets greed wrong when we forget that everything we have comes from God. We get greed wrong when we use the things God gives us to love ourselves, rather than using them to love God and love others, not living generous lives that reflect the character of God.

Jesus makes this right because he does not grasp for what is not his, but gives up everything for others, at the Cross, in order to reflect the character of God.

1. What challenged or encouraged you from the talk on Sunday?

2. What does the church get wrong about greed that Jesus makes right?



Head

The Bible is the story of God's generosity to his people in the face of their greedy rebellion. We act as though we wish God was dead, grasping hold of things that God desires to generously give us. At the Cross we get our wish, but as Jesus dies and is raised, he generously gives life, and the Holy Spirit, to his people so that we might live generous lives.

In the beginning...

God made the good world as a gift. The world is a good gift for the people God made (Jeremiah 27:5, Isaiah 45:18), but ultimately as an inheritance for his firstborn Son, Jesus, and his children (Psalm 2:7-8, Romans 8, Colossians 1:15-16, Hebrews 1:1-3, Galatians 4:4-7).

We see this in Genesis 1 and 2, where God creates the world and declares it good, fit for the purpose for which he made it, a home for his image bearing people (Genesis 1). he makes, places, and names Adam, giving him the job of expanding his garden sanctuary — the world is good, the Garden is better. God lavishly provides for Adam, the Garden contains “trees that are pleasing to the eye and good for food,” and the tree of life (Genesis 2:9) — God shows his love for people and his creation by creating beauty, and giving it to his people to enjoy. It's not just fruit trees mentioned in Genesis 2, but sources of wealth — gold, specifically good gold, and onyx (Genesis 2:11-12). At this point God declares one thing about the Garden “not good” — Adam is alone, so God generously provides a solution to this problem, he acts as a loving father to create love, one of the responsibilities of fathers in the ancient world was to provide a wife for his son (Genesis 2:18-24).

Where things go wrong

God acts, lovingly, to provide for his children — who respond by turning their backs on him, desiring what did not belong to them, and greedily reaching out to grasp it (Genesis 3:4-6). Adam and Eve steal what belonged to the Father. They try to hide from God — which shows that the loving, generous, relationship at the heart of the world is broken (Genesis 3:8-10). The frustration associated with the curse represents a frustration of God's loving provision for his children (Genesis 3:16-20), and a frustration of the love they were created to enjoy with each other (Genesis 3:16). What was once given generously now comes as we work hard to produce fruit from the ground we were made from, and we will now return to that ground as God withdraws the gift of life (Genesis 3:17-19, 23).

God's plan to fix things

But God continues to be generous to his people — even as they reject him, there is a note of hope in the promise that a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Even in judging Adam and Eve, and removing them from the goodness of the garden, God's generous provision continues when he clothes Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21).

Even in a world broken by sin, even in a world where people must work for their food, God continues to care for his creation, for the benefit of all people. Many Psalms reflect on God's relationship to his world, and how his sustaining of all things generously benefits, and gives life to, all people and animals (Psalm 65:5-13, Psalm 68, Psalm 74:12-17, Psalm 104). Even if God no longer grants humanity access to the Tree of Life, he gives continues to give breath to all creatures (Nehemiah 9:6).

His plans to restore his generous life giving

relationship with humanity begins with his establishing a nation for him to bless generously, who will generously bless others. This starts with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Eventually the children of this nation will be called the children of God (Hosea 1:10) — they will carry his name and be his heirs.

God promises to be good to Abraham, and he generously gives him wealth — cattle, silver and gold, and a growing household (Genesis 24:35). Abraham's actions make it clear that he knows the fruits of God's generosity come from God and still belong to God (Genesis 14:18-24). he is not greedy, but generous.

The question tying together God's line of people in the Old Testament is a question of inheritance — who inherits his promises to Abraham? This question starts with Abraham's own children, Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 15-21), it continues with Isaac's children, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25-28). When it becomes apparent that God has chosen Jacob, and will be generous to him, Jacob responds to this generosity by promising to give a tenth of all he is given back to God (Genesis 28:22). God provides for Jacob, who becomes Israel, and his twelve sons who become the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. From this point on in the Old Testament it becomes clearer who God chooses to bless with generosity and prosperity. As a nation, Israel is not particularly deserving of God's generosity — but he chooses to bless them for the sake of his name, his promises, and for the sake of their task as a nation of priests (Exodus 19:3-6, Deuteronomy 7:7-8, 9:5-6). God's generosity becomes especially clear when he appoints David as king and promises to bless his line (2 Samuel 7).

