

# THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

SEEKING THE TRUTH ON THE HARD BITS OF LIFE

14 TOPICAL STUDIES

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# Introduction

This is part of the apostle Paul's parting speech to the elders at Ephesus as he left:

*Acts 20:25 And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole counsel of God**. <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Paul has spent time ministering to the people at Ephesus and he says he feels innocent of their blood because he has not shrunk from 'declaring to you the whole counsel of God'. He's talking about the gospel—that is the message of the crucified and risen Christ, who he is and what he came to do, including his Lordship and how they ought to live in light of it. He didn't shrink from declaring the **whole counsel**. He wasn't afraid to speak about God's counsel on anything, any matter, he applied the gospel to all of life.

It is tricky to apply the whole counsel of God to our life. It is difficult to apply the gospel to all of our life, but it is what we are called to do. Those of us who are heterosexual, we happily apply a prohibition on homosexuality to our life. Those of us who are relatively healthy happily apply a prohibition on euthanasia. Most of us are happy with supporting the command not to murder. But what about the difficult areas? What about the way we think and speak about politics? Are we happy to listen to God's counsel about that, or are we happy to continue with the rest of those on our political side of the fence? What about our attitude to lotto? Or our attitude to alcohol? We might have strong opinions on those things one way or the other, but the question is, are we prepared to submit our strong opinions to the counsel of God? What about our career goals or the things we have worked hard to get (or are working hard to get)? Are we happy to listen to the counsel of God on that?

We always need to be checking ourselves against the counsel of God. Christ obtained us by his own blood, so we ought to submit to his Lordship over our life. Sometimes we can be far too prohibitive as we adopt traditions passed down to us rather than the true freedom of the gospel (this was the trap the Pharisees fell into). Sometimes we can be far too permissive making the mistake of becoming like the world we are trying to reach. We do not want to err on either of these sides. We want to submit our lives to the whole counsel of God. We want to submit to his Lordship—not our own version of it. Our prayer is that these studies will help each of us to wrestle with that in some of the hard bits of life today.

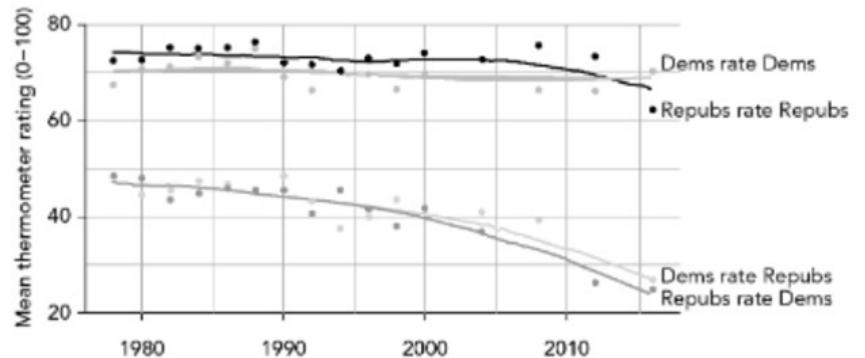
# 1

## Political or not?

Titus 3:1-2

### Read and Discuss

Jonathan Haidt in his book 'The coddling of the American Mind' discusses the increasing political polarization in the US since the 1990's. He includes in his book this graph of Affective partisan polarization. The chart basically shows how cold or hostile toward the opposite political party Americans are as a function of time. This is America but Australia seems to be heading down a similar line.



**FIGURE 6.2.** *Affective partisan polarization. Americans' feelings toward their own party have barely changed since the 1970s, but Americans have become increasingly "cold" or hostile toward the other party since the 1990s. (Source: American National Election Study,<sup>6</sup> plotted by Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018.)*

How should Christians relate to those of differing political persuasions?

### Explore

**Read Acts 17:24-27**

1. Who ultimately stands behind all nations including their political systems?
2. What is God's ultimate purpose in creating nations and allocating their boundaries?

**Read Romans 13:1-6**

3. What does Paul call the Romans to do in verse 1? Why?

4. What authority has God given earthly authorities to wield? What are the purposes of this authority?

5. What examples does Paul give of what it looks like to be subject to the governing authorities?

**Read Titus 3:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-17**

6. What further reasons are we given in these two passages for submitting to the earthly authorities?

7. In relating to the governing authorities and society more generally, what else (in addition to submitting to the earthly authorities) are Christians to do in these passages? How might this shape how we talk with those who differ from us politically.

**Read John 19:8-11 and Acts 4:23-29**

8. In the face of unjust authority how does Jesus and, later his disciples, act?

**Read Matthew 28:16-20 and John 18:36**

9. How does the church differ from governmental authorities in terms of nature and purpose?

**Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-13**

10. Why does Paul not want to judge or impose Christian ethics on those outside the church?

11. How might this help us navigate the difference between how we're to act in the church toward believers and how we're to act and interact with broader society?



## Apply

12. How might submitting to the earthly authorities in modern day democratic Australia differ from submitting to the Roman empire?

## Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2

13. How might this passage apply to a modern day Christian?

14. What should Christians desire from their government?

15. Thinking through all of the passages we have looked at, what tone ought we have as we speak about those in government today?

*It seems the purpose of government according to God's counsel is not to be a vehicle to impose Christian morality on society as a whole but rather to maintain justice and peace as a context for the church and Christians more generally to live out their faith and fulfill our mission of disciple making.*

## Pray

# 2 Does it clash with dreamtime?

## Acts 17:16-34

### Read and discuss

*"The traditional custodians of the Townsville area are the Bindal and Wulgurukaba people, and the language of the traditional custodians is the Birrigubba language. "Wadda Mooli" is Birrigubba language meaning greetings such as "hello, goodbye, or welcome".*

*The Bindal people call their country Thul Garrie Waja. An important symbol for the Bindal people is the shooting star. They believe that wherever the star fell or the direction the star fell there was either danger coming from that direction or someone from the direction was in need of help or in danger.*

*The Wulgurukaba people call their country Gurrumbilbarra. Wulgurukaba means "canoe people". An important symbol for the Wulgurukaba people is the carpet snake. The creation story tells of the creation snake that comes down from the Herbert River (Ingham area), went outside to sea creating the Hinchinbrook channel and down to Palm and Magnetic Islands. His body broke up leaving parts along the coast. The tail of the snake is at Halifax Bay; his body is at Palm Island; and his head rests at Arcadia on Magnetic Island."*

*This information is copied from the following website: <https://www.townsvillenaidoc.com.au/about>*

What connections do you have to local Aboriginal people?

What do you know about their dreamtime or the dreamtime in general?

I have spoken to a number of Aboriginal people about the dreamtime. The dreamtime explains creation but it is more than that, it is still happening today. Different tribes have different dreamtime stories and even different individuals have different dreamtime experiences. Two of the aboriginals I spoke to that are not Christians, strongly believe that dreamtime explains creation, they are not just stories that teach cultural values. The other two aboriginals I spoke to are Christians and so the dreamtime is part of their history but they 100% believe that God made the world. So as we dig into this study it is not a heartless study condemning some people for their beliefs. We want to know the truth but we want to think about it in a loving way.

## **Read Psalm 19:1-6**

1. From the verses you have just read, what does creation tell us?

*Theologians call the information that we gather from creation—general revelation. Creation tells us something about the Creator. It points to a Creator, but if we want to know exactly what that Creator is like or have an intimate relationship with them, then we need to know more information. We need the Creator to specifically reveal himself to us. Theologians call this special revelation. In the rest of Psalm 19 David goes on to talk about special revelation, he goes on to talk about how God reveals himself to us in his word, the Scriptures.*

## **Read Psalm 19:7-14**

2. A quick note. The reference to the Law of the LORD is not a reference to the 10 commandments, it is a reference to the Torah—the first 5 books of the Old Testament, all that David had. Why does David love God's word?

*God's word is amazing, it's an amazing gift to us. It tells us how we can have a relationship with our Creator. But there is something even more amazing. The Word became flesh. The Word dwelled among us. Jesus is God in the flesh and this is made really clear in John 1:1-18. And it's really Jesus' resurrection that affirms that he is God in the flesh and worth listening to.*

## **Read Acts 17:16-34**

3. The Areopagus could be a council of people or a place or both. It was a place to consider new ideas. Why did Paul take the chance to talk at the Areopagus? (16-21)

4. Summarise what he said to the Areopagus.

5. What is Paul's conclusion?



*I think the vibe of what Paul is saying, is that God has stepped into this world and revealed himself to us in his Son. And one day he is going to judge the world and so we should believe in his Son. He has given proof of all of this by raising Jesus back to life.*

6. How does what Paul is saying here relate to the dreamtime?

## Apply

7. Do you think it is possible to believe in both the dreamtime and the God of the Bible? Explain your answer.

8. How can we help Aboriginal people to be in a relationship with their Creator?

9. What barriers are there to sharing the gospel with Aboriginal people?

10. How can we overcome these barriers together?

11. Should Christians be involved in smoking ceremonies?

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12. Should Christians be involved in sharing Creation stories?

