



entrust⁴

Multiplying Leaders for Multiplying Churches

Becoming a Man of Understanding

010.122.01



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Introduction

What does it mean to be a *man of understanding*? Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (ESV). The author describes the intentions of a man’s heart as *deep water*, a phrase which speaks of “our human reluctance, or inability, to give ourselves away.”¹ Yet a man of understanding “can bring to light the deepest intentions of . . . another.”² A man of understanding is a man of discernment or wisdom. He has understanding of the wisdom of God, which enables him to understand himself and human nature in general. When this is true in a man’s life, God can use him to draw out the deepest intentions of other men—to serve others as a mentor and counselor.

This course is designed to encourage us as men to grow in our understanding of God and our understanding of ourselves. We will examine some of the false beliefs we have developed and look at some truths that are essential to understanding who we are, such as the damage caused in every human being as a result of the Fall, the scope of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the Cross, the new identity in Christ that we have received, and the resources God has given us to learn and grow to become more and more like his Son. As our own relationship with God grows deeper, and we begin to see real change taking place in us, we will find that God will use us to help and encourage others in their walk with God.

Our goal is to become a man of understanding. A man of understanding is a man who has a clear desire to live his life in a way that pleases God and brings glory to him, a deep commitment to know and apply God’s Word, and a desire to be used of God to serve and encourage others. Becoming a man of understanding is a lifelong process, and God uses many people and circumstances along the way to bring us to greater spiritual maturity and increased usefulness in God’s kingdom. We invite you to join us

on the journey as we grow together and become more and more the men that God is calling us to be.

Course Outline

Course Introduction

Lesson 1 Understanding Our Design and Damage

Lesson 2 Understanding Our Identity in Christ

Lesson 3 Understanding the Emptiness Within

Lesson 4 Exploring the Mind

Lesson 5 Exploring the Will

Lesson 6 Exploring the Emotions

Lesson 7 Understanding My Story

Lesson 8 Facing the Past and the Future

Lesson 9 Using Our Skills to Encourage Others

Recommended Reading List

Enjoying Intimacy with God, by J. Oswald Sanders
(Moody Press, 1980)

Bold Love, by Dan Allender
(NavPress, 1992)

Understanding People, by Larry Crabb
(Zondervan, 1987)

Counterfeit Gods, by Timothy Keller
(Penguin Group, 2009)

Course Objectives

When you have completed this course, you will be able to

1. experience a desire to deepen your relationship with God and to rely on him for your growth in Christ-like character
2. explain God's design for people created in his image and the damage resulting from man's sin and rebellion against God
3. explain what God accomplished for you through Jesus Christ, by his life, death and resurrection
4. explain your new identity as a son of God and give examples of ways that your new identity affects your thinking, emotions, and choices

5. explain the resources God has given you so that you can live your life in a way that pleases him
6. evaluate the *false wells* you have been relying on and commit yourself to turning to the true source of living water
7. evaluate lies you have been believing and exchange these lies for the truth of God
8. evaluate your growth in Christian character during your time of study
9. encourage other men to work through struggles they may be having and apply truths from God's Word

Suggestions for Your Study Time

Our sessions will focus on solid biblical concepts and their application to life. A facilitator will be there to serve as a helper and a discussion leader. His role is to encourage good discussion and interaction with the truths and concepts that are presented in the study material and to help you consider the implications of what you are studying. We encourage you to think through the teaching, examine the biblical passages for yourself, and test the principles that are presented. You will have opportunity to interact with other group members as you seek to discern and apply what you study to various situations you may discuss.

You will have reading and study to do on your own. This course is designed for you to do most of the study at home. You will come together in the group to discuss the concepts and to share what you have been learning. You will get much more out of the course if you prepare the study, answering the questions, and thinking through the application of the material before you come to the group. We encourage you to

find a time and a place where you can be quiet before God,

ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and to help you be completely honest as you work through the exercises,

read the materials and the Bible passages carefully, and listen to what God may be trying to say to you through them,

write down key thoughts and personal responses for your own benefit and some for sharing in the group.