One way to see how Israel is responding to God's generous love — or if they are being greedy — is to see how they are using gold. When we're told that there's gold around

the Garden of Eden we're presumably to see it as something Adam and Eve might use in their role, representing God in his world. As Abraham grows in wealth we're told God blesses him with gold (Genesis 13:2, 24:35), which he uses, in part, to secure a wife for his son (Genesis 24:52-54), and advancing God's promised line of people. When God rescues Israel from Egypt they take silver and gold — plundering the Egyptians (Exodus 3:22, 11:2-3, 12:35-36). As they become a nation and God gives them the Law, God says "Do not make any Gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves Gods of silver or Gods of gold." (Exodus 20:23). God promises to dwell with Israel in the sanctuary they build — initially the Tabernacle — and Moses is to take up an offering from them of gold, silver and bronze for this sanctuary, which presumably is the same gold they brought with them out of Egypt (Exodus 25:1-8), they're to decorate the Tabernacle and the 'ephod' (the clothes the priest wears) with gold (Exodus 25:11-36, 28:4-28, 39:1-38). This is how Israel was to express their reliance on God's provision, and how they were to use gold the way it was created to be used.

Israel is meant to use the things God provides for them to glorify God, but they are constantly tempted to turn God's generous provisions into idols. Just like Adam and Eve they pursue their own desires and to grasp hold of what was already God's generous gift, their inheritance.

Israel struggles to keep God's commands about gold and silver idols from the very beginning. While Moses is receiving the Law, including this instruction, Israel is creating a golden calf from the jewellery they're carrying (Exodus 31:1-11, Exodus 32:1-10). They do better when Moses takes up the collection for the Tabernacle — "everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them — gave gold jewellery to God's

sanctuary (Exodus 35:4-29), which is decked out with gold (Exodus 36-40). Moses also warns Israel that when the time comes for a king in Israel, this king can't be greedy like the kings of other nations — specifically ruling out the king amassing gold and silver for themselves (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

When Israel appoints a king, God's generosity continues. David defeats the enemies of Israel and he too plunders gold from these nations. He dedicates this plunder to the Lord (2 Samuel 8:7-12). We see what this involves when David tells Solomon how to build the Temple, and donates the wealth of Israel's treasury, and his personal wealth to its construction (1 Chronicles 22:14-19, 29:1-5). The people of Israel also give generously, both to the fitout of the Temple (1 Chronicles 29:6-9) and later, to the ministry of the priests in the Temple (2 Chronicles 31). David recognises that wealth comes from God, and should be given to his Temple, for his name (1 Chronicles 29:10-18). his prayer is that Solomon, and Israel, will continue to share this desire for wealth to be generously given to God (1 Chronicles 29:19).

God continues to provide wealth to Solomon (1 Chronicles 29:25), but Solomon almost immediately starts being the sort of King that Deuteronomy 17 warned against — amassing silver and gold for himself (2 Chronicles 1:14-17). Despite a great start, where he builds the temple and fits it out with gold (2 Chronicles 2-5:1, 1 Kings 6-7), Solomon starts to grasp and hold onto God's good provision for himself. First, his palace is bigger than the Temple (1 Kings 7), then he runs out of ideas for how to use the wealth he receives he stops investing in the temple, and starts decorating his palace (2 Chronicles 9:10-27, 1 Kings 10:15-28). This is the start of the spiral into idolatry — the result of Solomon ignoring Deuteronomy's instructions about amassing wealth, buying horses (symbols of power)

from Egypt, and marrying foreign women who lead him to create idols (1 Kings 10:23-11:39).

God's generosity should enable his people to be generous in a reflection of his character, to care for the poor, the widowed, and the oppressed in their midst. God richly blesses Israel so that they will be able to be "openhanded" and open hearted towards the poor and needy amongst them (Deuteronomy 15:4-11).