## Pray

ONE BLOOD

200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity: a story of hope



JOHN HARRIS

## Further reading

### One Blood

This is a great book. Although it is hard to read. It is big (I never made it to the end—still hope to) and it deals with some weighty topics. The first Christians didn't do a great job, they confused being Christian with being British. But one thing they did which the rest of the general population didn't do was they

treated the Aboriginal people as humans, people needing to hear about Jesus.

# 3 Is gambling ok?

Luke 12:13-34

## Read and discuss: Gambling in Australia

According to the most recent 'Australian Gambling Statistics' report (the 37th edition), 73% of all gambling turnover in 2020 (about \$124 billion) was generated via the pokies. The next biggest was about 13% from wagering/betting (\$22.5 billion). In 2020 there were around 19 million adults in Australia. Approximately 6 million of them played the pokies. That means 6 million people spent \$124 billion on the pokies. That's a staggering average of \$21,000 per player per annum (\$398/wk). Of the \$124 billion put through the pokies, only \$114 billion came back out. That means 6 million Australians lost \$10 billion dollars on the pokies in 2020—that's an average loss of around \$1700 per player per year. The reality is, many people would be losing a lot more than that, and many a lot less. Of that \$10 billion lost on the pokies, the government collected over \$3 billion. That represents about 20% of the amount collected from mining royalties (as a comparison). So gambling revenue is no small thing for the Australian government. Gambling, particularly on the pokies, is a complex societal issue.

## Explore

### Read Jonah 1:6-7, Matthew 27:35 and Acts 1:23-26

1. We don't really know what 'lots' were. They could've been different sized sticks (like drawing straws) or flat stones with one side being marked differently to the other, or some form of dice. The three passages above show 3 different settings/purposes for casting lots. What do we learn about casting lots here?

2. Do these passages help us to determine whether or not it is okay for Christians to gamble? Explain your answer.

3. Isaiah 65:11 is the primary passage that people use to say that gambling is explicitly condemned by God. Do you think this verse is substantial enough to say Christians should not gamble?

**Read 1 John 3:16-18**

4. Describe in detail what this passage is calling Christians to do.

5. What reason/motivation does John give for Christians to live like this?

6. *Have you ever considered how gambling works? A raffle involves a prize given by the organiser (either paid for or donated) aimed at tempting people into buying a ticket in order to raise funds for a purpose. The premise of the raffle and the hope of the organiser is that the majority of the people who invest in tickets will lose. For someone to win, their neighbours must lose. With sports betting a bookmaker offers a certain return for a particular outcome. They might offer 3 dollars return for every 1 dollar invested if the blue team beats the red team. The return to investment ratio is called the 'odds'. In this case the odds are 3/1. The bookmaker tries to make the odds attractive to lure as many investors as possible, but they also want to ensure they make a profit, so they won't make the odds too high on the team they think will win. They will make the odds higher on the team they think will lose, in order to tempt you to risk investing in the loser. If you place a bet with a bookmaker and you win, your winnings come from your neighbours who have bet on losing alternative competitors and/or from the pocket of the bookmaker. Unless everyone has mutually agreed that they would love to lose to support the cause (like a school raffle maybe) it is difficult to conceive of a kind of gambling where you winning does not involve your neighbour losing.*

Do you think it is possible to love others in the way John describes in the passage above by gambling? Discuss.

**7.** In Australia around 46% of people who gamble are classified as being at some risk of harm from gambling (AGRC snapshot 2023). This harm includes relational, financial and psychological among others. How might we be able to love these people who are at risk of harm from gambling?

**Read Luke 12:13-34**

**8.** What motivated all the actions of the rich man in the parable?

**9.** According to verses 22-34, what ought to motivate the people of God?

**10.** What are the two kinds of treasure this passage refers to (see verses 32-34)? What difference will it make to the way we live if we pursue one or the other?

**11.** What do you think motivates people to buy a scratchy, or a lottery ticket, or to have a go on the pokies?

**12.** What is the difference between buying a \$10 lottery ticket and paying for \$10 monthly subscription to Netflix. Aren't they both entertainment?

## Read Romans 14:1-4

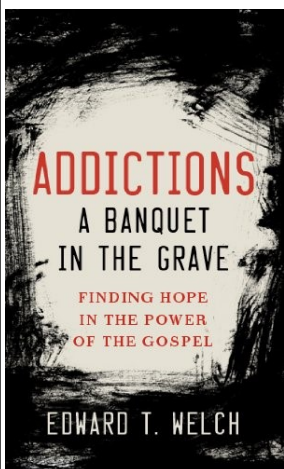
**13.** Because of the lack of explicit biblical condemnation of gambling (unlike murder, stealing, etc), the reasons we give not to gamble come from constructed theological arguments. For this reason, the Christian ethical position on gambling can have different shades of grey as opposed to black and white. Do you think Christians can justify any kind of gambling? Is it a 'disputable matter'?

**14.** How ought we regard a Christian brother or sister who buys a ticket in a raffle to support a local group, or participates in a Melbourne cup sweep?

**15.** How can we help a friend who is struggling with gambling addiction?

## Pray

### Further reading



#### **Addiction: A Banquet in the grave**

A worship disorder: this is how Edward T. Welch views addictions. "Will we worship our own desires or will we worship the true God?" With this lens the author discovers far more in Scripture on addictions than passages on drunkenness. There we learn the addict's true condition: like guests at a banquet thrown by "the woman Folly," he is already in the grave (Proverbs 9:13-18). Can we not escape our addictions? If we're willing to follow Jesus, the author says that we have "immense hope: hope in God's forgiving grace, hope in God's love that is faithful even when we are not, and hope that God can give power so that we are no longer mastered by the addiction." Each chapter concludes with "Practical Theology," "As Your Face Your Own Addictions," and "As You Help Someone Else."

# 4 What is God's will for my life?

## Hebrews 1:1-3

### Read and Discuss

*Does God speak to us in our dreams? Recently I listened to a Podcast by John Dickson on dreams. You can find it in Spotify if you look up 'Undeceptions' and it's the episode called 'Decoding Dreams'. I actually remember having a recurring dream in the share house I lived in at Lismore. Something would always come down the hall and get me but I never saw what it was. Was God trying to tell me something?*

*How do we know what God's will is for our lives? Will we have dreams about it, warm feelings or wet blankets like Gideon? The podcast concludes that God doesn't really talk to us in dreams, although there is an exception. In places where God's word the Bible is absent it seems like God uses any means, like dreams to help people to believe in his Son. Many Muslims in countries like Iran are coming to Jesus through dreams. But in Australia, in Kirwan God doesn't promise to talk to us in dreams or feelings or by special voices, he promises to talk to us by his Son - in the Bible.*

How do the above two paragraphs make you feel?

### Explore

#### Read Hebrews 1:1-3

1. How has God spoken in the past?
2. How has God spoken in the last days (the time between Jesus' first appearance and his return)?
3. How/what has God spoken to us by Jesus?

4. Who is Jesus?

5. Where is Jesus now and what assurance does that give us?

**Read John 3:16**

6. What does God ultimately want us to do?

7. What happens if we do this? What happens if we don't do this?

**Read Matthew 28:18-20**

8. What does God want us to do with our lives?

**Read Romans 8:28-30**

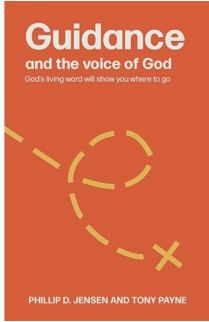
9. What do these verses tell us about God's plan for his people?

So ultimately what is God's will for your life? It is to trust in his Son and to tell others about him. **THAT IS ULTIMATELY WHAT GOD WANTS YOU TO DO IN THIS LIFE.** We are also to know that along the way through all that happens, God will be shaping his people to be like his Son.