Openness and Informality

Our sessions together will be conversational and informal in nature. Please feel free to ask questions as we talk about various ideas. No question is too insignificant. Often when a point needs clarifying in your mind, it is confusing in the minds of others as well. If you raise the question, we can all interact, remembering that our goal is to grow in understanding.

Confidentiality and Discretion

It is important that the things we share in the group remain confidential, not to be shared outside the group. No one will be required to share anything he does not feel comfortable sharing, but each group participant needs to know that he can talk freely without worrying about gossip or judgment. The instructor will be honest and vulnerable in sharing with you what God has been teaching him. Please do not share his oral stories with others, just as he is committed to keeping in confidence what you share with him.

Sharing in the group should be done with discretion. The study session will not be a time for personal venting of grievances or for extensive individual personal counseling. We will grow together in learning how to share on a deeper level and still maintain loyalty to our significant relationships. Our aim will be to learn from our life experiences, not to assign blame to others or to seek support for our views.

Opening Thoughts

*The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water,
but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

(Prov 20:5, ESV)

If you spend any time talking to people, you will quickly find out that their lives are complicated and often messy. They may be facing tough situations on the job or struggles with finances or health. Their relationships are often difficult. Some men struggle with addictions like pornography or alcohol. Even men who are outwardly successful are often plagued with feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. How does our Christian faith relate to the problems we face in life? How does it change the way we live and respond to tough situations?

The material we will study together will help you understand how to become both a strong and compassionate man who can deal with life's problems. It will also help you move with confidence in God into the messy situations of people's daily lives, be used by God to help them, and see them transformed by him.

The Bible is a book about people—real people—who faced the same kinds of problems that people face today. They encountered hardships, difficult relationships, desperate economic times, people who opposed them, and temptations to sin, just like we do. No book is more realistic or honest about facing the harsh facts of life than the Bible. The same God who was available to the people we read about in the Bible continues to be available to us as well. The Bible is the most instructive book for understanding people and for giving us wisdom as to how we can live. It was inspired by the God who designed and created us and knows what is best for us.

The theme verse for this course is Proverbs 20:5, which says, “The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (ESV). The more we understand how we are designed (what some might term a *biblical anthropology*), the more God can use us effectively in helping others. He can use both the difficult and rewarding situations of our lives to help us know him better and love him more. As we experience him transforming us personally, we will be better equipped to encourage and serve others.

The story that follows is an illustration of one man's first steps on the journey toward becoming a man of understanding.

People generally think of me as a friendly guy, and I find it easy to talk with men about topics like sports or hobbies. But when it comes to talking about my feelings, I struggle. I never found it easy to talk about my feelings. After college I became involved in ministering to other men, but it was a long time before I realized that I was afraid to be honest with others about my own struggles in the Christian life. I was afraid to be vulnerable because I imagined that if other people knew what was really happening inside me, they would reject me, and I would lose their respect.

On the other hand, I noticed that the men whom I admired were those who were honest and vulnerable. Men I

considered more mature than I was were willing to admit to their mistakes and failures. It took me several years to open up to some of these men, to share more of myself with them and seek their counsel. It took several more years until I was willing to take some risks in becoming more vulnerable myself as a Bible study leader.

I remember the first time I risked opening myself up to the group. I was in a meeting with a group of men, and we were discussing the topic of leadership. We had been asked to talk about some of the weaknesses we had observed in our own lives. As the leader of the group, I knew I should set the example and be willing to go first. I was afraid. I felt like I was standing on a cliff, and I would need to step off and leap into a dark abyss. The pressure had been building up in me ever since I had studied the material on my own in preparation for the group. Now was the moment. How vulnerable would I be?

Finally the words came out: “I see myself as a recovering Pharisee.”

The room was quiet for a minute or two. Several things happened after I said that. I felt tremendous relief at finally admitting what God had been convicting me about in my heart—the self-righteous attitudes I was seeing there. As I shared, I sensed that a wall came down, and the men were freer to talk about their own weaknesses. I sensed acceptance and even respect from the men for my honesty. I learned a little more about the grace of God and was encouraged to be more honest in the future. I saw the group gradually begin to change as other men were willing to take the risk to share what they were really thinking or struggling with.

