

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 1 — The Engine Underneath

What the Kingdom of God is, what an apprentice of Jesus is — and the fear that has been running us instead

The Big Idea

Jesus began His public ministry with an announcement: the Kingdom of God is at hand — not far away, not reserved for after death, but here, now, standing open. And He immediately did something just as striking: He took apprentices. Ordinary people were invited to be with Him and learn from Him how to live. This week we hold those two invitations up against an honest look at the life most of us have been living instead — a life quietly organized, underneath everything, by the fear of death. Scripture calls that life slavery (Hebrews 2:15). Jesus calls us out of it.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Stop surviving — start living.

The Kingdom of God is available **now**, and Jesus is taking apprentices. The only life saying yes will cost you is the one that fear built.

Where We Are on the Path

Six weeks, one journey: (1) the human condition absent Christ → (2) what the Bible calls that condition → (3) the cure: dying as living → (4) our wounds and being born from above → (5) grace, apprenticeship, and real community → (6) transformed people as agents of transformation in the world. This week is the starting point: seeing the two invitations — and the water we have been swimming in.

Opening Scripture

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

— **Matthew 4:17 (ESV)**

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

— **Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)**

1. What Is the Kingdom of God?

Strip away the stained glass and the phrase is simple: a kingdom is wherever what a king wants done actually gets done. **The Kingdom of God is wherever what God wants done is done** — the reach of His care, His will, His way of doing life. Dallas Willard described it as the range of God's effective will.

Jesus' announcement was not primarily that you can go to heaven when you die. It was better: you can live in the Kingdom **before** you die. It is "at hand" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15) — near enough to enter. It does not arrive with visible fanfare, because it is "in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21). It is not one more empire competing by force, because it is "not of this world" in the way it operates (John 18:36). And it is worth everything: like treasure found in a field, the man in Jesus' parable sells all he has *with joy* to get it (Matthew 13:44).

So the Kingdom is not a synonym for church, and not a waiting room for the afterlife. It is a present reality you can live in today — a life under God's rule and care, where provision replaces panic (Matthew 6:25-33). The gate into it is repentance: not groveling, but rethinking everything — turning around because the life you were chasing was pointed the wrong way.

2. What Is an Apprentice of Jesus?

The word we translate "disciple" simply means a student — and in Jesus' world, students were not people who audited lectures. They were **apprentices**: people who attached themselves to a master to be with him, watch him, imitate him, and learn to do what he did.

So here is a working definition to carry through all six weeks: **an apprentice of Jesus is someone who has arranged their life to be with Jesus, in His Kingdom, learning from Him how to live their actual, ordinary life** — trusting what He shows us about God, ourselves, other people, this world, and the world to come. Not an admirer. Not a fan. Not merely someone who agrees with facts about Him. A student learning to live.

And here is the uncomfortable part: everyone is already someone's apprentice. We have all been learning how to live from somewhere — a family, a culture, a feed, an ambition, a fear. The question of Week 1 is not whether you will be an apprentice. It is: **if I have not been apprenticed to Jesus, whom or what have I been apprenticed to — and what has it been teaching me?**

3. The Engine Underneath

Now the diagnosis. Watch a single ordinary morning. You defend yourself in an email before deciding to. You recheck how a post landed. You arrange your face before walking into a room and say "fine" when you are not. Each is a tiny act of

self-protection — and a self that needs constant protecting is a self that is afraid of something.

Underneath our thousand daily reflexes runs the oldest fear we carry: we are the one animal that knows it is going to die, and nearly everything about us is organized to keep from feeling it. Call the frightened, defended self that results the **survival self**, and its lifelong building program the **survival project**. Its familiar materials:

- **Grave goods.** Possessions and upgrades as small arguments against mortality — bought for the feeling of life they promise, delivering distraction instead of satisfaction.
- **Hero projects.** Careers, causes, reputations, and legacies built to make us feel significant enough to outlast death — what Genesis 11 calls making “a name for ourselves.”
- **Small gods.** Handing some person — a parent, boss, pastor, or audience — the job of being our judge and our world, so their approval feels like life and their frown feels like annihilation.
- **Two despairs.** Collapsing inward (“I’ll never change”) or escaping into fantasy and endless reinvention (“I can become anything”) — two ways of dodging the same cross.

Modern life has not conquered this fear; it has only gotten comfortable enough to avoid looking at it. Hebrews 2:14-15 is the load-bearing verse of this entire series: the fear of death produces *lifelong slavery* — and Jesus came to destroy the one who wields it.

4. Scripture Saw It First — and Why the Diagnosis Comes First

None of this is new to the Bible. Scripture treats death not as a mere event at the end of life but as a power that masters people long before their funeral. Three portraits make it concrete: **Zacchaeus** (Luke 19:1-10), whose wealth was a fortress against a hostile world — until Jesus named and accepted him *before* he changed, and the fortress became unnecessary. **Jonah**, who feared not only failure but success — a God who could change Nineveh might change Jonah too; we fear death, and we also fear life. **Peter on the water** (Matthew 14:22-33), who sank the moment he went back to measuring the situation by his own resources — and who, years later, freed by the risen Christ, feared neither death nor life.

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

— Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)

Read against everything above, that stops sounding like religious poetry and starts sounding like a physician naming a disease — and its cure. One more thing before we move on: this diagnosis has to come first. Every discipleship effort that skips it becomes behavior management — new habits stacked on top of the same frightened engine. So before we talk about transformation, we sit honestly in the before picture. The discomfort is not the study failing; it is the study working.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Where did you *feel* this week's material — which reflex, grave good, hero project, or "small god" did you recognize as your own? What does your reaction to seeing it tell you?
2. Hebrews 2:15 says the fear of death produces lifelong slavery. Where does a fear of insignificance, rejection, or loss quietly set the agenda in your decisions — work, money, parenting, image, even church?
3. What have you actually believed about the Kingdom of God — a future place, a religious idea, or a present reality you can live in now? How has that belief shaped (or limited) your walk with Christ?
4. In your own words: what is an apprentice of Jesus? Would you have called yourself one before tonight? If not Jesus, whom or what have you been apprenticed to — and what has it been teaching you?
5. Zacchaeus was loved before he changed. What would it mean for you to let that order — acceptance first, change after — be true of you?

