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**J E S U S -**  
**S H A P E D**  
**L I F E**

*Forty  
Days  
Toward  
Christ-  
likeness*

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**C O R D L E**

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 **Seedbed**

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## *Introduction*

“Whoa,” whisper onlookers. Others gaze silently, awed by the startling beauty of what lies before them.

More than five million people visit the Grand Canyon every year, and no one seeing it for the first time can be adequately prepared for the stunning view. The depth, color, and scope are impossible to describe. Pictures cannot do it justice. One of the most spectacular geological sites in the world, the Grand Canyon extends up to 18 miles wide and six thousand feet deep. It stretches for 277 miles and contains several ecosystems.

Geologists tell us that the Colorado River carved the canyon over millions of years. The river cut so deep that its strata reveal 40 percent of the earth’s history. Even today, the relentless water flow continues to imperceptibly erode the canyon floor, deepening and widening it.

Whether we realize it or not, there are seen and unseen forces working on our hearts and minds too. Our thinking, values, and character are continually being shaped by myriad influences. Some of them are obvious, such as our family of origin, nationality, or education. Our life experiences—both the painful and the enjoyable—also significantly shape us.

Other influences go unnoticed. Take, for example, our cell phones. Tony Reinke writes that heavy cell phone use

leaves us continually distracted. As we check our phones an average of three hundred times per day, we ignore the people and events around us.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, our interaction with the Internet fragments our ability to focus and reduces our attention span.<sup>2</sup> Algorithms increasingly determine what we see and, thus, affect what we think.

If all that sounds disconcerting, here is some good news: if you are a follower of Jesus, there is also a supernatural force at work in your life shaping you in healthy, life-giving ways. That force is the power of God forming you into the image of Jesus.

Romans 8:28–29 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*. (emphasis added)

God's eternal goal is that we live a Jesus-shaped life. From the moment you trusted Christ, God began the process of making you like his Son. And Philippians 2:12–13 urges us to engage in our part of that process: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

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1. Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

2. Mike Wright and Ellie Zolfagharifard, "Internet Is Giving Us Shorter Attention Spans and Worse Memories, Major Study Suggests," *Telegraph*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/06/06/internet-giving-us-shorter-attention-spans-worse-memories-major/>.



*Week 1*

## **Made for This**

God's will is for you to be holy . . .

—1 Thessalonians 4:3 NLT

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

—Romans 8:29

Who are you going to live for—yourself or God?

—Rick Warren

Day 1

## Desiring What God Desires

► Read Ephesians 1:1–4.

Even before Todd was born, his father had plans for him. Marv would make Todd the perfect quarterback.

Football ran in the family. Marv had been a captain for the University of Southern California and played professionally. Todd's uncle had been a star quarterback at USC. Now that Marv had a son, he intended to raise Todd to surpass them both.

Marv gave Todd frozen kidney to teethe on as an infant. Marv was stretching Todd's hamstrings when Todd was one month old, and had him doing push-ups before he could walk. Todd's parents made sure that he adhered to the purest diet: no junk food and no sugar. Todd even brought his own cake to birthday parties. *Sports Illustrated* later called Todd "America's first test-tube athlete" and reported that he had never eaten a Big Mac or an Oreo.

For a while, it seemed that the plan was working. Todd excelled as a quarterback in high school and went on to play at USC. After college, the Oakland Raiders drafted him in the first round.

But all was not as it seemed.

Todd always wanted to please his overbearing father, but he also wanted to be a normal kid. In grade school, Todd started sneaking junk food, and by high school, he was smoking marijuana regularly.<sup>1</sup> In college, he broke free from the strict rules of his upbringing. He began a struggle with harder drugs that shortened his professional career and plagued him for the rest of his life.

Eventually, the pressure became too much for Todd. During his freshman year at USC, he briefly left school and confessed to his mother, “I wish I could go somewhere else and be someone else. I don’t want to be Todd Marinovich.”<sup>2</sup> In short, Todd did not want to be the man his father desired him to become.

Have you ever felt that way in your relationship with God? While wanting to please your heavenly Father, have you wondered whether you can measure up to his expectations? Perhaps you’re not always sure you want to, even if you feel you should.