## Apply

### Guidance and the voice of God



A book that deals with this topic really well, is the one on the left. I found it really helpful to read. After making it clear that God speaks to us through his Son in Scripture by the help of the Spirit. And that it is super important for us to listen to and trust in the Son. There is a chapter that deals with the idea of what the individual should do with their life and they have three helpful categories. 1) Matters of righteousness - this category deals with issues that are black and white in Scripture. Should I commit adultery? No, God's word makes it super clear that this is not how he wants married people to live. This category is about things that God's word has made super clear, these are matters of righteousness. 2) Matters of judgment—this category deals with issues that call for wisdom. Should you get married? Well 1 Corinthians 7 presents arguments either way, you will need to use wisdom to work out which way you should go. Can you happily remain single? Great, use your life to serve the Lord well. However, if you think the desire to get married is going to be so strong that it's going to be overwhelming, then get married to a Christian and use your marriage to serve Jesus. 3) Matters of triviality—this category is about things that don't really matter. These are not matters of righteousness nor is one path necessarily any better than the other. An example could be a pair of shoes that are similarly priced. Just choose the ones that are comfy and you like and move on with your life.

The chapter concludes with an analogy for the Christian life. The Christian life is more like following a compass than following a detailed map. It's not about following the map exactly, it's about living a life that is continually moving towards Jesus and living a life that is pleasing to him. Read the book.

10. Think about a decision that you are currently trying to make. Give yourself 5 minutes to think about the decision with the info you have gained from this study. What new insights do you have to your decision?

## PRAY

# 5 What does it say about sex?

## Genesis 1:26-28

### Read and discuss: Sex and faith

While all religions have a degree of diversity within them, we may make some *generalisations about the mainstream view* on sex within major world faith groups.

**Hinduism:** It's very hard to pin Hinduism down, but generally speaking sex is beautiful and pleasurable if done in the harmonious (sattvic) way, that is within marriage with procreation in view. Sex purely for lust seems to be dangerous and not okay. Some Hindus believe sex is a distraction from spiritual enlightenment. Homosexuality is allowed to some extent in Hinduism, but not sex between two females.

**Buddhism:** According to the book 'Buddhist Ethics: A very short introduction', marriage is seen as inferior to a life of celibacy. Classical teachings reiterated by the Dalai Lama appear to favour reproductive over non-reproductive sex acts. Homosexuality and transgenderism are not prohibited by Buddhist teaching, and are sometimes seen as the past life's gender asserting itself over the present. Although, historically the Buddhist approach to non-standard sexual practices has been 'tolerance yet unacceptance'.

**Islam:** Extra-marital sex is prohibited (except prior to the abolition of slavery concubinage was legally allowed outside marriage in Islamic law). Homosexuality is forbidden.

### Explore

#### Read Genesis 1:26-28

1. Notice the order in this passage. God didn't make them 'male and female' in order that they could reproduce. God is God, he could've made two males to reproduce asexually or two females to reproduce asexually. But he chose not to do that—**that would not have displayed his image. His primary purpose was not that the humans would reproduce, but that they would bear his image—that they would be made in his image.** There is something unique to a woman's woman-ness and a man's man-ness and the way the two relate together **that bears the image of God** to his creation. For me this says something beautiful about the unique worth of the male and the female in the eyes of their creator. It says something beautiful about the complimentary nature of their relationship together as they bear God's image. What is the first thing God commands his image bearers to do?

2. By what means will his image bearers fruitfully increase in number?

**Read Genesis 2:18-25**

3. In this section we zoom in on the account of the creation of the first man and the first woman. In v 18 we see the only mention of something being 'not good' in Genesis 1 and 2. In light of what we discussed in question 1 above, why is it 'not good' for the man to be alone?

4. How is this 'not good-ness' resolved in this passage?

5. With the knowledge that the man and the woman have the responsibility of fruitful multiplication from chapter 1, what is the framework/entity 2:24-25 gives them for this fruitful multiplication to happen in? Do you think this union is part of displaying God's image?

*We learn in Genesis 3 that this beautiful image bearing relationship quickly becomes corrupted by sin—a desire to turn from the loving Creator. It is such a tragedy. We are told in 3:16 that the very thing the man and woman were commanded to do—multiply— is now cursed. Either their sex won't work properly, or their bodies won't work properly, or they won't meet their complimentary companion, and when they do the relationship will not bear naked shamelessness but desire and oppression. This is the picture of the male and female that has unfortunately played out throughout the Old Testament and throughout our world since Genesis 3. There are still glimpses of the image of God in our relationships/sex/maleness and femaleness, but the image is marred.*

**Read Genesis 4:19, 11:29-30, 19:4-9, 19:33-36, 34:1-2, 38:6-10, 38:15-17, 39:6-10**

**6.** This is the world post Genesis 3. We are not even to the end of Genesis and it seems like sex and marriage are completely corrupted—it gets way worse after this! What do we learn from these passages about sex and marriage in the fallen world? What has happened to God's image bearers?

**Read Colossians 1:15-23**

**7.** God's image bearers failed, and their fruitful multiplication turned into a multiplication of corruption. Rather than the fruitful multiplication of the man and woman and their relationship with one another, where can we see God's image now and how can we bear God's image now?

**8.** What hope does this passage offer people like you and me who have fundamentally failed our creator?

**9.** Do we need to have sex or be married to fulfill our created purpose anymore? Explain your answer.

**10.** How has the world (secular society) led us to believe that if we are not having sex we are barely human? How can we retrain our brains to human=Jesus, not human=sex?

**Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9**

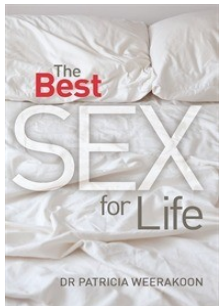
**11.** Even though it may not be essential to our identity, sex is still good and we still from time to time have legitimate erotic desires. Where should Christians look for satisfaction of their legitimate erotic desires?

**12.** Unfortunately we will never return to the naked and shameless perfect union that existed in Genesis 2—sin has shifted sexual perfection out of reach in this world. But discuss how a Christian couple may be able to best bear God’s image to one another in their one flesh union.

**13.** What can/should single Christians do with their legitimate erotic desires?

## Pray

### Further reading



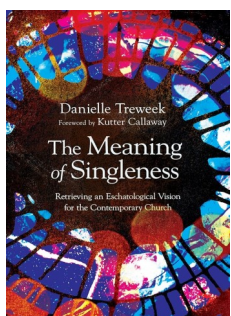
#### **The best sex for life: Patricia Weerakoon**

A good marriage includes a happy and fulfilling sex life - that's the way God planned it!

The world would have us believe that we're entitled to sex that's frequent, exciting and orgasmic. And if it's not, it's usually our spouse's fault, and we should look elsewhere.

Whether you're feeling dissatisfied or simply looking for some extra spice, "The Best Sex for Life" will help you to understand God's purpose for sexuality and to shift your approach to intimacy. It discusses day-to-day activities plus hot topics like premarital sex, infidelity, pornography, sex toys, sexual dysfunctions and variant sexual practices.

No matter whether you are engaged, a newlywed or have been married for many years, discover how to have the best sex for life!



#### **The meaning of singleness: Dani Treweek**

Treweek examines Christian singleness in her demanding and meticulous debut.

Though Christian culture has sometimes viewed being unmarried as a “deficiency,” Treweek argues a more complicated “theology of singleness” can be part of a religiously rich Christian life.

# 6 How to rest and holiday well

## Matthew 1:28-30

### Read and discuss

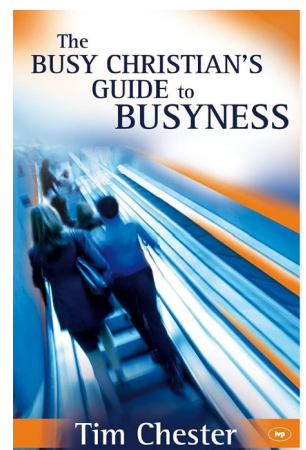
Take 5 minutes to write down your ideal holiday. Where would you go? What would you do? Who would you take? Write it down. But then think through how this holiday would help you to have rest for your soul.

### Explore

#### Read Matthew 11:28-30

1. What does Jesus promise to give the weary and burdened, if they come to him?
2. What do you think Jesus means by the phrase 'rest for our souls'?
3. What do you think Jesus means by saying his yoke is easy and his burden is light?

*If we want to have rest in all of our lives and forever—we need to come to Jesus. We will not find true rest—until we know that Jesus' blood is the only thing that can pay for sin and wash us clean. It's not about us trying to wash ourselves clean with good works and clean living. It's simply about coming to Jesus and trusting in him. I think why I often feel really busy and pressured is because I haven't completely understood the gospel. I am still trying to justify my existence to God and others. Jesus' death on the cross for me, means I don't have to do this. Jesus loves me more than I can imagine, even when I was at my worst. In Jesus I can find rest for my restless soul. If you want to think more about this read the book inserted into this text. It's a little old but it's good.*



## Read Genesis 2:2

4. Genesis 1 and 2 and parts of 3 are describing the world in a pre-fallen state. But did you notice God is working in a pre-fallen world. There is a relationship between work and rest and this is picked up in the 10 commandments (not binding on us as Christians but wisdom for us). Now the fall obviously affects our work but there seems to be a relationship between work and rest. You can't enjoy good rest without work. How do you feel about that? How do you feel about the fact that we will probably work in heaven? The Hebrew word used for work in Genesis 2:15 can mean work, serve or worship.