Walking the Path This Week

- Keep a "reflex log": once a day, write down one moment of self-protection you caught in the act (a defense, a rehearsed conversation, a checked reaction). No fixing — just seeing.
- Pray daily this week: "Lord, show me what I have been building to feel safe and significant apart from You — and show me what life in Your Kingdom would look like in its place." Write down what surfaces.
- Read Matthew 16:24-26 slowly three times this week, asking each time: what might Jesus actually mean by "lose your life to find it"?

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Watch the Week 1 companion video
0:20	Teaching walk-through, part 1: the Kingdom of God and the apprentice (Sections 1-2)
0:40	Table discussion 1 — Questions 3-4
1:05	Teaching walk-through, part 2: the engine underneath; why the diagnosis comes first (Sections 3-4)
1:20	Table discussion 2 — Questions 1-2 and 5
1:45	Whole-group takeaways, introduce the week's practice, closing prayer (end by 2:00)

Closing

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

— **Luke 17:20-21 (ESV)**

The Kingdom is not far off, and neither is its King. Next week we let Scripture name the engine we saw tonight — a fresh, simple look at what “the flesh” and “sin” really are, and what death has to do with both.

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 2 — The Flesh, Sin & Death

A fresh, simple definition of sin and the flesh — in view of death

The Big Idea

Church words wear smooth with use. This week we take two of the smoothest — *flesh* and *sin* — and let them be startling again. The flesh is not your body, and sin is not merely rule-breaking. **The flesh is the self running in survival mode:** good, God-given capacities organized around securing your own life apart from God. **Sin is the deeper refusal underneath: living as your own source** — trying to supply for yourself the life, worth, and safety that only God can give. And death is the key to both: sin brought death into the world, and the fear of death has been breeding sin ever since. Getting there will require us to read Scripture the way Jesus reads it — moving from example to principle — and to give up some stale totems along the way.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Bootstraps can't raise the dead.

Sin is living as your own source of life. The flesh is the self that fear builds to do it. Death is both sin's wage and sin's fuel. None of it can be reformed from within — the survival self is not upgraded; it dies with Christ so a real self can live.

Where We Are on the Path

Week 1 opened the Kingdom and exposed the engine underneath — the survival self and its fear of death. This week Scripture gives that engine its true names: the flesh, sin, the dominion of death. This completes the “before” picture so that the cure (Weeks 3-4) makes sense.

Opening Scripture

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

— **Romans 8:5-6 (ESV)**

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

— **Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)**

1. The Flesh: The Self in Survival Mode

Ask church people what “the flesh” is and the answers often run in a circle: the flesh is our sinful nature; our sinful nature is the part of us that sins. Paul deserves better. When he lists his own “confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3–6), he lists a *résumé*: circumcised the eighth day, tribe of Benjamin, Pharisee, zealous, blameless. Not one item is a vice. They are status markers answering survival questions: *Am I safe? Do I matter? Am I accepted? Will my life count for something?*

So the flesh is **existential, not behavioral** — an entire way of being in which our God-given capacities get organized around self-preservation rather than trust. The body is not the problem. Our desires for belonging, significance, security, and intimacy are good gifts. But like a compass needle beside a magnet, they are bent by a force acting on them: the fear of death. Belonging curdles into people-pleasing, significance into pride, security into control, protection into aggression.

In one sentence, portable enough to keep: **the flesh is you, running on fear — the self organized around keeping itself safe, significant, and alive apart from God.**

2. Lists or Principles? Reading Paul the Way Jesus Reads Moses

Now a challenge. Here is Paul’s most famous list of the works of the flesh:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

— **Galatians 5:19-21a (ESV)**

Is “the flesh” self-evident from a literal reading of that list? Be honest: a purely literal reading turns it into a checklist — and checklists flatter us. *No sorcery this week, no orgies — I must be doing fine.* But look closer at three items that seem unrelated: **fornication, jealousy, greed** (cf. Colossians 3:5). What do they have in common? Each is a frightened self *seizing for itself* what it does not trust God to give — intimacy taken on my terms, my standing defended against yours, more hoarded against the fear of not-enough. Different objects; one move: **grasping at life apart from the Giver of life.** That is why Paul ends the list with “and things like these” — he is handing us a principle, not a fence around fifteen behaviors.

And once you hold the principle, it reads things that are not on the list: image management, doom-scrolling for validation, respectable workaholism, hoarding attention, outrage tribalism, the curated self. None of them appear in Galatians 5. Every one of them is a work of the flesh.

This is not a modern trick. It is exactly how Jesus teaches us to read Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not murder’... But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22). “You shall not commit adultery... But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus moves from the **example** (murder, adultery) to the **principle** (contempt, grasping desire) — from the hand to the heart — and He plainly expects His apprentices to do the same with all of Scripture. That means giving up the stale totems we have come to expect — the circular definitions, the checklist religion, the proof-text reflex — and letting each text speak in its own categories before we file it into ours. Scripture read Jesus’ way does not get easier. It gets deeper — and it stops letting any of us off the hook.

3. Sin: Living as Your Own Source

If the flesh is the *machinery*, sin is the *decision* the machinery serves. In Paul’s letters sin is bigger than bad behavior: it *reigns*, *enslaves*, and *deceives*, almost like a tyrannical king (Romans 5:12; Romans 6). If sin were only rule-breaking, better behavior would fix it. Scripture insists the problem is deeper: **sin is the creature’s refusal to live as a creature** — the attempt to secure life, meaning, and significance on our own, apart from the Giver of them all. Jesus locates it not in the hands but in the heart: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34; 23:25-26) — the same example-to-principle move again.