Our image of what God desires of us determines how we relate to him. If we believe that God wants us to live in a way that we consider unappealing, we will keep our distance from him. So, if we want a trust-filled relationship with God, we need to desire what he wants for us.

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1. Michael Rosenberg, “Learning to be Human Again,” *Sports Illustrated*, January 11, 2019, <https://www.si.com/nfl/2019/01/11/todd-marinovich-dad-marv-quarterback-drugs-rehab>.

2. Douglas S. Looney, “The Minefield,” *Sports Illustrated*, September 3, 1990.

And what is it that God desires for us? It might not be what we think it is.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us: “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes” (NLT).

God wants to make us holy. Does that idea inspire you or induce you to cringe? Your answer likely depends on what you believe it means to be holy. If you think that *holy* is a code word for well-behaved, you probably won’t be enthusiastic about it. If you imagine holiness to be a grim, duty-bound existence, you might say, “I’ll pass.” But, in reality, true holiness bears no resemblance to those tired stereotypes.

*Holy* is the word the Bible uses to describe God’s character. Holiness is not sterile rule-keeping; it is the word that sums up God’s goodness and his power.<sup>3</sup> Holiness is wholeness. It is our interior and exterior life syncing up with heaven’s heartbeat. It shows up as life-giving words, thoughts, and actions. Holiness is life as God originally intended it to be. In short, to be holy means to be like Jesus. And God created us for that life.

“Even before he made the world, *God loved us.*” God wants us to be like Jesus because he loves us, not because it annoys him if we are not. He knows how rich and rewarding it is to live a Jesus-shaped life, and he desires that for us.

God desires to free us from both the penalty and the power of sin. We can be eternally grateful that God forgives us and promises us heaven after we die. Yet, he also makes it possible for us to taste the kingdom of

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3. “Holiness,” *The Bible Project*, accessed August 31, 2019, <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/holiness/>.

heaven here and now. God loves us too much to leave us trapped in the grip of sin that robs us of peace, tears apart our relationships, and blocks us from fulfilling his plan for our lives. While it is wonderful to know that we are forgiven for our disobedience, it is exhilarating to be liberated from the compulsion to repeat that sin.

Do we want a Jesus-shaped life? Do we desire what God wants for us? When we see the fulfilling life God has in mind for us, will we desire it? Admittedly, as we grow there will be moments (maybe seasons) when we want our own way. Saint Augustine once prayed, “Lord, make me chaste [sexually pure], but not yet!”<sup>4</sup> But the good news is that if we ask him, the Holy Spirit will change our desires to match God’s good ones for us.

Take a moment now to talk with God about your feelings regarding a Jesus-shaped life. Be honest with him. Where do you want his will? Where have you not yet embraced it?

### ► Prayer

*Lord, thank you for your love for me. I know you want the best for me. By your Spirit, help me to want what you want for me. Amen.*

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4. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145.

Day 2

## Why Christlikeness Is Not Natural

► Read Ephesians 4:22–24.

The movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* features a grotesque character named Gollum. Before he came to possess the “one ring to rule them all,” he used to be a hobbit named Sméagol. But, gradually, the power of the ring distorted his body and mind, turning the wholesome hobbit into the ghastly Gollum.

Eventually, Gollum loses the ring, and a hobbit named Frodo acquires it. Gollum pursues Frodo, scheming to regain possession of the ring by any means necessary. Yet when Frodo meets Gollum, he doesn’t harm the creature. Instead, he reminds him of his prior life and name. As a result, Gollum begins to call Frodo, “Master,” and becomes an uneasy ally in his quest.

Later, however, Gollum’s old, twisted nature resurfaces. One night, as Sam and Frodo sleep, Gollum is tempted to steal the ring. However, he is torn. One part of him wants to betray Frodo, but another part of him

doesn't. His old Gollum nature wants to take the ring. But his new Sméagol nature wants to help Frodo. The two natures argue with one another:

Gollum: "We wants it. We needs it. Must have the Precious. They stole it from us. Sneaky little hobbitises. Wicked. Tricky. False."

Sméagol: (*shaking his head*) "No. Not Master."

Gollum: (*snarling malevolently*) "Yes . . . They will cheat you, hurt you, lie!"

Sméagol: "Master's my friend."

