



# WHAT MATTERS?

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## *What Matters?*

There is a popular phrase with young people these days: “Whatever.” It often means, “So what,” which also means “What does it matter?”

So, what matters? That question is huge. Why? Because we invest our lives in what matters most to us. If we don’t know what really matters, then we have a really hard time knowing what to do with our lives. We’re not sure how best to invest our time, or energy, our gifts or talents. In short, we’re not sure how to invest ourselves.

Central and perhaps more critical to the question of what matters is a more personal question: Do I matter?

The so-called “I” generation has worked hard at giving each of us a sense of personal identity and importance, and that’s mostly good. But if we pry into the hearts of many of our young (and maybe not so young) people they still wonder, “Do I matter, really?” I know some young people who ask that question a lot. That was the topic of conversation I had with a young person the other day. He thought that he mattered to his mom and dad. But in his words, “They’re supposed to care.” He really questioned whether he mattered to any body else. Do I matter to those who don’t have to love me? My friends, my boss and co-workers, my class mates. Do I matter to them? And if I do, why? What matters seems to be up in the air for many of us. And as such, we’ve lost our bearings.

This series of devotions and Bible studies is designed to help us find our bearings once again. God has a great deal to say about what matters. He gave us the Bible with the deliberate intention of answering these questions. As we listen to Him and talk together we will be able to answer the question clearly and with genuine conviction: “I know what matters. And I commit my life to it.”

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day One:** We're our Father's choice, not accidents

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)*

God starts His conversation with us with these words, "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth . . ." He tells us right up front, "This universe and everything in it is no accident. I made all of it. Everything begins with me and connects to me."

He's also telling us that creation is personal to Him, that is, an act of His love. Perfect love exists between the three persons of the Trinity and it's out of that perfect, personal love that God created His universe and made people the crown of His creation. We were not made or evolved from some generic spiritual omnipotence. God is a person, with a personal Name, Who desires to know and be known personally. Personal love stands behind God's every action.

God goes on to say, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Of everything that God made, you and I were made to be like Him, that is, to reflect His person, character, and purpose. "Let us make man" doesn't simply tell us how we got here; it also speaks to "Why." We are here because God wants us here. Our existence in this world is God's idea. No human being is an accident; each is His personal choice.

In other words, we actually matter to Him. That points to relationships. God chose to make each of us in order to relate to each of us. Being created in His image means among many things that we are persons distinct from God, who have the capacity to relate to Him and one another personally—to know and be known in the Biblical sense of those words.

How come so many of us start thinking differently about ourselves when someone else takes a genuine interest in us? Is it because once I matter to

someone else, I matter to myself. It seems like the question “Do I Matter?” is only answered in relationship to someone else. Why is it that a young teenage boy, complete with a “Whatever” attitude, suddenly acts differently when someone significant—usually a girl—takes a personal interest in him? He often pays more attention to his appearance and his “whatever” attitude begins to soften. His relationship with her awakens in him the fact that he really matters. He is significant. And that makes a lot of other things matter too.

In thinking about what really matters, St. Paul once wrote, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*” (Ephesians 1:3-4). We mattered to God before the beginning of time. We’ve always mattered to Him.

**Prayer:** Lord God, We thank you that You have made us in Your image giving us value as we live in a relationship with You. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Two:** We belong to God our Father. That makes us Significant

*I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

God gave us two accounts of creation, each telling a different side of the story. The first is comprehensive; the second is personal. In Genesis 1 we learn that God, the all-powerful One, made everything. In Genesis 2 we learn that He has a Name: Yahweh. Knowing God's Name makes all the difference in our relationship with Him. Names matter. Being named says we matter.

Most of us have pet names for our children. I have one for each of mine. I call my second daughter, "Bird." I'm not sure how I came to that name. Perhaps it's because she is such a free spirit. Whatever the reason, the name Bird stuck and continues to stick right up to the present. She's married and a mother of three, but she is still my Bird.

My daughter loves that name—for no other reason than it is my name for her. It signifies a special bond that we share together. By it she knows she belongs to me, that is, she's treasured by me.