Genesis traces sin like a case history — it develops, expands, mutates:

- **Eden** (Genesis 3): not really about fruit but autonomy — “you will be like God.” And notice the first symptom: fear. Hiding, covering, blaming.
- **Cain and Lamech** (Genesis 4): wounded jealousy becomes violence; vengeance becomes a boast. Sin is becoming a culture.
- **The flood generation** (Genesis 6): corruption goes systemic — human and supernatural rebellion together (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
- **Babel** (Genesis 11): “Let us make a name for ourselves” — humanity’s first collective self-salvation project, a monument against mortality. In response, God disinherited the nations, allotting them to lesser spiritual beings (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; Psalm 82) — a thread Week 6 will pick back up.

We are still building towers — with careers, reputations, movements, wealth, even religious identities as our bricks. Different materials; same blueprint: *secure your own life, make your own name*.

4. Death: The Engine of Both

Now put the two definitions in view of death, because Scripture ties them into one knot: “the sting of death is sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56), and the fear of death holds people in lifelong slavery (Hebrews 2:14-15). Sin brought death into the world — and death, through our fear of it, now breeds sin. **We sin, at bottom, because we are trying not to die:** not to lose our lives, our worth, our place, our name. That is the loop the survival self runs on, and no willpower breaks a loop that willpower is part of.

You can watch the loop resist apprenticeship in three familiar ways:

- **Self-preservation instead of transparency** (Matthew 16:24-26) — avoiding pain and exposure; hiding behind religion, competence, or busyness.
- **Habit and conformity instead of transformation** (Romans 12:1-2) — character runs on muscle memory, and our muscle memory was trained under the fear of death.
- **Lie-based thinking instead of truth** (Ephesians 4:15) — working beliefs like “my value is what I do and what they think of me,” “people can’t be trusted,” “God is distant and doesn’t care.”

5. Why the Flesh Cannot Be Improved

Here is where the diagnosis lands. Because the flesh is not a defect in an otherwise sound self but the old self’s *entire survival strategy*, it cannot be reformed from within. You cannot train survival mode into trust. You cannot discipline a frightened self into a fearless one, any more than you can order a drowning man to relax. Paul knew this civil war from the inside — “For I do not do the good I want” (Romans 7:15) — and Scripture’s verdict is unanimous: humanity’s deepest problem is beyond human solving.

That sounds like bad news. It is actually the doorway to the only good news there is. The flesh does not need a better program; it needs a funeral — and in Christ, that funeral has already been arranged, with a resurrection on the other side. That is where we turn next week.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Paul's "confidence in the flesh" was a résumé of respectable things. What is on *your* résumé of safety and significance — and what would be left of you if it were taken away?
2. Take three items from Paul's list that seem unrelated — say fornication, jealousy, and greed. In your own words, what is the common element underneath them? Now name something *not* on the list — perhaps something respectable, even rewarded — that runs on the same principle in your life.
3. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus moves from example to principle: murder to anger, adultery to lust. Where have you settled for the example — the checklist — because the principle would read *you*? What "stale totem" (a circular definition, a proof-text habit, a checklist comfort) might Jesus be asking you to give up?
4. In your own words — simple enough to say to a friend — what is the flesh? What is sin? How is that different from what you grew up thinking?
5. Where do you see the loop — fear of death (of loss, insignificance, rejection) quietly producing sin — running in your own life right now?
6. If the flesh must die rather than improve, what have you been trying to *improve* that may actually need to *die*?

Walking the Path This Week

- Write your own Philippians 3 résumé — the credentials, roles, and reputations you lean on — then pray over it: "Lord, I have counted these as gain. Show me what it would mean to count them as loss for Christ."
- Practice Jesus' way of reading once this day: take one command of Scripture, ask "what is the principle behind this example?" — then ask where that principle touches something in your life the literal words never mention. Write down what you find.
- Each day, watch for the loop: one moment where a fear (of loss, exposure, insignificance) produced a move of the flesh (a defense, a boast, a control, a numbing). Write one sentence naming the fear underneath.

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Recap Week 1 practice: what did your reflex log show you? (brief

	shares)
0:20	Watch the Week 2 companion video
0:30	Teaching walk-through, part 1: the flesh defined; lists or principles — reading like Jesus (Sections 1-2)
0:50	Table discussion 1 — Questions 1-3
1:15	Teaching walk-through, part 2: sin as living from yourself; death as the engine; why the flesh cannot be improved (Sections 3-5)
1:30	Table discussion 2 — Questions 4-6
1:50	Whole-group takeaways, week's practice, closing prayer (end by 2:00)

Closing

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

— **Romans 7:24-25a (ESV)**

The honest cry of verse 24 belongs to everyone in the room — and so does the answer of verse 25. Next week: the cure begins, and it begins with a death that leads to life.

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 3 — The Cure: Dying as Living

Dying to live — what actually dies, what never does, and how the exchange happens

The Big Idea

The cure for a self enslaved by the fear of death is not self-improvement. It is a death — a real one that is not biological. United with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6), the believer undergoes a first, decisive death in which the old survival project is pulled out by the roots and replaced with love — and then a lifetime of daily, quieter deaths in traffic, meetings, and conversations. It is one thing to know *what* the Bible says about being an apprentice of Jesus; it is another thing entirely to know *how* to be one. This week is where that line is crossed — from information about dying to self to the actual, daily practice of it.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Let go — the floor holds.

You do not die to self to end your life; you die to self to finally receive one. What dies is never you — it is the frightened, false self that was suffocating you. Every letting-go feels like falling; in Christ, the floor always holds.

Where We Are on the Path

Weeks 1-2 diagnosed the survival self and let Scripture name it. This week the Path turns: from diagnosis to cure. We learn what Jesus meant by “lose your life to find it” — first as a decisive death, then as a daily practice.