God's love is generous and abundant. Greed is the very opposite to God's character. In the Wisdom Literature, generosity is linked to being righteous, and experiencing God's love (Psalm 37, 68, 112, Proverbs 11:24-25, 22:1-23, 112, 128), while the greedy are condemned to judgment, even if they initially appear to prosper (Psalm 10, 37, 73:3-27). Following the Way of God, or fearing the Lord, is said to be the path to true prosperity and to sharing in God's good inheritance (Psalm 1:1-3, 4:6-7, 25, 37:11).

Israel's leaders choose the path of greed and corruption, so God judges and exiles them. Jeremiah says the very people who should be generous like God is generous are greedy, "from the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike." (Jeremiah 6:13-15, 8:10-11), Ezekiel says Israel is under judgment for allowing wicked men to "extort unjust gain from their neighbours" (Ezekiel 22:12), and that "their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain." (Ezekiel 33:31, also Ezekiel 34), Isaiah also says God punished Israel for their "sinful greed" (Isaiah 57:17, Isaiah 58).

Piece by piece, the gold that faithful Israel amassed is stripped from the Temple and sent to foreign kings, until it is finally captured by Nebuchadnezzar as God's people are taken into exile (1 Kings 20:1-9, 2 Kings 14:11-15, 2 Kings 16:7-9, 2 Kings 18:14-16, 2 Kings 24:13-14).

The Old Testament is the story of God's continuing generosity to his people, even as they greedily try to grasp for things that are his to give, use his gifts for their own names, hold on to things he has given without gratitude, or turn his good gifts against him to worship idols.

The worst part of this pattern of behaviour is that people are grasping for the very things God delights in giving his children as their inheritance. God's intention for his abundant provisions is that it be used to glorify his name, to be enjoyed with thanksgiving, and to be generously shared with the needy. This is how Israel were to use God's provisions to love God, and to love their neighbours as themselves.

How Jesus makes things right...

Jesus comes as God's shepherd-king to invite people back into God's Kingdom, and the inheritance we were created to enjoy. He talks about the sort of people who will "inherit the earth" and receive a reward that is "great in heaven" (Matthew 5:1-12). he secures abundant life in God's city of Gold that will come down to earth when everything is made new (Revelation 21:1-5).

Jesus makes a clear link between idolatry and money when he tells people to store up treasures in heaven because "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus also says money is an alternative master, or God, to God — an idol — saying "you cannot serve both God and money." Finally he rebukes people for worrying too much about food, drink, clothing, or material needs because their priority should be seeking the "Kingdom and his righteousness," then God will supply these other needs (Matthew 6:19-34).

Unlike Adam and Eve, when Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus refuses to greedily grasp for that which is already his inheritance (Matthew 4:1-11). his greatest display of God's generosity comes at the Cross, where though he was "in very nature God" but "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6), instead he made himself nothing (Philippians 2:7-11), for the sake of others, those who follow Jesus become "children of God." (Philippians 2:5, 15).

In the New Testament, Paul ties the idea of the abundant life found in the Old Testament and the Gospels to God's provision of grace in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul says "he saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7, also 1 Timothy 1:14, Ephesians 2:4-7).

For the church, the right response to God's abundant generosity in Christ is to enjoy his goodness (1 Timothy 4:3-7), and share with those in need. We are God's Temple, because God's Spirit lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16-18, Romans 8:9). Greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). We are not to grasp hold of God's good gifts for ourselves, but as a result of God's abundant blessing we should give cheerfully, from the heart (2 Corinthians 9:7), and "abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8), trusting God to provide generously to his Church in order that we might meet the needs of the poor, and being "generous on every occasion" so that such generosity results in overflowing thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:10-12).

Read more of this story at creekroad.org.au/wtcgw/greed

7. Read Romans 1:25-29, 1 Corinthians 5:10-11, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Ephesians 5:3-5, Colossians 3:4-5. The New Testament treats greed very seriously — what are some of the warnings here? In our interactions with the public, is it fair to say the Church appears to focus on everything else on these lists before we talk about money? Why?

8. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-21, what motivates Christians to give generously, rather than being greedy? What is the first thing Christians are to give (verse 5)? What does our giving reflect (verse 9)?

9. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, What should our attitude be to giving? What sort of things might we give to? What does this passage say about the wealth God gives his people? What is the desired outcome of our generosity?