God says to each of us through His prophet, Isaiah, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*" God also tells us that He has chosen a "new name" for each of us, one that's unique to each one of us (Revelation 2:17). If you will, it is His pet name for you and me. It signifies a special and personal bond that we each share with God Himself. It is His way of telling us we belong to Him, that is, He counts us as His treasures.

**Prayer:** Jesus, You have made us Your own so we thank You that You have given us a name that reminds us we are treasured. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Three:** We are God —Originals. That gives us Identity.

*[Then] the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)*

God tells us that He actually formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him His divine breath of life. He doesn't tell us exactly how He did this forming, or how He breathed into Adam His divine breath or spirit, but it's clear He was the maker, that is, He was the craftsman. Craftsmen—be they authors, sculptors, artists, potters, composers, carpenters, architects, metal workers, engineers, etc.—join their creative genius with a certain medium and produce a unique product or work. The completed work combines the craftsman or creator's heart and mind with the medium or materials with which he chooses to work.

Different from being manufactured by a machine, the workmanship of a craftsman is personal, that is, he or she has personally designed the work and built or formed it. In so many words, it's "hand made." Also different from being manufactured by a machine no two works by a craftsman are exactly alike. Each is unique.

God tells us through St. Paul that each of us is His workmanship. "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). A couple of key points about this word workmanship.

The word workmanship means more than a product that some workman made or put together. It suggests a personal connection between the workman and the finished product. The product, in some specific way, reflects the person and skill of the workman. In other words, *the product naturally gives testimony to its creator*. A painting by Picasso will be spotted as exactly that by anyone who knows art. A Mozart composition bears the mind, heart, and skill of Mozart, not Brahms, Beethoven, or any other composer. St. Paul explains this same point in Romans 1:20, "*For [God's] invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in [His workmanship]*". (Paul uses the this word, workmanship, only twice: here in Romans 1:20 and in Ephesians 2:10. It always points back to God's personal workmanship.)

The second key point is that God's workmanship—you and me—has a purpose. He designed and made us according to His own personal will and purpose. He had a good reason for making each of us. St. Paul told us "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.*" That's purpose. Knowing what His purpose and will is for each of us goes a long ways in helping us understand "what matters."

The lesson to be learned for today is clear: We are each a signed original of the Master.

**Prayer:** Lord God, We thank you for giving us a unique identity and purpose so our lives have significance. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Four:** We are loved by God. That gives us Value

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)*

Yesterday we briefly explored the fact that God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. As such Adam was God's workmanship—a personal creation reflecting God's person, character, and attributes. The attributes that Paul identified were God's "*eternal power*" and His "*divine nature.*" By looking at all of the natural beauty, uniqueness, complexity, and sheer immenseness of the universe we easily say, "Wow! God is powerful; He is all-powerful!" That obviously fits with His divine nature. His power is huge and by itself points to the fact that He is God. But is His power the main thing He wants us to grab hold of when we look at creation? Or is there something more that He would like us to grasp?

Another way to ask it: Since we are His workmanship we obviously reflect or show His creative genius and ability. What is it He wants to say to the world through each of us? St. John tells us that Jesus is the "*Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world*" (*Revelation 13:8*). That is a hard one to put our heads around. Even so, it tells us that you and I—in fact all of creation—are not simply or primarily products of God's power. We are also products of His sacrificial love.

It would be humanly impressive if a great sculptor invested all of his life's savings into creating a single, magnificent work of art. We would be impressed by his dedication and sacrifice. We would also assume that this work of art is incredibly valuable to the sculptor. We would call it his life's greatest accomplishment. God did even more. He not only invested all of His eternal power into creating this universe including you and me. He invested His own life. In other words, He sacrificed Himself to create you and me and the rest of the world. How valuable, then, do you think each of us is to our Master Creator?