Opening Scripture

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

— **Luke 9:23-24 (ESV)**

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

1. The First Death

Behind this course stands a story. A father sat in a pediatric ICU on the night his infant son died — the very thing every survival project exists to keep at bay. And in the middle of that wreckage, God met him: not with an explanation, but with the overwhelming realization that God Himself had given up His own Son — for him. This was love, comprehending and sacrificial, arriving at the worst possible moment. Something in that room died that night, and it was not only his son's body. The old tree — fear of rejection, alienation, insignificance, death itself — came out by the roots, and love took its place. He walked out a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), born from above (John 3:3).

That is what Romans 6 describes doctrinally: united with Christ in a death like His, the believer is *dead to sin* — death, the hub of the old wheel, no longer has dominion. Because Christ is risen, the root fear behind every secondary fear has been cut. Notice what changes first: the first death changes your **motivations** before it changes your circumstances. You may keep doing many of the same things — but no longer to earn approval or outrun death; only to love.

And notice what it does *not* instantly change: we carry old desires, habits, and projects into the new life, sometimes assuming they are suddenly sanctified by their new religious employment. They are not. They come off the way they went on — one layer, one death, at a time, each one made possible by the same love.

2. A Thousand Quieter Deaths

Jesus said *daily* (Luke 9:23) — He could as accurately have said moment by moment. Here is the anatomy of a small death. Someone corrects you in front of others. Credit for your work goes to someone else. The heat climbs your neck; a defense assembles in your mouth before you have chosen the words. Notice the disproportion: why does a small slight feel, for a moment, like annihilation? Because it touched the survival self. **The disproportion is the tell.**

In that moment you stand at a fork with two moves: **grab** — the defense, the retort, the knot pulling tighter — or **let go**. Letting go feels like falling, because it is a small death. And then comes the discovery on the other side: the room does not end. The floor holds. Air comes in. That is what losing your life to find it looks like in practice — not once, in a blaze of glory, but a thousand times, in the smallest moments of an ordinary day.

This is also why Romans 7 rings true for believers: a character formed over decades under death's dominion is re-formed over a lifetime of such deaths (Romans 7:15-17; 1 John 1:8-9). The first death is decisive; the daily deaths are how its victory reaches your reflexes.

3. Two Anatomies: The Pleaser and the Climber

In the social world, the survival self has only two basic moves: bow *beneath* people, or climb *above* them. Appeasement or dominance. Most of us specialize in one.

The people-pleaser. Reading every face, saying yes without meaning it, replaying conversations afterward. It looks like kindness; it is survival. Other people have become small gods — Scripture’s word is *idols* — and the size of the fear gives the idol away. It is also a dead end: a love you have to earn is not love at all; it is a wage. How does Jesus kill this engine? Not with “try harder” or “care less.” He hands you the verdict first: no condemnation (Romans 8:1), your name called before you change (Luke 19). Paul knew the death this requires: “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). Loving people and pleasing people are not the same thing — they are often opposites.

The status-climber. The instinct that measures every room in a quarter second; the cold drop in the gut at a peer’s success (James 3:16; Genesis 4). Underneath it is something God-made: you were built for glory — crowned with it (Psalm 8:5). But cut off from its Source, the hunger for significance curdles into the need to outrank your neighbor — Babel, one résumé at a time. How does Christ kill this engine? Philippians 2: He did not grasp; He descended to the lowest place — and there received the name above every name. He reversed the climb, and the climb broke. Then He confers a status that cannot be lost: named, adopted, seated. Gifts are not scarce, so the zero-sum game collapses — you step off the ladder and discover you were already home.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

— **Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)**

4. What Dies Is Not You

A warning the church has often failed to give: **self-denial is not self-hatred.** Self-denial lays down the false self so the true self can live; self-hatred attacks the true self and leaves the false one untouched. Groveling “worm theology” wears the gospel’s clothes, but no one ransoms a worm at infinite cost, and you do not honor an artist by despising his work. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) holds both halves at once: sinners — *and worth dying for*. Contrition moves toward mercy and gets up off the floor (Luke 18:13-14); contempt just circles the self forever. Dying to self is not God demolishing His own image in you. It is God clearing away the rubble that was piled on top of it.

And so the door stands where it has always stood: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The survival engine cannot be tuned into life. Christ does not offer to fix your engine. He offers to be your death — and your resurrection.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Have you experienced anything like a “first death” — a moment when God’s love reordered what drives you? If so, what actually changed: your activities, or your motivations? If not, what do you sense still standing in the way?
2. Recall a recent “disproportion” — a small slight that felt enormous. What did it touch? What would “letting go” have looked like in that exact moment, and what were you afraid would happen if you did?
3. Which is your specialty — bowing beneath people (pleasing) or climbing above them (status)? What is one concrete way that engine ran this week — and what would its death cost you?
4. Where has “trying to please people” been masquerading as love or as Christian virtue in your life? How would actually loving those same people look different from pleasing them?
5. Have you confused dying to self with despising yourself? What is the difference, in your own words, between laying down the false self and attacking the self God made and loves?
6. What is one thing — a grievance, an image, a control, an ambition — you sense Jesus asking you to let fall into the ground and die this season?

Walking the Path This Week

- Practice one deliberate small death each day: when the heat climbs your neck, pause, pray “Jesus, I let this go into Your hands,” and choose not to grab. Afterward write one line: did the floor hold?
- Pleasers: say one honest, kind “no” this week. Climbers: celebrate a rival’s success — out loud, to them — once this week.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11 daily. Each day, note one downward step of Christ — and one downward step available to you.

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Recap Week 2 practice: what did your résumé and loop-watching reveal? (brief shares)
0:20	Watch the Week 3 companion video
0:30	Teaching walk-through, part 1: the first death and the thousand quieter deaths (Sections 1-2)
0:50	Table discussion 1 — Questions 1-3
1:15	Teaching walk-through, part 2: the pleaser, the climber, and what dies is not you (Sections 3-4)
1:30	Table discussion 2 — Questions 4-6
1:50	Whole-group takeaways, week's practice, closing prayer (end by 2:00)

Closing

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

— **John 12:24 (ESV)**

Next week we go to the place the survival self was built — our wounds — and meet the One who bore every one of them and came out the other side, so that we could be born from above.