Since that first experience of being honest about myself in a group, God has continued to speak to me about the areas he wants to transform in me. He is helping me to open myself more to others so we can learn and grow together. I often come back to Matthew 7:3-5, where Jesus told his followers to first remove the log in their own eye so they could see clearly to remove the speck from their brother’s eye. I began to realize that the more I was willing to ask God to remove the log from my own eye, the more

he could use me to encourage other men with similar struggles.

The Value of Spiritual Mentors

One of the keys to becoming a man of understanding is to develop relationships with other godly men who will challenge and motivate you to walk in God's ways. God designed us to live in community with others, so that we would learn and grow as we interact with other godly people. God says that we are to be men who sharpen one another in godliness and wisdom (Prov 27:17).

Paul and Barnabas were peers who served in ministry together and had the kind of relationship in which they could encourage and challenge each other in key areas of their walk with God. A close friend who shares our commitment to Christ is a tremendous encouragement to us on the journey of faith. Paul also had a mentoring relationship with Titus and with Timothy, through whom he passed along his knowledge, vision, insights, and skills that would equip these younger men to have effective ministries of their own. Would it not be ideal if each of us could have a Barnabas beside us, a Timothy developing under our oversight, and a Paul leading us into greater maturity? These are the kinds of relationships that help us learn how to live out our faith in the way God designed for us.

The need for this kind of spiritual mentoring is obvious today. Not only does it benefit younger men, it brings challenge and satisfaction to mature men as well. Younger men need the experience and wisdom of older men, and older men need the energy, enthusiasm, and new ideas of younger men. This course hopes to build on past and present life experiences of those in the group and to equip you to help other men to grow in maturity, wisdom, and effective ministry. Seeing others discover greater satisfaction in following God and his ways will also encourage you. Paul spoke of the younger men he discipled as his *crown and joy*. Like a father, he was pleased to see these men develop in their faith and love for others. We can have an experience like Paul's, as we follow God's plan for growing in wisdom and discernment and allow God to use us to encourage other men.

0.1**Making It Your Own**

- a. Think of two or three older men you know who have had a significant influence on your life, whether they are Christians or not.
 - 1) What was it that impacted you?
 - 2) What would you like to emulate about them?
- b. Are you involved in mentoring any men who are younger, spiritually speaking?

What do you think you could do to help some younger men to mature?

- c. Do you have a close friend who shares your faith, someone with whom you can be honest and open and who will challenge you and hold you accountable?

If not, ask God to help you find another Christian man who can be your Barnabas.

NOTES

¹ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 128.

² Kidner, 137.

Lesson 1: Understanding Our Design and Damage

Lesson Outline

Designed for Dignity

Designed to Bear God's Image

Designed to Be God's Stewards

Damaged by the Fall

Consequences of the Fall

God's Restoration

The Marred Image of God

The Emptiness of Our Hearts

Designed for Dignity

When a young couple learns that they are expecting their first child, they often begin to make some changes at home. Michael describes what happened at home like this:

“When my wife was pregnant with our first, she was constantly preparing for the little one, thinking about little blankets, clothes, and equipment we would need to care for our baby. I built some extra shelves for the baby's items and toys. The preparation added to the fun and expectation of the arrival of the baby. We wanted to make our home a place where our little one would feel loved and secure.”

We read in Genesis 1 that God, the Creator of heaven and earth, lovingly prepared a place for his created beings that included all that was needed for his creatures' comfort, security, and enjoyment. After creating from nothing a world filled with beauty and order, he created a beautiful garden filled with all that Adam and Eve would need to live happy and fulfilled lives. The writer of

Genesis says that after the creation of man and woman, God saw all that he had made “and it was very good” (Gen 1:31, NASB).

In Genesis 2:9 we read that God made all kinds of trees to grow in the garden, trees that were pleasant to the sight and good for food. The garden itself was well-watered. God placed the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and he also placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When God created Adam, he breathed into him the breath of life (Gen 2:7), and it was that empowering breath of God that created and continues to sustain all life even now.