Another way to look at this is to ask a question: What's our value? In other words, "What did it cost God to make us?" What was the price tag? We can answer that first by saying He used a lot, maybe even most of His eternal power. But St. John tells us that Jesus is the "*Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.*" That means that God calculated the cost of

creating us before He started the project. He knew the rebellion, the Fall, the consequences, the death, the price tag to buy it back and still proceeded. The price tag was not only His power, but His life. He would end up sacrificing Himself in order to create what was in His heart and mind to make. He counted the cost and went ahead with the plan. What's that all about? St. John writes, "*By this we know love, that [God] laid down His life for us.*"

The next time you picture in your mind's eye God forming Adam from the dust of the ground, study His hands as He works. They have nail scars.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, Thank You for not counting the cost of our redemption that we may be Yours. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Five:** We serve with God. That gives us Purpose

*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."  
(Ephesians 2:10)*

We know that we are God's workmanship, created by His unconditional love and inexhaustible power. But why; what's our purpose? We return to this Bible verse in Ephesians: we were "*created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*" Let's consider a couple of things.

First, we were created or made in Jesus Christ. That means that our being here on this earth is completely wrapped up in Him. Our source and purpose in life is found in Jesus. Secondly, God wants good things to happen in and for His creation and He personally chose and prepared each of us to do them. We have specific roles (if you like theater) or positions (if you really like sports) to play in the cosmic plan that He designed. No exceptions, each of us has a specific purpose.

In the beginning of creation, God made Adam and Eve and gave them a specific purpose and assignment. God said, "*Let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over . . . all the earth*" (Genesis 1:26). These words do not apply only to the first man and woman, but to all of their descendants including us. God created us to rule over His creation in His behalf. Let's not think that God didn't care to oversee and take care of His wonderful world, so He put us in charge. That idea could not be farther from the truth. The care, nurture, and growth of His creation matters big time to Him. But what also matters is that He cares, nurtures, and grows His creation through us, His children. He loves having us participate with Him in doing the good things that He is doing. Thus, He made us to be the "crown of His creation" and His partners in serving it. So He made us the rulers and servants of His creation.

The business of ruling and at the same time serving seem to bump into each other. Jesus talked to His disciples a lot about that. Once He told them, "*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. . . But it shall be so among you. But whoever would be great among you, must be your servant, and who ever would be first among you [that is, the*

*ruler] must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).*

Serving is always about someone else. The focus of attention is on the one being served, not on the one who is serving. That’s how God designed our purpose in life. We are here for others, not primarily or simply here for ourselves. Getting that turned around really confuses what truly matters—to Him and ultimately to us as well.

We began this devotion with the thought that we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” We take our cue from Him. You, me, and everything else in creation is a result of His personal service—the investment of His eternal power and His sacrificial love. That is how God works. As we just read, “He gave His life as a ransom for many.” This universe was designed by a Servant who gave everything He is and has for it to exist. It operates properly when we follow His lead and serve others. “What’s in it for me?” simply mucks things up.

**Prayer:** Father in Heaven, help us to be those co-ruler servants who know how to wash feet. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Six:** We believe the Lie, "You're in this Alone."

*Did God actually say . . ." (Genesis 3:1)*

Begin this devotion by reading Genesis 3:1-7. It records the story of humankind's fall into sin. The fall—more like a plunge—into sin by Adam and Eve really mucked things up. It introduced chaos into a world ordered perfectly by God in His love and service. God had entrusted His creation to His people. He placed into their hands the privilege and ability to serve His universe with Him, or choose a different path. Whichever way Adam and Eve chose to go, the creation had to follow. That is how much God entrusted His creation to them.

The plunge into sin was predicated on a lie. The evil one told Eve that God had not been completely honest with Adam and her when He commanded them not to eat the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." "God told you that eating the fruit will kill you. It won't. You're not going to die," Satan told them. "Actually your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. God is quite aware of this possibility and He doesn't want anyone else to be like Him."

The real lie wasn't what Satan said about the fruit. It's what he said about God and His relationship with Adam and Eve. God created them out of His love and delighted in serving His creation with and through them. Their relationship was built on unconditional love and unquestioned trust. Satan put a question mark in Eve's mind regarding God's love for them and His trustworthiness. That's all it took. He managed to create doubt where trust once reigned supreme. Was God holding out? In the end, was he really in this thing for Himself?