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 4 — The Wounds & Born from Above

Where the survival self came from — and the rebirth that heals what teaching cannot

The Big Idea

No one is born performing. The survival self is *built* — usually young, at the site of our wounds: childhood brushes with death's lesser cousins. Every wound teaches, and what it teaches about God is always a lie. The cure for a wounded condition is not instruction but resurrection: Christ took all six wounds into His own body, carried them through death, and came out the other side. The doorway into that new life is being born from above — not more information, but surrender — and its firstfruits are the three things no wound-management strategy ever produced: comfort, peace, and contentment.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Wounds lie; resurrection heals.

Your wounds built the survival self, and every wound preaches lies about you and about God. Jesus took every one of those wounds into His own body and carried them through death. Healing does not come by instruction; it comes by resurrection — being born from above.

Where We Are on the Path

Week 3 introduced the cure as death-and-resurrection. This week we take the cure to the roots: the wounds where the survival self was formed, and the new birth that plants a new self in their place. This is the hinge from “before” to “after.”

Opening Scripture

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

— **John 3:3 (ESV)**

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

— **Psalms 34:18 (ESV)**

1. Six Wounds, Six Sermons

The defended personality we have been examining for three weeks did not come from nowhere. It was built — usually young — in response to wounds. Six are common to us all, in different measures: **shame** (“I *am* wrong,” not merely “I did wrong”), **insignificance** (the terror of being the nobody), **humiliation** (shame made public), **abandonment** (being left by someone who was yours), **neglect** (being unseen), and **rejection** (being un-chosen at the door). Each wound teaches — it hands you conclusions about yourself, about others, about the world, and about God. And about God, the conclusions are always false:

- Shame says God will recoil if He sees the real you. Abandonment says He will leave. Neglect says He is not paying attention.
- Rejection says His love must be earned. Insignificance says you are beneath His notice. Humiliation says He sided with the mockers.
- Every wound, at bottom, is a rehearsal of death — which is why the behaviors it breeds are all small survival projects.

Left in the dark, wounds turn deadly. Pain seeks discharge — inward as addiction and self-harm (nearly every addiction is, underneath, a way of managing a wound), outward as violence (Genesis 4:7; James 4:2), and downstream through generations, where what was done to us becomes what we do (cf. Exodus 34:7). Multiplied and systematized, the wounds build what the Bible calls “the world” (1 John 2:16; John 16:33). And wounds blind as they sensitize: they hand you a gavel, not a clear eye (Matthew 7:3-5; Romans 2:1) — which is why vengeance belongs to God alone (Romans 12:19). Grace does something better than sharpen the prosecution: it turns prosecutors into witnesses. But none of this is cured by teaching or discipline. Only resurrection reaches this deep.

2. The Wounded Healer: Christ Took All Six

The gospel’s answer is not a technique but a Person. Trace the six wounds across Jesus’ own life: **insignificance** — a Nazareth nobody (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”, John 1:46); **rejection** — “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11); **neglect** — nowhere to lay His head (Luke 9:58); **humiliation** — stripped, flogged, mocked (Isaiah 53); **abandonment** — “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46); **shame** — naked between criminals.

He emptied Himself, entered the wounded world, took every wound into His own body, and carried them through death — and the descent turned out to be the road up. At the cross, the ancient cycle of transmitted pain finally stopped: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). He absorbed it and refused to pass it back.

Hold this against your own deepest wound. The wound always says: if you were ever truly known, you would be cast out. The gospel answers: you are truly known — all the way down — and you are kept.

3. Born from Above: Nicodemus and the Wind

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

— John 3:7-8 (ESV)

Nicodemus — the teacher of Israel — came at night to *know more*, and was told he must *start over*. His knowledge was not the doorway; it was the obstacle. What he lacked was not information but surrender. Every other door humanity has built — religions, philosophies, self-improvement systems — asks the self to grow, to optimize, to climb. None of them asks the self to die and then be raised. That is the one door no human system has ever built — and it is the door Christ *is*. Faith here means trust and allegiance: the self finally resting in the Power that established it. You do not engineer your own rebirth any more than you command the wind. You surrender to it.

4. What the Newborn Receive: Comfort, Peace, Contentment

The new birth answers the wounds point by point, with three gifts no survival strategy ever manufactured — received, not achieved; not the reward for surrender but its fruit:

- **Comfort** — answering abandonment, neglect, and rejection: near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18); “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5); your tears kept in His bottle (Psalm 56:8); “as one whom his mother comforts” (Isaiah 66:13).
- **Peace** — answering shame and humiliation: justified by faith, peace with God (Romans 5:1); the inner courtroom adjourned, no condemnation (Romans 8:1); a peace that surpasses understanding standing guard (Philippians 4:7); “not as the world gives” (John 14:27).
- **Contentment** — answering insignificance: “Whom have I in heaven but you?... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26); “I have learned, in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6).

Psalm 23 paints the whole cure in one picture: a Shepherd under whom a frightened sheep can finally lie down; a soul restored; a table set *in the presence of*

enemies; goodness and mercy not trailing at a polite distance but *pursuing* you; and home, forever. One correction as we close: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (“the new has come”) is not a lid to screw down over your past. What passed away is not your biography — it is the old self that kept the pain buried. The new birth is what finally makes it safe to face your wounds. That healing walk is next week’s subject.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Which of the six wounds — shame, insignificance, humiliation, abandonment, neglect, rejection — do you recognize most readily in your own story? What has it been teaching you about yourself, and about God?
2. Where do you see a wound-management strategy in your life that others might label a personality trait, a habit, or even a strength? What is it protecting?
3. Wounds hand us a gavel: where are you most severe in judging others — and is that severity connected to a place you were once hurt? What would it mean there for grace to turn the prosecutor into a witness?
4. Jesus bore your specific wound in His own body. Which scene of His passion speaks most directly to your wound — and what changes if the God who made you has also *felt* what was done to you?
5. Nicodemus lacked surrender, not information. Where might you be substituting knowing more — more study, more sermons, more theology — for surrendering something specific to God?
6. Comfort, peace, contentment: which of the three do you most lack — and what would it look like this week to receive it rather than try to manufacture it?