## Read Mark 2:23-28

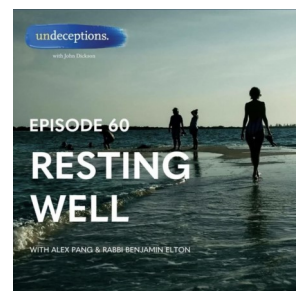
5. It was a big thing for the Jews to rest on the Sabbath. In fact the Pharisees had made up 39 rules to make sure you didn't do any work on the Sabbath (it sounds exhausting trying to remember them all). But Jesus says something very interesting about the Sabbath. What is it?

## Read Colossians 2:16-17

6. What does the Sabbath day point to?

7. From the Mark passage and the Colossians passage, do you think we have to follow the Sabbath or is it something that might be wise for us to do but not necessary? Explain your answer.

*One of the things I found helpful as I was thinking about rest was an "Undeceptions Podcast" called "Resting Well". It highlighted that we are more likely to enjoy life, enjoy work, be effective, enjoy our relationship with God and serving him, if we rest regularly. Taking a weekly day off may be a great way to do this. You don't have to, but when you do it points to the ultimate rest we have in Jesus. It also shows our dependence on God. We can rest because we are not God and he is in control. He is always working away in the background to bring about his plans. Not resting can show we don't trust God. On the podcast Alex Pang said that research has found that there seems to be an optimum time and rhythm to holidays. On day 8 of a holiday we reach peak happiness and this happiness lasts about 3 months. So if we have four holidays equally spaced throughout the year for a period of 7-10 days that will be one factor that could help us to really enjoy this life. But maybe more than that—help us to enjoy our Creator and to enjoy serving him.*





## Apply

8. Do you enjoy the rest that Jesus offers? Explain your answer.

9. Do you have a regular day of rest? Why/why not?

10. Have you ever spent time being strategic with planning your holidays?

11. Spend some time thinking through your holidays for 2024.

- When could you have them to enjoy the most benefit?
- Could you include other people in your holidays (maybe single people or family or friends?)
- Could you have a holiday just with your family to strengthen bonds?
- Could you use one of your holidays to serve others?

It is well worth spending some time thinking through how to rest well. It might change your life. I also reckon you are doing yourself a disservice to not listen to the Undeceptions podcast on **Resting Well**.

## Pray

# 7 The gender agenda

## Genesis 1:26-28

### Read and discuss: The trickle effect of one bloke's idea

In 1641 Renee Descartes published his meditations on philosophy. Descartes put forward that perfect knowledge only exists if we have no reason to doubt it. So he systematically went through and proved that almost everything could be doubted. The only perfect knowledge can be that we exist—because we think we exist, we must exist! Even if we are being deceived into thinking we exist, because we're thinking at all, we still exist. Later on Descartes summed this philosophy up with the phrase, "I think, therefore I am".

Descartes' thinking led to a radical shift in the history of philosophy. Rather than debating "what is true", Descartes asked "of what can I be certain?". Absolute truth became a thing of the past. This thinking removed the authority of various bodies (particularly the Church) to claim truth and instead showed how certainty relies on our individual judgements. If it is true for you, that is as reliable as truth can be. Now, "many people take for granted that our inner feelings tell us who we really are. Nothing and nobody else has authority to contradict those feelings—not my family, not the biology of my body, and least of all some God or religious text. Everybody else has a moral obligation to recognize, celebrate and nurture those inner feelings. If they don't, they're denying 'my truth' oppressing 'me'."<sup>1</sup>

### Explore

**Read Genesis 1:26-28, 1:31, 2:7, 2:21-22 and Psalm 139:13-16**

1. What do we learn from these passages about our bodies?
2. Do you think making two different sexes was intentional? Why?

*We saw in study 5 that this beautiful intentional maleness and femaleness was meant to perfectly display the image of God. But we don't see it. We learned in study 5 that our decision to be the ones who determine the truth (rather than God), our sin, has placed the world under God's curse. Now, things are distorted. Men and women don't relate to each other properly, our reproductive systems are broken—things are disordered. The maleness and femaleness we see is a shattered image of what it was originally intended to be, as the passages below show.*

<sup>1</sup> This last quote is from "The Gender Revolution : A biblical, biological and compassionate response", Weerakoon & Smith, 2023.

**Read Romans 1:21-28, Deuteronomy 22:5, 23:1 and Matthew 19:12**

**3.** What do these passages tell us about the state of our maleness and femaleness after God cursed sinful humans (i.e. Genesis 3 when 'God gave them over')?

*The Matthew passage above says that some are born Eunuchs. This means that there is some kind of biological difference in the make up of their genitalia. When a person's biological sex does not fit into the normal binary pattern, it's called a disorder of sex development (DSD). DSDs are also called 'intersex' conditions. Disordered development of our bodies takes on all kinds of non-sex manifestations in our post fall world as well. As we consider gender and identity, it is important for us to understand that the large majority of people with intersex conditions are not usually confused about their gender, even though they may need similar surgical or hormonal treatment that a transgender person chooses.*

**Read Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:21-23 and John 2:24-25**

**4.** Gender dysphoria is the experience of distress caused by the disjunction between one's feelings and the reality of their body. The distress is real, and the solution our society is currently offering is to support people to shape their bodies according to their internal desire—to shape the body not according to biology, but the heart. What do these passages tell us about the human heart and whether or not it should be followed?

**Read Romans 5:1-8**

**5.** Where can we find peace in the face of our distress according to this passage? Explain your answer.

**6.** What have our hearts been filled with if we have come to faith in Jesus?

**7.** How could this passage offer peace to someone who struggles with gender dysphoria—or for that matter any internal conflict?

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-52**

**8.** Since the fall our bodies have not borne the image of God as they were intended to. What does this passage tell us will be the future of our bodies and our image bearing if our faith is in the resurrected Lord Jesus?

**9.** What hope does this give us as we suffer distress over our bodies today?

**Read Galatians 5:13-26**

**10.** Rather than being guided by our hearts, what are we to be guided by now as we wait for the day when our bodies will be renewed?

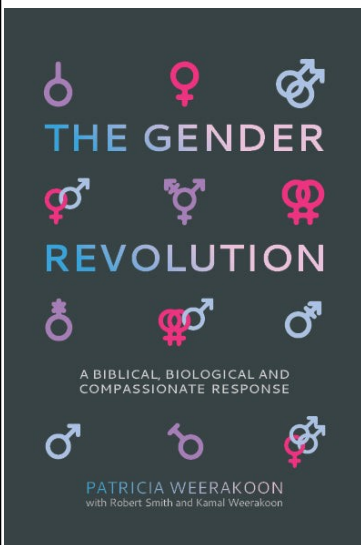
**11.** When we put our faith in Christ and receive the Spirit, what will the rest of our days in this body of flesh be like according to verses 16 to 18?

**12.** Rather than letting our inner self rule our life, what characteristic does verse 23 say the Christian ought to pursue?

**13.** Over the course of the last decade as transgender ideology has roared to the fore in Australian society, Christians have publicly responded with a strong voice against things like the safe schools program which promotes trans ideology in the schools. But as we seek to love the people of our world and bring them to bear the beautiful image of the maleness and femaleness they were made for, what message ought to be coming from us to the trans community, to those struggling with gender dysphoria and to our world?

## Pray

### Further reading



#### **The gender revolution: A biblical, biological and compassionate response**

How can you show love to someone who feels that their gender identity does not match how God made them—especially amid loud social messaging that says compassion and disagreement are incompatible? How do we keep the conversation grounded in reality? How do we lead others away from the harmful desire to transform their body into something it can never truly be? Why would hearing an explanation of God’s design for our bodies and his guidance for sexual expression be good for them, and how could you possibly begin that conversation?

Transgender ideology has quickly become pervasive in our broader culture, and many Christians prefer to avoid issues of sex and gender altogether. But if we’re not prepared in advance to show care and compassion to people questioning their gender identity or declaring a new one, we are unlikely to do it well when the moment arrives (as it inevitably will). The Gender Revolution provides the biblical basis for a contemporary Christian response to the complicated feelings and experiences of gender dysphoria. Grounded in the latest scientific findings, this much-needed book is the fruit of decades of thorough research, medical practice and pastoral experience from the authors. It offers clear and compelling reasons for why God’s voice matters, and how it can be used to disciple others in truth.