In Acts 17:24-28 we read that God determined the times set for people and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that human beings would seek him, reach out to him, and find him. Paul says, “For in him we live and move and have our being” (NIV). Let us take a closer look at the creation of humankind.

Designed to Bear God’s Image

Scripture pulls back the curtain on eternity past and invites us to eavesdrop on a conversation between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26-27 we are told that God says, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (NIV).

While God creates many wonderful species of animals, birds, and fish, his creation of human beings is his crowning act, as human beings are designed and created to reflect the very image of God (Gen 1:26; 5:3). **Human beings are given great dignity by virtue of their design as unique reflections of God.** Adam and Eve are fashioned for rational, moral, and spiritual fellowship with their Maker.¹

While an image is not identical to what it mirrors, it does bear some significant resemblance. For example, God thinks, creates, feels, loves, expresses, remembers, and acts. In God’s image and as a reflection of him, humans are given these same capacities.

Consider a few of the ways in which people reflect God’s image. First, men and women are personal and relational. We

worship a personal and relational God, a fact that is illustrated from the revelation that God has always existed in relationship with himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is having a conversation with the other members of the Trinity when he decides to create mankind in his image. Relationship is core to God's personality in the Trinity. We worship a God who delights in relationship and takes pleasure in relationships that reflect him.

In the story of the original creation, the first time God pronounces something to be *not good* is in regard to relationship. He says, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18, NASB). Being alone refers to human not divine companionship indicating that we are created as human beings to be in relationship and community. We are created by divine design to relate to one another as well as to God. Horizontal relationships with others are important as a reflection of our vertical relationship to God. We are designed that way by our loving Creator.

God even initiates the awakening of this awareness in Adam by bringing all the beasts of the field and birds of the air to Adam to see what he will name them. In the process he realizes that he is lacking a companion like himself. Then God chooses to provide the woman for the fulfillment and delight of Adam's heart. This is the kind of God we have—one who loves to delight his children and give them good gifts.

The man and woman living in God's perfect garden enjoy regular fellowship with God and perfect fellowship with each other. They are naked and not ashamed. They are created to love and worship God, and all their needs are satisfied in him.

Men and women are also created to reflect God's image in their personality, in the faculties they share with their Creator, such as moral responsibility, rational understanding, and spiritual communion. In God's image and as a reflection of him, humans are given these same faculties. At Creation we are linked with the divine. Although we ourselves are not divine, we are designed to live as created beings in dependence on God. God has the capacity to think perfect thoughts, to choose perfect actions, and to experience perfectly the entire spectrum of emotions that belong to personality. While we do not share in the perfect experience of these personal characteristics, we reflect his image in the possession of these faculties of our personality.

At creation, Adam and Eve reflect God's image as emotional beings, capable of joy, love, wonder and worship. Their emotions are constructive and designed to be used in worshiping God and in enjoying relationship with each other. They also reflect God in their ability to think. They are created as rational beings, able to evaluate, plan, and use their minds to accomplish God's purposes. They reflect God as volitional beings, able to choose wisely and devise a good course of action based on knowledge of what was in line with God's purpose and his pleasure.

Designed to Be God's Stewards

The creation story emphasizes the dignity given to human beings. Humans are designed to rule as God's stewards or viceroys and to care for his creation. A steward is one who manages or has charge of the property or affairs of another. Our responsibility as caretakers of God's world is a tremendous privilege, full of dignity and worth, because we represent the Lord himself. God gives humans dominion over all creation (Gen 1:26), blesses them, and gives them the privilege of family and heritage. His plan for them includes fruitfulness and creativity. Since our identity flows from our origins, it is imperative that we grasp the significance of our design and dignity as God's highest creations.

Damaged by the Fall

We do not have a record of how long Adam and Eve live in this perfect environment with God. We only have the account of who and what brings this glorious period to a tragic conclusion. The beautiful creation we read about in Genesis 1 and 2, with its perfect design and dignity, is damaged by the event described in Genesis 3, which we call the *Fall of Humankind*.