Walking the Path This Week

- Write a short, private “wound inventory”: the wound, when it happened, and what it taught you about yourself and about God. Then, next to each lie, write what the gospel actually says (use the scriptures from Section 4).
- Pray Psalm 23 aloud once a day, slowly, placing your own name in it.
- If your wound involves another person and it is safe to do so, take one small step into the light this week — tell one trusted person, or bring it honestly before God in prayer for the first time.

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Recap Week 3 practice: small deaths — did the floor hold? (brief shares)
0:20	Watch the Week 4 companion video
0:30	Teaching walk-through, part 1: the six wounds and what they teach (Section 1)
0:50	Table discussion 1 — Questions 1-3 (leaders: this is tender ground — allow silence, never force disclosure)
1:15	Teaching walk-through, part 2: the wounded Healer, the new birth, and the three gifts (Sections 2-4)
1:30	Table discussion 2 — Questions 4-6
1:50	Whole-group: pray Psalm 23 together; week's practice; closing prayer (end by 2:00)

Closing

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

— **Psalm 23:1-3a (ESV)**

Born from above, the healing begins — but it does not happen alone, and it does not happen overnight. Next week: grace, effort, apprenticeship, and the flawed, forgiven family where transformation actually grows.

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 5 — Loved into Realness & the Fellowship of the Forgiven

Grace, apprenticeship, and the church — flawed people, real bonds, and the commitment to stay

The Big Idea

The new birth severs the root — the fear-of-death slavery — in an instant; the branches come down one at a time, over a lifetime, through the renewal of the mind. Grace and effort are not rivals: as Dallas Willard put it, grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Because failure can no longer disqualify you, you can finally tell the truth and try — you are loved into realness, and realness is the only soil transformation has ever grown in. And that soil is communal: transformation happens in Christ's church — a fellowship of flawed, forgiven people who no longer treat each other as threats to be managed — and who have committed to stay.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

You cannot fail your way out of grace.

Grace does not lower the bar; it removes the disqualification. Because failure cannot disqualify you, you can finally be real — and realness, practiced among forgiven people who commit to stay, is the only soil transformation grows in.

Where We Are on the Path

Weeks 3–4 gave us the cure: death, rebirth, healing. This week the Path becomes a daily, shared walk: apprenticeship under grace, practiced in a real local church — with honest warnings about how the survival self sneaks back into both.

Opening Scripture

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

— **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

— **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

1. Severed Root, Falling Branches: Grace and Effort

The morning after conversion, you may still snap at your child. Despair lives in the gap between what God did in an instant and what He intends over a lifetime. So hold the picture: the root — fear-of-death slavery — is cut (Hebrews 2:14-15; Romans 8:1-2); the branches — decades of survival reflexes — come down one at a time (Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:9-10). We are saved by grace through faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8-9) — *and* created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10). “Work out your own salvation... for it is God who works in you” (Philippians 2:12-13): we do not work *for* our salvation; we work it *out* — walking into possession of what we have already been given.

Here is the liberating logic: no one can honestly work on something they are not allowed to be bad at. If failure could disqualify you, you would either fake success (legalism, the polished persona) or quit (despair). Grace removes the disqualification in advance — and with the mask gone, transformation finally has soil to grow in (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 1:8-9; Proverbs 24:16).

The shape of this life is **apprenticeship** — and its toolkit is the **spiritual disciplines**: activities within our power that enable us, by God’s grace, to become what we cannot become by direct effort.

- **Disciplines of engagement**: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission.
- **Disciplines of abstinence**: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice.
- They are customizable to your branches: the person terrified of people pushes gently into fellowship; the person who cannot bear quiet sits in silence. Not to earn anything — to train, burning grace as fuel.

2. A Warning: When Church Becomes a Survival Project

The survival self does not stop at the church door. It comes inside, takes a seat near the front, and learns a holier vocabulary. Ambition becomes *vision*; control becomes *shepherding*; the need to be admired becomes *anointing*. Ministry can host the best-camouflaged hero project of all — and congregations run a quieter version in a borrowed dialect and performed humility. It is dangerously easy to mistake fluency for formation — to assume that learning to speak Christian is the same thing as being changed by Christ.

The corrective is to measure by Jesus rather than by the mythos: thirty years of obscurity, withdrawing from the crowd that wanted to make Him king, a towel and a basin (John 13; Mark 10:43-45; 1 Samuel 16:7). By nearly every metric the religious marketplace celebrates, His ministry looked small — and it saved the world. The law that governs all of it is the same grain-of-wheat law from Week 3: nothing in the church lives until it dies.

3. What the Church Actually Is

So what is this community the cure requires? The church (Greek *ecclesia*, “assembly”) is God’s human family of Jew and Gentile — founded by Jesus, with Jesus as its Head, participating with Christ as His body on earth (Matthew 16:17-19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23). Its members are *hagioi* — holy ones. Its purpose: under Christ’s authority, to accomplish His will on earth until He returns — going into all the nations, baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), reclaiming in Christ’s name the nations disinherited at Babel. Its destiny: to rule and reign with Christ and inherit all He has been given (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:6-7).

Christ’s Church shows up in Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox, Catholic — anywhere Christ is believed and followed. No church is the gateway to Christ; Christ is the gateway to the Church. And your local church is your residence in that universal Church — the place where participation actually happens. Entering the Kingdom as an apprentice (Week 1) and seeking healing and transformation (Weeks 3-4) is not done privately but in community. The Path is concurrent, not linear: you do not wait until you are transformed to commit to the church.

4. Feet of Clay and the Commitment to Stay

We were built to need each other — patterned after a God who has never been alone (“Let us make man in our image,” Genesis 1:26; “it is not good that the man should be alone,” Genesis 2:18). But consumer culture and the survival self train us into disposable, plug-and-pull connections: enough contact to get something, shallow enough to walk away the moment it costs us. Then we get close to a pastor, a friend, a congregation — and see the flaws. Feet of clay (Daniel 2). Disappointment hits, and “I should just leave” feels logical. But the impulse to leave is usually a symptom of our own mess, not proof that the church is broken. Every admired person has clay feet — and so do you.

The Bible never promises a perfect church — only a perfect Savior working through imperfect people. At the thorns there are two choices: trash the relationship and restart the cycle somewhere new, or push in, accept vulnerability, and do the hard work of grace (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-17). The bond itself is Christ’s supernatural work (Colossians 1:21-22); keeping it connected is our obedience (Colossians 3:12-17). The daily toolkit, in brief:

- Give grace to yourself — you are a work in progress (Romans 7:21-25). Give grace to others — so are they (Romans 14:10).
- Stop comparing real life to curated images (2 Corinthians 10:12). Drop unrealistic expectations of people (Matthew 23:1-4).
- Do not avoid necessary confrontation — speak truth in love, directly (Matthew 18:15-17); never gossip or ghosting.
- Let love be genuine rather than forced (Romans 12:9). Value relationships over rituals (Colossians 2:20-22).
- Remember whose work the bond is (Colossians 1:21-22) — and bring Jesus into your inner life daily (Romans 12:1-2).

Boundaries remain essential — staying never means staying in abuse, and a short season away for healing can be wise. But permanent exit should be the rare exception, never the default. The foundation of staying is simply this: **Jesus stayed**. He saw all our clay and did not walk away. A fellowship of the forgiven becomes possible exactly when its people stop managing one another as threats and start loving one another as family. Union Point commits itself to being the local expression of Christ's Church here, in our own community — not in competition with other churches, but alongside them, for the same purpose.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Where are you living as if failure could disqualify you — performing at church, hiding a struggle, or quietly giving up? What specifically would you work on if you were finally allowed to be bad at it?
2. Grace is opposed to earning, not effort. Which side do you fall off: effort that has quietly become earning, or a “grace” that has quietly become passivity? What one discipline of engagement or abstinence fits your actual branches right now?
3. Where do you see survival-self camouflage in church life — in leaders, in the congregation, in yourself? (Fluency mistaken for formation, performed humility, the scoreboard.) What would it look like for that thing to die?
4. Over your life, how have you viewed the purpose of the church — and yourself as part of it? How does the picture in Section 3 (family, body, mission, destiny) confirm or challenge that?
5. When have you felt the impulse to leave a church or a relationship? What “thorn” triggered it — and looking back, how much of it was their clay feet, and how much was yours?

6. Which item in the daily toolkit do you most need right now — and what is one practical step this week to deepen a connection instead of drifting?

Walking the Path This Week

- Choose one discipline (one of engagement, or one of abstinence) and practice it daily this week — small and consistent beats heroic and abandoned.
- Write and, if you are ready, sign this commitment: “I choose to replace my impulse to leave with a commitment to stay. I will give grace, pursue vulnerability, and do the hard work of unity, because Jesus stayed with me at my worst. Starting this week I will [one specific action — join a group, serve, show up consistently].”
- Practice vulnerability in a safe dose: share one real struggle with one trusted person in this church this week — and thank one person, publicly or in writing, for their faithfulness.

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Recap Week 4 practice: the wound inventory and Psalm 23 (brief, voluntary shares)
0:20	Watch the Week 5 companion video
0:30	Teaching walk-through, part 1: grace, effort, apprenticeship, and the warning (Sections 1-2)
0:50	Table discussion 1 — Questions 1-3
1:10	Teaching walk-through, part 2: what the church is; feet of clay and the commitment to stay (Sections 3-4)
1:25	Table discussion 2 — Questions 4-6
1:45	Whole-group: read the commitment statement together; week’s practice; closing prayer (end by 2:00)

Closing

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

— Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)

A transformed people, bound together and committed to stay — that is the community heaven calls the center of the universe. Next week, the finale: why such a community is the renovation of the world.

THE PATH AT UNION POINT

Week 6 — The Renovation of the World

Transformed people as agents of transformation — the inner cure meets the unseen war

The Big Idea

Two streams meet in this final week. One (through Dallas Willard) shows how a person is actually remade into Christlikeness. The other (through Michael Heiser) shows the unseen powers behind the visible world. They converge on the verse this whole series has stood on — Hebrews 2:14-15. The rebellious powers move humanity the way cowboys move cattle: they spook the herd, and their one handle is the fear of death. Which means a person genuinely freed from that fear is a person the powers cannot drive — and every such person, in every real community, is a working part of the renovation of the world.

THE MAIN THING — TAKE THIS WITH YOU

Unafraid people change the world.

The powers herd this world by one handle — the fear of death. A person Christ has freed from that fear cannot be herded. So the whole assignment is this: become one unafraid person, and help build one community of unafraid love.

Where We Are on the Path

The Path ends where it aimed from Week 1: the before picture (Weeks 1-2) has become an after picture (Weeks 3-5) — and the after picture has a purpose bigger than personal peace. Transformed people become agents of transformation: salt, light, and a city on a hill in a world still herded by fear.

Opening Scripture

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

— **Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)**

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

— **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

1. The Unseen War: The Deuteronomy 32 Worldview

Week 2 left a thread hanging at Babel. Here is the rest of it. When humanity built its tower, God disinherited the nations, allotting them to lesser spiritual beings — “sons of God” — while taking Israel as His own portion (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; 4:19-20). Those beings rebelled and became the corrupt gods of the nations; Psalm 82 is their courtroom indictment and death sentence (“like men you shall die”). Paul’s “rulers,” “authorities,” and “cosmic powers” are these same beings (Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16) — which explains the strange surplus of evil in the world: why herds of otherwise decent people stampede.