# Earning, spending, saving, investing

Philippians 4:10-13

## Read and discuss

Almost 2.2 million Australians are millionaires after soaring asset prices pushed another 390,000 adults onto the [top rungs of the global wealth ladder](#), according to a report by Credit Suisse that says Australians are the richest people in the world.

The figure probably marks a near-term peak for Australia, as [falling property prices](#) are poised to drag on Australians' paper wealth this year.

The median Australian adult finished 2021 with a net worth of \$US273,900, making them richer than the comparable resident of any other country, according to Credit Suisse's annual global wealth report. <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/australians-are-the-world-s-richest-people-20220920-p5bjg4>

Do you consider yourself rich? Why or why not?

## Explore

### Read Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5

1. Both of these passages indicate that greed is a form of idolatry. What is idolatry? Why is greed idolatry?

### Read Mathew 6:24

2. What does this verse tell us the problem with money is?

3. Do you have a problem with money or greed? Spend a few minutes thinking it through and share with the group.

*I honestly think we all struggle with greed in some form or another. If you think you are clean, please come and have a chat with me (Simon) :). So if this is something that we all struggle with and something that we need to stop making an acceptable sin, God's word clearly says it's super dangerous. How do we fight it? Please read the next passage.*

### **Read Philippians 4:10-13**

4. What has Paul learned?

5. What is the solution to being content whether you have plenty or are in want?

6. What is verse 13 actually talking about?

### **Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19**

7. Remember that we are some of the richest people in the world. What command does Paul have for those who are rich?

### **Apply**

8. What does your **earning** suggest about who or what you trust in? Why do you do what you do?



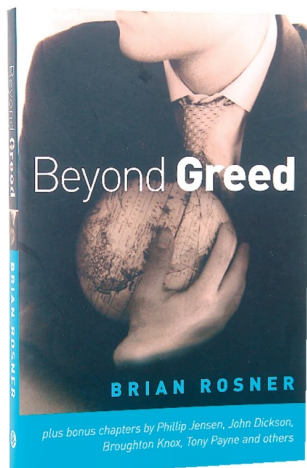
9. What does your **spending** suggest about who or what you trust in? Why did you buy your most recent purchase?

10. What does your **saving** suggest about who or what you trust in? What are you saving for?

11. What does your **investing** suggest about who or what you trust in? If you have investments why do you have them?

Pray

### Further reading



#### Beyond greed

This is an old but helpful book. It outlines the problem of Greed and also the solution to it. It also has some really helpful appendices as well. It's definitely worth a look. Here is a quote from the book, where Rosner is actually quoting Martyn Lloyd-Jones *"anything that you and I tend to set up as the big thing, the central thing, in our lives, the thing about which we think and dream, the thing that engages our imagination, the thing we live for, the thing that gives us the biggest thrill, if it is anything other than God, it is idolatry."* Here is another quote I like. *"What we politely call 'getting something behind us', 'moving up', 'becoming more comfortable' or 'improving our circumstances' is often a thin disguise for the fact that we are "in love with this world" (2 Timothy 4:10).*

# 9

# Beer, Wine & Spirits: Yes or No?

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

## Read and Discuss

In Australia the National Health and Medical research Council (NHMRC) released a guideline in 2020 to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. The guideline states:

**‘To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol’**

The 2020-2021 National Health Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) gives us a bit of a snapshot of Australian’s consumption of Alcohol compared to these health guidelines.

- 25.8% of people aged 18 years and over exceeded these guidelines
- Men were more likely to exceed the guideline than women (33.6% compared to 18.5%)
- People aged 18-24 years were more than three times as likely as those aged 75 years and over to have consumed 5 or more standard drinks on any day in the last year at least monthly (22.0% compared to 6.5%).
- People aged 18 years and over born in Australia were almost twice as likely as those born overseas to exceed the guideline (30% compared to 17.3%)
- People employed full time were twice as likely as those who were unemployed to have exceeded the guideline (32.0% compared to 16.8%)
- People living in areas of least disadvantage were more likely than those living in areas of most disadvantage to exceed the guideline (30.7% compared to 18.5%)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-21), [Alcohol consumption](#), ABS Website, accessed 21 September 2023.

The WHO notes in it’s paper on Alcohol that:

- The harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions.
- Worldwide, 3 million deaths every year result from harmful use of alcohol. This represents 5.3% of all deaths.
- Overall, 5.1% of the global burden of disease and injury is attributable to alcohol, as measured in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).
- Alcohol consumption causes death and disability relatively early in life. In people aged 20 –39 years, approximately 13.5% of total deaths are attributable to alcohol.

## Explore

**Read Psalm 104:14-15,**

1. What seems to be God's purpose in creating wine and by extension alcohol?

**Proverbs 9:1-6, Isaiah 25:6 and Luke 7:33-34 (See also John 2)**

2. How do these passages describe wine and by extension alcohol more broadly?

**Read Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 31:4-7,**

3. Like all the good gifts of God alcohol can be abused. What are some of the dangers that alcohol presents in these passages?

**Read Ephesians 5:15-18 and Romans 13:12-14**

4. What are we to avoid when it comes to alcohol?

5. Could this include completely abstaining from alcohol? Could this include drinking in a self-controlled and responsible way?

6. What instead are we to pursue? Why?

*So it seems like alcohol is a gift from God to gladden human hearts but unfortunately, for sinful humanity, it is all too easily abused and can lead to further sin and harm to oneself and others. It seems clear that getting drunk is off limits for Christians but that still leaves significant grey area for how Christians can responsibly use alcohol. So, let's consider and explore what might be wise in our current context.*

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Romans 14:19-21**

7. What guiding principals does this passage give us for deciding on a wise use of alcohol or not?

**Read 1 Cor 9:22-23, 1 Peter 4:1-6**

8. In a culture where drinking is a social norm, could there be a place for self-controlled responsible drinking?

9. In a culture in which problematic drinking is rife could there be instead a place for abstinence?

10. Given the health implications and guidelines, along with these other wisdom considerations, what do you think is the wisest use of alcohol for you in your circumstances and tendencies?

11. It seems like there is good biblical warrant for both abstinence and self-controlled responsible drinking. How then should we relate to those who choose differently to us?

**Pray**

# 10

## Attraction

Romans 1:18-27

### Read and discuss: Attraction versus action

According to the Second Australian Study of Health and Relationships conducted about 10 years ago in 2013, 3.2% of men and 3.8% of women identified as homosexual or bisexual (that is for 16 to 59 year olds). At the same time however, 7.7% of men and 16.3% of women claimed to have some degree of sexual attraction to the same sex. That means that 4.5% of men and 12.5% of women who identified as heterosexual also found themselves feeling sexually attracted to members of the same sex. 10 years later in a society where freedom of sexuality is embraced and endorsed, one would only expect these figures to have increased. What is interesting about these figures (among many things) is that between the first study conducted in 2002 and the second study conducted in 2013, the rate of increase in same sex attractedness increased 4 times faster for women than men. That means either women are increasingly finding themselves sexually attracted to members of the same sex at a faster rate than men, or they feel more comfortable admitting it as society changes, or they feel more obliged to say they are attracted to other women as society changes. Only God knows.

### Explore

**Read Revelation 4:9-11, Genesis 1:31 and Ecclesiastes 3:11**

1. What do these passages tell us about God's creation?

**Read Genesis 2:22-25**

2. How would you describe the man's response to the woman when he first saw her?

3. If we say something is 'attractive' we mean it evokes interest, liking or desire (Oxford). If we say someone is 'sexually attractive' we mean they evoke sexual interest, sexual like or sexual desire. Does the passage say God made the man and the woman to be sexually attracted to each other? What would draw them together to be united in one flesh?

4. How/in what context did God make them to express their sexual attraction?

### **Read Genesis 3:1-7**

**5.** The woman's response to the serpent in verse 3 misrepresents God and makes him out to be stricter than he actually is (see 2:17). What might this tell us about the woman's perception of living under God's authority?

**6.** The woman finds the fruit 'pleasing to the eye' according to verse 6. We would say she was attracted to it (not sexually!). We know that the word for Eden (the garden where the tree was situated) means 'delight'. We also know that God made his creation 'very good' from Genesis 1:31. In light of that, do you think the woman is sinning by finding the fruit pleasing to the eye? Explain your answer.