God sets only one boundary for humans in the garden, that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is interesting to note that humankind is not designed for total freedom, contrary to popular belief. Appropriate limits are part of the perfect plan of God, placed there by a wise and loving Father for the good of his children.

1.1



Making It Your Own

Read Genesis 3:1-24 and answer the following questions.

- a. In what ways did Satan tempt Eve in Genesis 3?
- b. In what ways did he tempt Adam? Notice Satan's strategy in this encounter.
- c. Describe the choices of Eve and Adam.
- d. What do you think Eve's motivation was? Adam's?
- e. List as many consequences of their choices as you can find in this passage.
- f. What changes do you see in Adam and Eve, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
- g. As a man, what consequences do you think may have resulted from Adam's passivity in this situation?
- h. How did God deal with Adam and Eve after they had sinned? What do you learn from this?

In Genesis 3 we find that Satan enters the garden in the form of a serpent and tempts the woman to violate the single limitation God has set for them. God has abundantly provided all that is needed for life and satisfaction: abundant food, provision for housing, beauty, creativity, and harmonious relationships. But evil enters the garden from an external source.

Eve's first mistake is to dialogue with the devil. As she listens to his words, she allows her mind to doubt God, to doubt his word and his goodness. She allows her senses to be tempted by the attractiveness of the forbidden fruit (and perhaps by the attractiveness of the serpent). She allows her pride to be aroused by the suggestion that she could become as wise as God.

Adam's sin takes a different form. Although he knows what God has said, Adam chooses a response of passivity and silence, allowing his wife to take the lead, rather than taking responsibility for the decision (Gen 3:6). God has clearly told Adam what was at stake, and he chooses to disregard God's words. He accepts the

woman's offer of the fruit and disobeys God's expressed will for them.

1.2**Making It Your Own**

- a. Read Romans 5:12-19 and record your thoughts on Adam's role in the rebellion against God. What do you think was the nature of Adam's sin?
- b. Can you relate to Adam's choice of disobedience? Why or why not?

In choosing to disobey the single prohibition that God has set for them, Adam and Eve choose to live in independence from God. They choose their own will rather than God's will. They are created to depend on him for life, food, water, air, purpose, and for the relationship with him that fully satisfies their hearts. Human beings are created for a dependent relationship with the only one who can meet all their needs and satisfy their deepest desires. Their disobedience is the *Fall*.

Since the Fall, human beings continue to pursue the hopeless goal of becoming like God. Scientists attempt to create human life and to extend our life span. In spite of our great achievements in fields such as architecture, science, technology, and art, it only takes some natural disaster to remind us of how impotent we really are in comparison to the power of God. An earthquake can destroy in minutes what took years to construct. Similarly, it only takes a quick detour through a cemetery to remind us that our life is limited. Some people live to be a century, but we do not live forever. Only God has no beginning or end to his existence.

Consequences of the Fall

Immediately after their sinful choice, both the man and woman experience emotions of fear and shame. They now become self-conscious and experience a desire to hide themselves from God

and one another. With this shame comes a self-centered focus, a commitment to turning to a new source to find a solution to their internal dissatisfaction. Instead of turning, as they had previously, to the Creator, who has provided all they could ever want in abundance, they now find themselves looking to their own limited abilities to find satisfaction and to relieve the sense of vulnerability that is so painful. Their shame drives them to seek a solution to their pain. Their failure to look to God for this solution causes them to rely on themselves for an answer; they sew together some fig leaves in a pathetic attempt to cover their nakedness.

The entrance of sin into God's perfect world has dramatic consequences for all of creation. Adam and Eve are separated from God, and they die spiritually on the day they take the fruit. They also experience the corruption of their physical bodies, which will result in physical death. All of creation is likewise subjected to physical corruption.

God's Restoration

In shame, Adam and Eve attempt to hide from God because of fear of what he will do. Earlier he has walked with them daily in the cool of the evening, sharing their lives and enjoying a wonderful relationship with them. Now they cannot face him. Paradise is lost to them. Innocence is lost. For a moment it seems that all is lost.

But Satan underestimates the love of God for his creation. Nothing that happens on that day in Eden catches God by surprise. He knows all along that this terrible choice would happen, and the Bible says that even before the foundation of the world God has a plan to restore his fallen creation (Eph 1:4-8).

The same loving God who initiates the creation of his children takes the initiative to seek them out after they sinned. First, he seeks to establish responsibility and bring about repentance by asking penetrating questions. Their responses reveal the devastating impact of their disobedience. Adam blames Eve, and even suggests that God is ultimately to blame, having given him the woman in the first place! Eve blames the serpent for her foolish choice. They stubbornly refuse to take responsibility for their disastrous personal choices. Their relationship with God is damaged, creating a chasm between them and a holy God. The

sweet fellowship they had enjoyed earlier is broken. It appears that the devil has won in this contest with God.

Yet, within the curse of the serpent found in Genesis 3:14-15 is the first promise of the *seed* of the woman who would one day destroy the works of the devil. God unfolds a glorious plan of redemption that will find its culmination in the cross where his Son is crucified for the sins of the world.

God's plan, first revealed in Eden, involves a sacrifice that will atone for or cover the sin of his children. God's slaying of an animal provides a skin covering for Adam and Eve and is the first indicator that God himself would make a way to cover sin and to bring restoration and reconciliation between him and his creation. The sacrificial animal died in the place of the sinner as a substitute that God in his mercy chooses to accept. This first sacrifice prefigures the system of sacrifice that God sets up for his people. It also points ultimately to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who will be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humankind. God creates a way back to him, a way to enjoy his fellowship again, provided at the ultimate cost of the life of his own Son.

The Marred Image of God

The story of the Fall is a story of tragedy, of fallen creatures once so beautiful and joyful. God's magnificent creatures, designed to bear his image and reflect his glory, are now marred and defaced by sin. And the tragedy of Adam and Eve is that their sin is passed on to the following generations. Although Satan could not destroy God, his design is to destroy the hated image of God in human beings. **While human beings retain some traces of the image of God, sin's tentacles now reach to every aspect of their personality.** In theology we refer to this truth as the *total depravity* of humans.

The concept of total depravity does not mean (1) that depraved people cannot or do not perform actions that are good in either man's or God's sight. But no such action can gain favor with God for salvation. Neither does it mean (2) that fallen man has no conscience which judges between good and evil for him. But that conscience has been affected by the fall so that it cannot be a safe and reliable guide. Neither does it mean (3) that people indulge

in every form of sin or in any sin to the greatest extent possible.

Positively, *total* depravity means that the corruption has extended to all aspects of man's nature, to his entire being; and total *depravity* means that because of that corruption there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God.²

The **minds** of Adam and Eve are darkened by the effects of sin. At creation they reflected God's image in their thinking. They could accurately discern truth and wisdom; their thinking caused them to pursue a wise course of action. After the Fall, their thinking is darkened. As a result, although people are capable of great intellectual achievements, the accuracy of our perception of truth and reality has been seriously diminished. We have become subject to all kinds of deception. Proverbs 22:15 indicates that we are born foolish; Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick" (NASB); Romans 1:21 describes this turning away from God: "their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (NIV).

The **choices** of human beings are likewise affected by the Fall. Before the Fall all human choices were righteous ones, based on a pure knowledge of what was in line with God's will and what would please him. After the Fall the focus of human choices become self-centered rather than God-centered. Our motives are no longer pure; our own comfort and our pride have become more important to us than righteous living that honors God. Jeremiah 5:23 speaks of people who have "stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away" (NIV) from God. Verses like this describe the tendency of all humans to resist and rebel against God.

Our experience of **emotions** has also been thoroughly damaged by the effects of the Fall. Before the Fall Adam and Eve's emotions were constructive and in line with God's heart as they responded to experiences and to his creation. After the Fall their feelings and ours become consistently selfish, focusing on our self-interests rather than God's. Our emotions, which are designed for worship of God and for self-expression in relationships, are twisted, allowing them to become a driving force in our lives that can damage our relationships and lead us down paths of destruction.

These three aspects of our personality, once so perfectly aligned with God's purposes, now fail to function as he designed them. The capacities that reflect the image of God in us have become corrupted. Our natures are enslaved to sin. Where God had once filled the lives of Adam and Eve and satisfied them completely, only emptiness remains.

1.3

Making It Your Own

- a. Explain in your own words how each aspect of our personalities has been affected by the Fall.

Mind

Will

Feelings/Emotions

- b. How do you see the effect of the Fall in your own mind, will, and emotions?

And so begins each of our personal stories. We are not born into a perfect world, into a garden where all is provided and where we enjoy perfect relationships and meaningful work, but into a world more and more deeply damaged by generation after generation of fallen people. Born blind to the love of our divine Creator, we live with human capacities that have been darkened and damaged by the sinful nature within us, and we pursue our own path to seek satisfaction. We turn away from God rather than to him, and we seek to make life work for ourselves out of our own pitiful resources. **One definition of sin is a choice to be independent from God.**

The Emptiness of Our Hearts

Satan's tactic in tempting the woman was to create doubt in her mind that what she was experiencing was true fullness. Surely there was something more. Satan suggested that God was cruelly

Lesson 1: Understanding Our Design and Damage

withholding something from them, keeping them from enjoying all there is to life. They chose to believe that satisfaction would come from a source other than God.

After the Fall, Adam and Eve were bitterly disappointed; instead of greater fulfillment, they experienced emptiness within and the painful emotions that came with that realization. At the core of their being, where God had once filled them, there was now a vacuum so great that it demanded to be filled.

We recognize that no metaphor is fully adequate. We might symbolize this inner emptiness (or as the Bible calls it, thirst) with the illustration of a tipped cup at the center of their lives. They died spiritually as their relationship with God was severed through disobedience to him. Then, in the experience of this terrible emptiness, they began to look at each other and around them to see what they could do to cover their own sin and alleviate their own pain and shame. They used what they had at hand, fig leaves, to cover themselves. Instead of coming back to God and seeking his help and provision, their committed direction was to look to themselves and their own resources to try to fill their inner emptiness.

**Digging Our Own Wells**

From that time forward, ever since sin entered the human race, every person is born, figuratively speaking, with a tipped and empty cup within. All of us are estranged from God, and we suffer in our relationships with others as well. The emptiness within

shows itself even in infancy, in the heart-rending cries of the child who wants to be held and loved. As a person begins to mature, he will experience the natural disappointments, difficulties and pain of living in a fallen world. He will begin to experience the emptiness within that is the result of our broken relationship to God.

From the time we are young, we begin to look around us at other people in our world who appear to be more satisfied, and we begin to determine some beliefs about what will help us satisfy our inner emptiness. Some of these beliefs are formed very early in life. Having reached some conclusions about how to fill the emptiness, we begin to formulate strategies to satisfy our longings and to gain what appears to be real life and satisfaction.



Making It Your Own

Read Jeremiah 2:13. How does the prophet describe God's thoughts about the sins of his people Israel?

Like the people of Israel, we seek to fill the emptiness within us by digging wells—pursuing goals and directions that we believe will provide living water that will satisfy our inner thirst. How do we begin to dig wells? We look around us at people who seem, on the outside, to be satisfied in life or to be successful. We develop basic beliefs about what *life* is and what will satisfy us. We conclude that the qualities or achievements of the people we see will satisfy us also. Therefore, we begin to imitate what we have observed and to dig similar wells of our own creation. We each dig many common wells to try to fill the emptiness within. Most of us can list many of them.

1.5

**Making It Your Own**

- a. Make a list of some of the common wells that people in your culture dig to fill the emptiness in their lives or to become satisfied or successful.
- b. Which of these wells are ones you are most attracted to?

In addition to these common wells that people turn to in order to fill the emptiness in their lives, we each dig wells that are unique to us, based on our personal life experiences. Often a painful event will teach us something about where we think we can find *water*. We dig that particular well with diligence and guard it fiercely. What is really happening is that we are becoming driven or controlled by false sources of life.

Just as wells are dug where studies indicate the greatest likelihood of finding water, so we, **as we reflect on our own lives, find that our personal wells are often developed in response to various life experiences.** The following is Mark's example of a personal well he discovered.