Betrayed trust breaks relationships, because trust is the bond that holds them together. Once trust is broken, there is nothing that can hold the relationship together. Each member in the relationship becomes disconnected. Each finds himself or herself suddenly alone. And that's where the evil one was headed. His plan was to break the trust bond between people and the Lord. So he started with a deceitful question, "Did God actually say . . .?" In so many words he told her, "I hate to be the one to break the news to you, but God's not on your side. You're really in this thing alone."

Since that day in the Garden of Eden we have found it impossible to take

that question mark out of our hearts. It's built on a complete and unfounded lie, yet we find ourselves believing it. Because we find ourselves questioning whether or not we really matter to God, and whether or not we can trust what He tells us, we consistently make choices from a position of profound fear and insecurity. We think we are really in this thing alone and we do not know what to do.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews considered this very dilemma when he warned: *"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for [God] has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5).* Is that why we are so tempted to trust our material wealth to take care of us? Is it because we believe that we have been forsaken? We're in it alone?" It comes down to the question Satan proposed, "Are we really in this thing alone?" Just like Adam and Eve, we can choose to believe the lie, or we can choose to believe the Lord, "I will never leave you or forsake you, I promise." God hanging on a cross for our sake should tell us clearly whether or not He is telling the truth.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, You have given Yourself that we may be with You. We thank You for making Yourself our brother so we are not alone. Amen.

## ***Week One ~ Made by God: We matter***

*But now thus says the Lord, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)*

**Day Seven:** We live the lie, Broken and Lost

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)*

Biblically speaking, to love the Lord is to know the Lord; to know the Lord is to love Him. We often read in the Old Testament that a man *knew* his wife and she gave birth to a child. Knowing someone that intimately exists only in the bonds of Godly love.

Years ago I was teaching a group of lay leaders in the Philippines about the Biblical understanding of a man "knowing" his wife. During supper some of the guys gathered around the senior leader of the group and asked him a question, "Ama (father) how well do you know your wife?" Having been married some forty years to her he answered, "As well as it is possible."

In the spirit of good fun, they plied him with questions such as, "Ama, how many teeth does she have?" "Ama, how many bones are in her body?" "Ama, how many hairs are on the top of her head?"

To each question he answered, "I don't know."

Jokingly they concluded, "Ama, you do not know Ina (mother) very well at all."

"Oh, I know her very well," he responded. "I know what makes her laugh. I know what makes her cry. I know the sound of her feet on the garden path. I know her."

Adam and Eve knew God that well until the day they chose to listen to Satan's lie and doubt God's love. After they ate the fruit they "heard the sound of the Lord's feet on the garden path" but no longer knew Him. The sound of God's footsteps didn't fill them with love; it filled them with fear. Their relationship with God was broken. It caused them to run away and hide from Him. We've been running from God ever since. Adam and Eve also found that they had to hide from each other. They made aprons of fig leaves to hide their nakedness and shame from each other. We've been wearing emotional aprons of one size or another ever since.

In no time, the brokenness of sin showed its ugly head. When asked by God whether or not he had eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam retorted, "*The woman*

*whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate.*” “It’s her fault, not mine.” From that moment on it was every man or woman for himself.

While Adam and Eve’s hearts had changed toward God and toward each other, God’s heart had not. He loved them just as much now as before they sinned. It was His love that caused Him to come looking for them in the garden that day. God became the seeker that day. He donned missionary garb and waded into the quagmire of our sin-filled world. With these simple words, “*Where are you, Adam,*” He began His work of seeking and saving the lost. From these words to the end of Revelation the Scriptures tell the story of a missionary God who persists in coming to his sworn enemies in order to restore them to Himself and by so doing restore them to their divine image and divine vocation to serve the world. Here we get a real glimpse into the heart of God. Finding those who are broken and lost matters most to Him.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for seeking me as You have loved sinners with Your everlasting love. Amen.