**7.** What does the woman do with her attraction to the fruit?

**8.** In Genesis 2:25 when the man and the woman stood before one another they felt no shame. It's quite possible that they found each other 'pleasing to the eye' and praised God for what they were looking at, with little consideration of how they themselves appeared in the eyes of the other. Rather than praising God for the beauty of the other, now that they've rejected God what is their response to their nakedness in verse 7?

**9.** Do you think that we sometimes overstate the strictness of God's commands—especially when it comes to observing the beautiful things he has made? Give some examples.

**10.** Do you think, like Adam and Eve, we've become more obsessed with our own image than the beauty of those around us?

### **Read 1 Peter 3:1-4**

**11.** So far we've talked about physical beauty and attraction to things that are 'pleasing to the eye'. What other kind of beauty is on display in this passage?

**12.** Sometimes we say that women are attracted to personality but men are attracted to the physical. What does this passage have to say about that?

**13.** Often we spend a lot of time trying to make ourselves look good for others (which is possibly to do with question 10 above). What kind of beauty are we to be concerned with fostering in ourselves and how can we work on that?

*We learned from the Revelation passage at the beginning of this study that the beauty of God's creation/creatures is cause for praising him. We've also seen that the right place for outwardly expressing our sexual attraction to someone is in the context of marriage. And we've seen, rather than acknowledging God's goodness in creating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and giving thanks to him, Eve took it and used it to rebel against God. Look at these passages to see what happens when we find something attractive and take it for ourselves rather than praise God for it:*

**Read 2 Samuel 11:2-4, 12:9-10**

**14.** What does David do with his physical attraction here?

**Read Romans 1:21-28**

**15.** According to verse 21, what does it say humanity did not do? How is this consistent with what we just read about David and Eve?

**16.** As a consequence of this disordered praising of the creature instead of the creator, we're told in verse 24, 26 and 28 that God gave us over to disordered desires, lusts and minds. What shameful lusts has God given us over to according to verse 26 and 27, and how do these lusts differ from the sexual attraction we were made for in the beginning?

**17.** What were the consequences of people acting on these shameful lusts that God gave them over to?

**18.** All of humanity suppresses the truth about God, that's the point of this passage (see Romans 3:10-20 for example). Since the fall (since we exchanged worship of the creator for worship of the creatures) we have no longer been able to 'not sin'. We are what theologians call 'totally depraved'. God has given us over to sinful desires (v 24), shameful lusts (v 26), and a depraved mind (v 28). We all have disordered desires. This means we find things sexually attractive that we were not made to find sexually attractive (as in the survey at the start of this study). We take

things for ourselves that are not ours to take, with no gratitude to God. We selfishly make them our own, even though we ought to receive them with thanksgiving and praise to God. Our attraction is disordered, like everything else in this fallen world. Think of some of the disordered desires we have today (not just same sex attraction). Discuss these examples and what is hard about being a Christian with these disordered desires God has (justly) given us over to.

### **Read Romans 12:1-2**

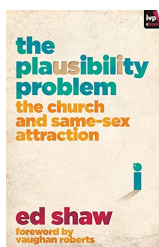
**19.** Rather than running with our disordered desires and taking things for ourselves, where can we take our disordered desires and how can we deal with them?

**20.** What happens to me if I do act on my disordered desires?

**21.** How ought you respond if you find a member of the same sex sexually attractive?

### **Pray**

#### **Further reading**



#### **The plausibility problem: The church and same-sex attraction**

It's all very well to say that the Bible is clear when it talks about homosexuality. But is it realistic? Isn't it unrealistic and unfair to those who struggle with this issue? Doesn't it condemn them to loneliness, a lack of fulfilment and the loss of basic human satisfactions like sex and marriage? Is what the church teaches a plausible way of life? Ed Shaw experiences same-sex attraction, and yet he is committed to what the Bible says and what the church has always taught about marriage and sex. In this honest book, he shares his pain in dealing with these issues - but, at the same time, shows us that obedience to Jesus is ultimately the only way to experience life to the full. He shows that the Bible's teaching seems unreasonable not because of its difficulties, but because of missteps that the church has often taken in its understanding of the Christian life. We have been shaped by the world around us, and urgently need to re-examine the values that drive our discipleship. Only by doing this in the light of the Bible, can we make sense of its call on the lives of those who are attracted to their own sex.



# 11

## What is my best life now?

Ephesians 2:1-10

### Read and discuss: What is my best life?



I remember doing 'Fundamentals of management' as part of my first university degree and looking at what motivates people. One of the tools we used to consider this was 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. Maslow basically said people are motivated by their needs, starting with simply physiological needs (e.g. I need to eat, I need to go to the toilet), all the way up to the need for 'self-actualisation' (e.g. I need to realise my potential, my purpose

in life). It is not a neat transition, but theoretically, as we meet the lower needs we move on to the higher ones. Self-actualised people are fulfilled people, people who are doing all they are capable of – they are at peace with the world and their circumstances. They may feel they are nailing their purpose in parenting, career, sport, the arts, etc. His observation was that this 'self-actualisation' was our peak need. Essentially, we all want to be the best version of ourselves – we will be most content when we have the sense that we are using our lives optimally. We can't live without bread – but bread alone will not be enough to motivate us, there is something in us that knows we ought to be the best version of ourselves.

### Explore

#### Read Genesis 1:26-28

1. According to this passage, what were our lives made to be like?

#### Read Genesis 3:16-19

2. What are our lives like instead?

**3.** Can you think of any media advertisements that tell you some form of perfection is available here on earth if you buy/try hard enough? What does Genesis 3 have to say to us about that idea?

**4.** Have you been convinced that if you try hard enough you can find the perfect life here on earth? What are some of the ways you have been caught up in pursuing the perfect life?

**Read Ephesians 2:1-10**

**5.** Despite being dead in our sins, how has God's great love given us life again?

**6.** When will we experience the rich and perfect life God made us for according to v 7?

**7.** How do we opt in to this life that God offers us?

**8.** Now that we have new life in Christ, how can we live our best life now until the Lord returns?

**9.** Will living a life of service to Christ be free from trouble and opposition prior to the return of Christ (see in particular Ephesians 5:15-16; 6:11-12, 6:19-20)? Explain your answer.

**10.** If being a Christian can be hard and bring trouble, is it really our best life? Or is there a better life we could be living? Explain your answer (see also John 3:35-36 and Philippians 1:18c-26 to help with your answer).

**11.** How can we help ourselves and each other to remember that following and serving Jesus, despite persecution, is our best possible life now?

**12.** What are some ways we can help our friends and family who don't know Jesus to see that their best life can only be found in living for him?

**Pray**

**John  
Piper**

**Don't  
Waste  
Your  
Life**

**Further reading: Don't waste your life**

The American Dream beckons people to spend their lives on trivial diversions, slipping through life caught up with seeking success, comfort, and pleasure above all else. But God designed people for far more than this. In this best-selling book, John Piper makes a passionate plea to the next generation to avoid the dangers of a wasted life, calling us to take risks and make sacrifices that matter for eternity—with a single, soul-satisfying passion for the glory of God that seeks to make much of him in every sphere of our lives