When I was about six years old, I was playing barefoot outside with a friend. My father pointed to my toe and called attention to the fact that it was bleeding. Though I had not noticed it before, the sight of the blood sent me running into the house, crying, to have my mother bandage my toe. My father ridiculed me for crying over my toe, since it obviously was not painful, and I had not noticed it before. He told that story to friends and relatives in public for the next thirty years until he died. Each time he told it in my presence, it was a source of shame to me, both as a boy and as a man. He reinforced my sense of shame with each telling.

As a result, I came to believe that it was very important to put on a brave front and to keep other people from seeing me as weak. I spent a lot of energy hiding from any situation that had even a small potential to reveal myself as

weak or inadequate. I became very self-conscious and did not open up or let myself be vulnerable with others lest I face shame. The strategy I developed in life was to always try to perform well, wherever I knew I was strong, and to cover up areas where I was weak or avoid any situations that could lead to being embarrassed. I dug this well of performance and hiding deep and wide, and it went unrecognized for many years.

1.6**Making It Your Own**

- a. Give some thought to identifying an experience from your own life that illustrates a way that you have learned to satisfy your own emptiness apart from God.
- b. How did you begin to dig your well?
- c. If possible, list several wells that you are aware of.

Maintaining Our Wells

Perhaps you have seen an oilfield where many wells have been drilled, and pumps are working constantly, rhythmically, forcing the shafts down into the earth and drawing up the oil from deep underground. Figuratively, in the same way, each of us goes about drilling our own water wells and running a pipe from each well into our tipped cup.

However, we never feel full for long. Our cup always remains tipped over on its side. We cannot set the cup straight, so water continues to run out. One well is not sufficient; it takes constant maintenance of many wells trying to fill our tipped cup just to keep a level of water sufficient to take the edge off the driving thirst of our empty hearts. We expend physical and emotional energy in the lifelong quest to pump these wells. The process of rushing from one well to another in the frantic effort to maintain a sufficient supply of water keeps us occupied. If we stop for a moment to contemplate, we can be overcome by despair.

Often we are not aware of what kinds of wells we have been depending on until one of them stops working. A friendship we treasure comes to an end; we lose a job that provides us with respect and self-esteem. Suddenly, the water level goes down drastically, and we are finally conscious of what we have been depending on. The newly revealed emptiness motivates us to do whatever we can to once again restore the function of that well or to replace it with another—to refill our cup.

Apart from God, we will continue this desperate cycle of pumping our wells, seeking to fill up the inner emptiness we feel.

1.7



Making It Your Own

- a. Read John 4:1-15. What kind of water did Jesus offer the woman at the well where she was drawing water?
- b. What did he mean by this expression?
- c. What other sources had this woman been drawing from to fill her own inner emptiness?
- d. How did Jesus help her see her inner emptiness?
- e. What evidence do you find that she eventually became *filled* with living water?

In spite of her sinful past, Jesus does not speak harshly to this woman but leads her to see her need for the living water that only he can supply. When she grasps the truth that Jesus himself is the living water, she is eager to drink, and her soul is satisfied. Her life is changed by this encounter with the Savior.

As we study this course together, we will continue to explore the emptiness within us and the true source of living water that God, in his great love, has made available to us. In order to become men of understanding, we need to recognize the extent of the damage caused by the Fall to our personality and relationships. We also need to recognize the wells we have been digging to substitute

for the living water and to learn to live in dependence on God for real life. When we do this, we will experience God filling us once again with himself and transforming us to reflect his image.

Lesson Flashback

- We are designed by God to reflect his image in the world and to be his stewards.
- Sin separates us from God and affects every area of our personality: our thinking, our will, and our emotions.
- As a result of sin we experience an emptiness within that we attempt to fill by digging false wells.
- God initiates restoration of our relationship with him and is the true source of living water that satisfies us.
- God wants to transform our lives as we learn to live in dependence on him.

NOTES

¹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Image of God (Grand Rapids, MI 49506: Baker Book House, 1985), 546.

² Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Depravity, Total, 312.