Gollum: "You don't have any friends. Nobody likes you."

Sméagol: (*closes his ears with is hands*) "Not listening. I'm not listening."

Gollum: "You're a liar and a thief."

Sméagol: "No."

Gollum: (*sinister whisper*) "Murderer!"

Sméagol: (*voice breaking; hurt by Gollum's remark*) "Go away!"<sup>5</sup>

Most of us know what it's like to argue with ourselves—to engage in an internal struggle. If you have ever tried to lose weight, you may have had a conversation that goes something like this:

New healthy self: "I'm not going to eat that donut!"

Old undisciplined self: "Yes, you are. You know you are. Just admit it."

New healthy self: "No, I'm not! I eat healthy now!"

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5. Concept from Preaching Today, [https://www.preachingtoday.com/search/?query=Gollum&sourcename=Illustrations&order=newest&type=.](https://www.preachingtoday.com/search/?query=Gollum&sourcename=Illustrations&order=newest&type=)

Day 7

## Working It Out

### For Individual Reflection

1. **Give thanks to God** for his faithfulness, goodness, and activity in your life.
2. **Pray** Psalm 139:23–24:

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

Pause and open yourself to anything the Holy Spirit might bring to your attention.

3. **Review your week.**
  - a. How did I act on what God told me last week?
  - b. Where have I noticed God at work?



**4. Respond.**

- a. What stood out the most from this week's readings? Where is God asking me to focus my attention this week?
- b. What will I do in response?

**Group Discussion Questions**

1. When you hear the word *holy*, what comes to your mind? How closely does that image resemble Jesus' character and life?
2. Does pursuing a Jesus-shaped life mean that we will lose our individuality and become clones? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you most frequently see your old nature show up in your thoughts and actions? How would your life be different if your new nature were able to win more of the inner battles?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that you will become more like Jesus over the next six months? Why?
5. What pitfalls might we face if we do not realize that it is the grace of God that enables us to become like Jesus?
6. Share a time you recently sensed the Spirit's conviction. How does knowing that you are already accepted by God change the way you respond?
7. Why is repentance essential to a vibrant spiritual life?

*Week 2*

## **The Obedience of Jesus**

And being found in appearance  
as a man, he humbled himself by  
becoming obedient . . .

—Philippians 2:8

“If you love me, keep my commands.”

—John 14:15

Day 8

## The Answer Is Yes

► Read Matthew 26:36–42.

Jeff Lewis was an army specialist with the Eighty-Second Airborne Division when he was ordered to parachute out of a plane. At first glance, this does not appear noteworthy. A paratrooper expects to receive an order like that. But Jeff was not a paratrooper; he was a supply clerk. He had never been to jump school. He had no experience with parachutes. He did not know it, but his order was the result of a clerical error.

Even so, the young supply clerk reported for duty. A short time later, he strapped on a parachute, then when it was his turn to jump, he stepped out of the airplane and started his free fall. Amazingly, he landed unhurt.

When asked later what went through his mind during the experience, he said he was just doing what a good soldier is supposed to do: follow orders. “The Army said

## WHAT IF WE COULD...

BREAK FREE FROM SELF-DESTRUCTIVE SINS?

SEE AND VALUE PEOPLE LIKE JESUS DOES?

REFLECT JESUS' LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE TO OTHERS?

We are constantly being influenced by outside forces—our families, the media, and even our cell phones. Yet God promises to shape us into the image of Jesus.

*A Jesus-Shaped Life* invites you to invest forty days into learning how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he transforms you from the inside out.

Throughout the course of six weeks, readers will explore selected aspects of Jesus' character and learn how God's grace can be reproduced in his followers. Spiritual exercises and discussion questions combine with daily meditations to create a valuable tool for becoming the person God created us to be.

**STEVE CORDLE** is the founding and lead pastor of Crossroads Church, a small-group-based congregation with five locations in the Pittsburgh area. He is also the founder and president of A1.8 Movement, a non-profit dedicated to catalyzing church plants in the United States and western Europe. Cordle came to Christ as a high school student in Brussels, Belgium, and he is a graduate of Wittenberg University, Asbury Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and United Theological Seminary (D.Min.). Steve and his wife, Linda, have three grown sons, three daughters-in-love, and three grandchildren.



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