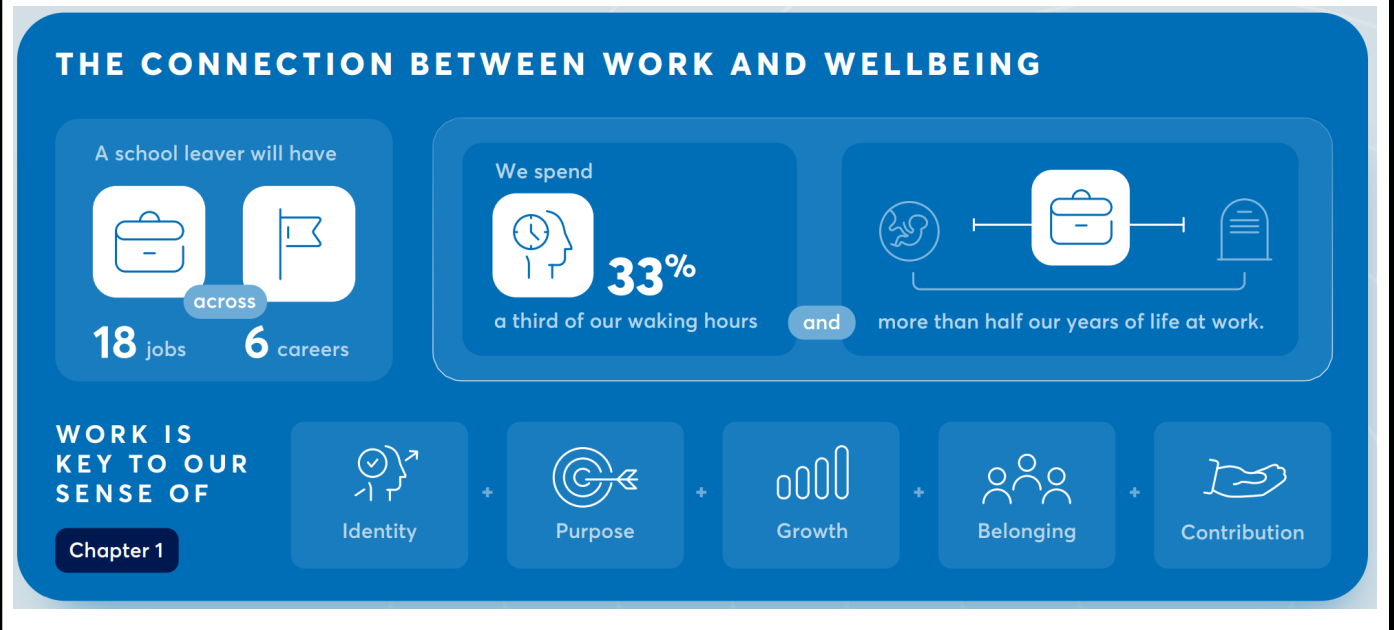
# 12

## What about my career?

Genesis 2:4-17; Colossians 3:22-25

### Read and discuss: A big part of life

The following infographic is from Mark McCrindle's book on work wellbeing.



### Explore

#### Read Genesis 2:4-17

1. What reason does verse 5 give for there being no vegetation yet, and how is this situation rectified in verse 6 and 7?

2. What does this tell us about the relationship between humanity and work?

3. The Hebrew word for work in verse 5 is עָבַד (ah-vad) and it means 'to work/serve/worship'. It seems like working/serving/worshipping is part of why we were created. When we look at verse 8, 9 and 10 who did the planting and the growing of the vegetation? What do you think human work involves in the garden?

4. The words 'work it and take care of it' in the original Hebrew language are עָבַד (ah-vad) and שָׁמַר (shah-mar). They literally mean 'to work/serve/worship' and 'to keep/watch/observe/preserve/heed'. It could just as easily be the case that this passage could be translated, the man was put in the garden of Eden 'to worship and obey'. There is probably an intentional play on words here for the original readers, because what do we see in verse 17 will be at the heart of human life in the garden? How does this help us to understand what the most important work we could do with our life is?

**Read passage Genesis 3:17-24**

5. The man was put in the garden to work it and take care of it, to worship and obey God. He didn't do that. What are the consequences of his disobedience for his work according to verse 17 to 19?

6. In chapter 2:15 we heard that the Lord put the man in the Garden of Eden (literally in Hebrew, the 'Garden of Delight') to work it and take care of it. It was a delightful prospect. Has his future changed? Explain your answer.

**Read Genesis 4:1-8**

7. What line of work were Cain and Abel engaged in? Did either of them seem to undertake the same work as their father?

8. If our work is fundamentally meant to be worshipping and obeying God, who do you think was the better worker? Is it because they chose a better career/line of work? What made their work more pleasing to God (see also Hebrews 11:4)?

9. Even though Abel's work brought pleasure to the Lord, it didn't seem to bear lasting fruit. What was the eventual result of Abel's toil?

**Read John 6:26-29**

9. Jesus contrasts two kinds of work in verse 27, what are they? Explain your answer.

10. In verse 28 and 29 Jesus clarifies exactly what the 'work for food that endures to eternal life' is. What is this work? How is it different to the work that Adam was subjected to under the curse in Genesis 3?

11. In verse 35 Jesus explains more of the fruit of putting our faith in him. How is what he is offering similar to what we were made for in the beginning? How is it better? (see Genesis 2:16-17)?

12. How, according to John 6 verse 51, is Jesus able to offer such satisfaction?

**Read Revelation 7:9-17**

13. When those who believe in Jesus go to be with him in glory, what will their work be?

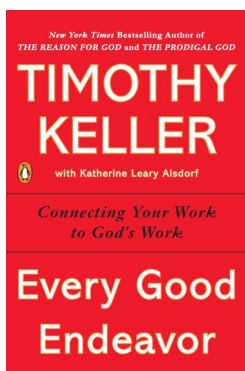
**Read Colossians 3:22-25**

14. Obviously this passage starts off talking exclusively to slaves, and we are not slaves in the same sense here in Australia today. But, we can learn some things from this passage. What do we learn here about how we ought to work?

15. Do you think there are particular careers that will help/hinder us in the very important work of worshipping and obeying the Lord by believing in Jesus? Explain your answer.
16. Christians are called to love the Lord our God and love our neighbours. Do you think there are some careers that would be hard for Christians but worth undertaking in order to love your neighbour?
17. What can we do to avoid careers/safeguard ourselves in careers that may be unhelpful for our relationship with Christ?
18. If you are in a job that hinders your relationship with Christ, how can you change your situation?

## Pray

### Further reading



#### **Every good endeavor: Connecting your work to God's work**

Tim Keller, former pastor of New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Reason for God*, has taught and counseled students, young professionals, and senior leaders on the subject of work and calling for more than twenty years. Now he pulls his insights into a thoughtful and practical book for readers everywhere.

With deep conviction and often surprising advice, Keller shows readers that biblical wisdom is immensely relevant to our questions about work today. In fact, the Christian view of work--that we work to serve others, not ourselves--can provide the foundation of a thriving professional and balanced personal life. Keller shows how excellence, integrity, discipline, creativity, and passion in the workplace can help others and even be considered acts of worship--not just of self-interest.

# 13

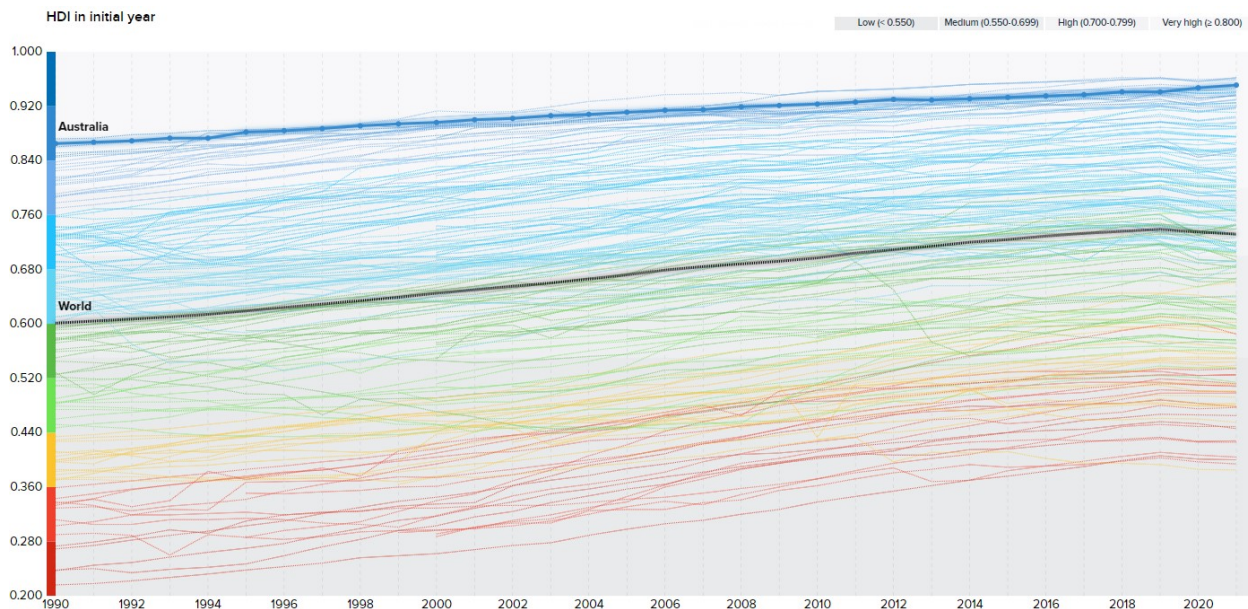
## Is it wrong to have lots of stuff?

1 Timothy 4, 6

### Read and discuss

It's helpful to realise that wealth isn't just determined by pure monetary means. Wealth is an expression of access to education and a whole host of other measures. The UN Human Development Index is one way to measure this larger measure of wealth. It takes into account life expectancy, access to education, as well as standard of living as measured by gross national income per capita.

You can see from the Graph that Australia is consistently incredibly high in the global HDI ranks. Currently we are ranked 5th in the world.



God has given us incredible wealth in our country. Do you think that comes with a responsibility?