Heart

10. How is our approach to our possessions a chance to live out the story of the Cross? Is there anything you need to change in the light of God's generosity to you?

15. While it's true to say some churches do the wrong thing with money, some media reporting about churches and money isn't fair – what can churches do, proactively, to make sure they are accountable and above reproach when it comes to their finances? Read creekroad.org.au/give. Are you comfortable with how Creek Road spends money?

Hands

16. Have you responded to God's generous gift to you by giving yourself to God? Are you giving and serving him, and others, as part of his Church? At Creek Road, or in other ways?
17. Do you share your possessions with those in need? Both those who need Jesus and those who are in financial need? What are some ways you might start doing this on your own? As a Growth Group?
18. In the last few weeks we've been challenged not to consume others, or the world, with our behaviour, what are some things you're going to change so that your life reflects God's generosity to you?

Pastoral Prayer

Your Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come before you grateful for Jesus. Thank you that he turned greed upside down. Thank you that he showed us a better way — a new way of giving to replace the normal way of grasping. Please forgive us that we have pursued the way of grasping. Forgive us that we have grasped for wealth. Forgive us that we have grasped for influence. Forgive us that we have done this to make our names bigger. Forgive us that we have forgotten that everything comes from you and everything is for you — to make your name bigger.

So we thank you for Jesus. Thank you that Jesus gave up everything at the cross to make your name bigger. Thank you that he shows us this new way of giving. Father, we know that we will get things wrong if we take our eyes off the cross of Jesus. We know that we will get things wrong if our hearts are not changed by the cross of Jesus. Father we thank you that at the cross, Jesus puts things right. Please, by your Spirit, help us to live lives shaped by the cross. Giving lives. Please shape our hearts at the cross to learn the truth about ourselves, so we will only ever speak with humility the truth to others. Please shape us at the cross to live and speak the truth of the gospel in humility, gentleness, compassion, love, mercy and generosity.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Jesus you have loved and bought me
By your death my debts are paid
I am yours, I stand beside you
Fearless face the coming day*

Grace Awaiting Me

FAMILY GROWTH

Greed

Big Idea

God wants us to use the good things he gives us to be generous not greedy

Bible Reading

Luke 12:13-21

All Ages

Search online for the video **'Max 7 parable of the rich fool'**.

What are some of the things the rich fool does that show his greedy nature?

Why do you think it's important to be generous?

What are some of the ways God is generous to you?

What are some ways you can be generous to others?

How do you spend your money/time/energy? Is it for greedy purposes, or generous?

When God sent Jesus to die for our sins, God's generosity and love is shown to us. Every good thing we have comes from God — toys, games, money, talents — but his ultimate show of generosity was giving up his Son for us.

God doesn't provide us with good things so we can store them up for our own comfort and enjoyment. He gives us good things so we can use them to show others his love and generosity.

Pre-Primary & Primary

Find 3 jars, boxes or containers. Label each one with “Spending”, “Saving”, or “Giving”. Discuss how you might split your pocket money into these 3 containers. You might also like to discuss how you can use the money from each container to show God’s generosity to those around you (e.g. you might like to nominate a Christian aid organisation that you can “Give” to along with church).

Prayer

You might like to:

- Thank God for sending Jesus as the ultimate act of generosity
- Say sorry for when we take God’s generosity for granted, and store up his gifts for our own pleasure
- Ask for help in becoming more sacrificial and generous

High School

Thinking about the gifts of time, money, and talents with which God has blessed you, write down some ways you’ve been greedy, and some ways you can be more generous in response to God’s ultimate generosity.

	How I’ve been greedy	How I can be more generous
Time		
Money		
Talents		

Notes

At Creek Road we love Jesus. We want to reach the city
and reach the world with the good news about
who Jesus is. We'd love to help you meet Jesus as we
explore the Bible together at our Sunday Services.

We want every person to have a chance to connect with
Jesus, to grow to be more like Jesus and to serve Jesus.
So we try to make everything we do clear
and easy to understand.

If you've got any questions, we'd love to answer them.
If there is anything you need, we'd love to help.

You don't need to be good, religious, or have it all
together to join us on a Sunday. Jesus is for everyone —
people of all stages, ages, and places. So is our church.

Everyone is welcome. Seriously.



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