The whole Bible after Babel is a **reclamation campaign**: Abraham called as the countermove (Genesis 12); the Word made flesh entering occupied territory in person; the cross as the powers’ own self-inflicted undoing — “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8); the powers disarmed and put to open shame (Colossians 2:15); Pentecost reversing Babel (Acts 2); and the Great Commission sending Christ’s people into every nation the powers once held (Matthew 28:19).

The war is won; the battle continues. The powers know the verdict — their whole remaining strategy is *delay*: division, outrage, fear, corroded trust. Hold both truths at once and you can stay sane in any headline cycle: the powers are real — and the powers are beaten.

2. The Handle and the Unstampedable Person

How do powers that cannot force anyone move whole nations? The way cowboys drive cattle: they spook the herd. Their handle is the engine this series began with — the fear of death in all its costumes: insignificance, rejection, scarcity, tribal threat. The survival self was never only our private prison; it is the grip by which the powers steer us.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

— **Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)**

Now the verse we started with shows its full size: when Christ frees a person from the fear of death, the handle comes off in the powers’ hands. That person is

unstampedeable. History proved it: Christians nursing plague victims the empire abandoned; martyrs whose songs on the way to the arena made the threat of death useless against them. The early church did not out-argue Rome; it out-loved and out-died Rome — and the watching world said, look how they love one another.

This is why the church must never fight with the enemy's weapons — money, force, fear, the megaphone — and why fusing the Kingdom to any political party, and quarantining the gospel as merely private, are both errors. Every system is only as good as its people's character; every forced Eden delivers hell. The gospel changes the world the only way it ever has: by changing the people the world is made of.

3. The Apprentice's Toolkit: Kingdom, VIM, and a Life That Is Training

How does a person actually become unstampedeable? The answer has been under this whole series. The Kingdom of God — the range of God's effective will, in Willard's phrase — is available now (Matthew 4:17), entered as an apprentice: someone arranged to be with Jesus, learning to lead their life as He would lead it if He were they. A disciple is not made by trying harder but by **training** — and grace, remember, is opposed to earning, never to effort. The pattern is **VIM**:

- **Vision** — a compelling picture of life with Jesus in His Kingdom, now and forever. (These six weeks have been vision work.)
- **Intention** — the settled decision to be His apprentice, including deciding to take the required steps. A vision never intended stays a daydream; an intention without means stays a wish.
- **Means** — the disciplines of engagement and abstinence (Week 5), practiced in community, burning grace as fuel.

You are being formed either way — deliberately by Christ, or quietly by appetites, screens, wounds, and the spirit of the age. Formation into Christlikeness is not contrived; it is participated in — beholding and becoming (2 Corinthians 3:18). Its fruit is a life that simply works: faith, hope, love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) — which is what holiness actually is: a life that works well because it is rooted in another world, the Kingdom of God. And character — what you do without thinking — is the most powerful thing you will ever bring into this one.

4. The Assignment

So the Path ends in a sending. Not a program, not a platform — a quiet counter-conspiracy with two moves: **become one unafraid person, and help build one real community of unafraid love.** That is the whole assignment. A community of unafraid, forgiven, staying people is salt, light, and a city on a hill (Matthew 5:13-

16); it is the display of God's manifold wisdom *to the powers themselves* (Ephesians 3:10); to heaven's eyes it is the center of the universe. Jesus said mustard-seed faith moves mountains (Matthew 17:20) — and it moves them by remaking, one at a time, the people the mountains are made of.

The before picture: a self enslaved by the fear of death, building towers and managing wounds. The after picture: a person loved into realness, free enough to die daily, bonded to a fellowship of the forgiven, and unafraid in a herded world. That person, in that community, in this town — that is the renovation of the world. Take the next mountain.

Questions to Consider

Take these slowly. They are meant to be sat with, prayed over, and discussed honestly — not answered quickly.

1. Look back across six weeks: what is the single clearest “before and after” in your own understanding — or your own life? What died? What is being born?
2. Where do you see the herd being spooked right now — in the culture, in your feeds, in your own chest? Which fear is the handle? What would it mean, concretely, for you to be unstampedable there this month?
3. The two political errors: fusing the Kingdom to a party, or locking faith in a private “china closet.” Which are you more tempted by — and what does salt-and-light engagement without the enemy's weapons look like for you?
4. Walk through VIM honestly: Is the vision compelling to you? Have you actually *intended* — settled the decision — or only admired? What means will you commit to when this series ends?
5. How could spiritually transformed lives, one by one, change this local church — and how could this church change this community in profound and innovative ways? Can you envision yourself as part of that? What is your first step?
6. Who is one person you could walk the Path with next — as Christ's witness, or as a fellow apprentice? What would inviting them actually require of you?

Walking the Path This Week

- Write your own VIM on one page: the vision in your own words, your settled intention (dated and signed), and two means — one discipline, one commitment to this community — you will practice for the next 90 days.
- Identify one “stampede” you will opt out of this month (an outrage cycle, a fear-driven purchase or post, a tribal fight) — and one act of unafraid love you will do instead.

- Pray daily: “Lord, make me one unafraid person, and use me to help build one real community.” Then watch for the person He puts in your path — and take the next mountain.

Suggested Session Flow (1.5-2 hours)

A guide, not a straitjacket. Protect the discussion blocks — the goal of each session is honest conversation, not covering every line.

Time	Segment
0:00	Gather, welcome, and opening prayer
0:10	Recap Week 5 practice: commitments made, disciplines begun (brief shares)
0:20	Watch the Week 6 companion video
0:30	Teaching walk-through, part 1: the unseen war and the unstampedable person (Sections 1-2)
0:50	Table discussion 1 — Questions 1-3
1:10	Teaching walk-through, part 2: VIM and the entire assignment (Sections 3-4)
1:25	Table discussion 2 — Questions 4-6
1:45	Whole-group: share VIM commitments; commissioning prayer over the group; celebrate (end by 2:00)

Closing

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

— **Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)**

The Path does not end tonight — it begins. One unafraid person. One real community. The renovation of the world, starting here, at Union Point.