### Explore

#### Read 1 Timothy 4:4-5

1. Our stuff is part of everything that God has made so how does this passage tell us to think about our stuff?

2. Using this passage what might you say to someone who said that Christians should abstain from owning stuff?



3. What should the stuff we have cause us to do?

**Read 1 Tim 6:6-10**

4. What is the danger of pursuing lots of stuff as an end in itself?

5. What is a better pursuit?

**Read 1 Tim 6:17-19**

6. For those with lots of stuff what does Paul call us to avoid? Why?

7. What is the better alternative that Paul wants us to choose? Why?

8. What does this passage tell us God gives us things for?

9. How can our stuff point us to God's generosity and grace?

10. What should God's generosity to us in giving us everything we have spur us to do?

## Apply

11. Is loving God and loving his gifts necessarily a zero-sum game? In other words is it the case that the more you love one the less you love the other?
12. Do you see a love for money in your own heart? If so, what should you do?
13. The more we see our stuff as a gift, to be enjoyed and used for God's glory the more we'll actually enjoy it. How can you grow your ability to receive God's good gifts with the thanksgiving and enjoy them the way he intended?
14. What might it look like for you personally to take one step toward greater generosity and willingness to share?

## Pray

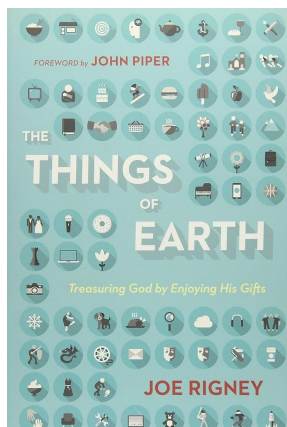
### Further reading



#### The good life in the last days—Mikey Lynch

Mikey Lynch in this great little book helps us think about all the goodness in our lives, we all have so many enjoyable things that God has given us. Is that wrong? What of self-sacrifice. Mikey helps us wrestle with these questions by helping us see our lives from the perspective of the last days. Along the way he also tries to expose some of the dead ends of self-sacrifice we often go down.

This is a thoughtful book that is so applicable and rooted in the lived experience of the everyday Christian. Well worth the read.



#### The things of earth—Joe Rigney

Many of us will know the hymn turn your eyes upon Jesus which has the line in it:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Rigney's contention in this book is that in the face of Christ the sinful things of earth will grow faintly dim, but that the enjoyment of his good gifts with actually grow strangely *Bright*. Joe is a biblically saturated scholar who wants to apply the bible to the hard questions of how do we enjoy the good gifts that God has given us while at the same time being faithful to the bibles call to self-sacrifice and fleeing greed. This is another great book in this space.

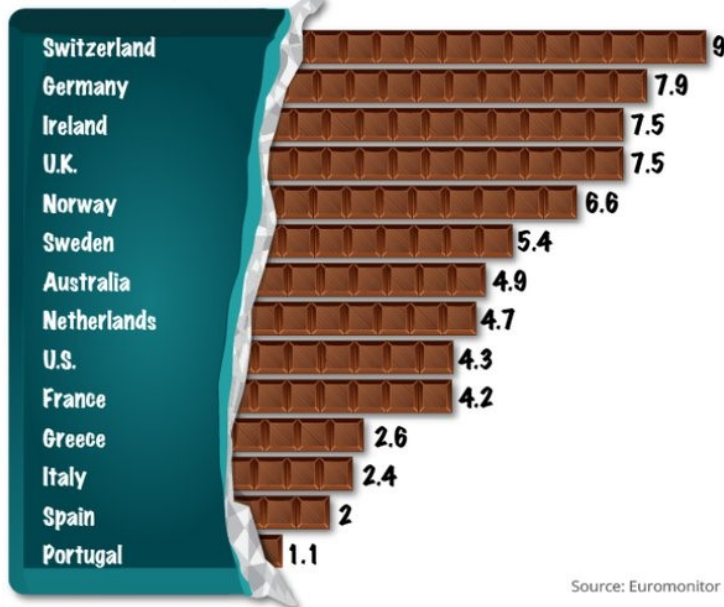
# 14 Food

John 6:35-40; 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Read and discuss: How much chocolate is okay?

## The world's chocoholics

In kilos consumed per capita



⏪ Australia is 7th on the list of global chocolate consumers. We consume on average around 5kgs per person per annum. That's 20 chocolate blocks per year per person. The truth is... only 14 million Australians eat chocolate. Those of us who do, we're probably on the upper side of 5kgs per annum. According to Roy Morgan research 25% of us eat bars only, 14% blocks only, and 4.5% only boxes. 30% are happy to eat bars and blocks, and 15%... will eat any form.

## Explore

Read Genesis 1:29-31, 9:3 and Mark 7:18-20

1. What do we learn from these passages about food?

2. If this is the case, how ought we receive food?

Read Genesis 3:1-7

3. Notice in verse 3 how the woman overstates the prohibition on the fruit. Why do you think she overstates this? What do you think could be going on in her heart here?

4. In verse 5, what is the ultimate temptation the serpent puts before the woman? Why is his offer so deceptive?

5. How do the man and the woman fail to help each other regarding the forbidden fruit?

6. How do they feel after they have eaten the food they should not have eaten?

7. Earlier we read that all food was declared clean by Jesus and that it was to be received with thanksgiving. What do we learn here about when it might be wrong to eat food?

**Read Proverbs 23:1-3; 23:19-21; Amos 6:1-7**

8. What is gluttony as it is described in these passages?

9. What's the problem with over-indulging in meat (and wine)?

**Read John 6:35-40**

10. Where does Jesus say we can find satisfaction for our hunger?

11. Obviously God designed us as material beings to eat material food—we learn that in Genesis 1. How then can putting our faith in Jesus provide us with material satisfaction of our hunger? Is Jesus just using an analogy? Or is it possible that putting our faith in him can impact our physical hunger?

**Read Revelation 19:6-9**

12. How does this passage describe heaven?

13. How does this passage help us to see the goodness of food in God's eternal plan?

**Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5**

14. How ought we receive our food today? What are some practical ways we can do this before we eat, during our eating and after we have eaten?

**15.** Food is a gift from God for his glory. Adam and Eve used it to lead each other into sin. The Bible encourages Christians to use food to glorify God with others. We can do this by being hospitable and by helping those who are unable to provide food for themselves. What are some practical ways you can use food to love others this week? In the long term?

## Pray

### Further reading

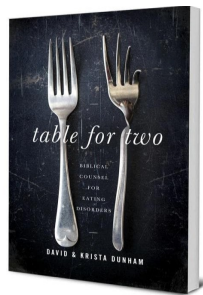


#### **Overeating: When enough isn't enough**

If we're honest, most of us can remember eating more than we need. More often than we might care to admit, we finish a meal knowing we've had too much. Why do we push the limits of our food consumption? Does God have anything to say about this struggle?

Physician and counselor Michael R. Emlet walks us through the many reasons we may overeat and reminds us of biblical themes that should guide how we think about food and the way we eat. He reminds us that our use of food is not morally neutral, but reflects many layers of heart motivation.

Instead of experiencing guilt or shame over this struggle, however, he invites us to see that our identity is in Jesus, not in our weaknesses. Readers will be encouraged to consider new thought processes and practices that will bring new freedom to mealtime.



#### **Table for two: Biblical Counsel for Eating Disorders**

Breaking free from an eating disorder is difficult and complex. Those who are suffering often feel misunderstood. They struggle with feeling alone and afraid, ashamed to tell those closest to them. Their loved ones also feel helpless and ill-equipped to care for them. Within this dynamic, hurt, disappointment, and neglect often thrive. From the unique perspective of a husband and wife team, *Table for Two* shares Krista Dunham's journey to freedom from her eating disorder while David shares insights as the loved one coming beside her.

Krista suffered from an eating disorder for over ten years and, by God's grace and through biblical counseling, overcame it. She openly and honestly shares her experience, describing what she did, what she needed, and what proved helpful in the process of change. In conjunction with her insights, David shares what he did, how he failed, and what he learned along the way as a biblical counselor that was helpful to Krista. Without minimizing complicated issues, the Dunhams provide practical, gospel hope and biblical encouragement to those suffering and help for loved ones walking with them. They share personal narratives, interactive exercises, and biblical direction for those navigating recovery. Individuals suffering from an eating disorder - and loved ones - will find practical help, hope, and encouragement in this couple's story. Applying the truth of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, they know two are better than one and understand the need to connect and jointly navigate the process together.

This powerful, redemptive book reveals an intimacy beyond personal stories of struggle told through a biblical counseling lens; it highlights the close-knit relationship of husband and wife and a home life where one person struggles with an eating disorder.







*Willows*  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH