



NEXT STEP

# THE BOX

THE BOX | STUDY GUIDE  
WITH PROPAGANDA



This film series and study guide were produced by Next Step Ministries alongside Propaganda. It was watched by thousands of students on Next Step mission trips across the globe. Our hope is that this series will challenge your faith and help you gain a new understanding of the freedom and joy that can be found in a life outside of **THE BOX** in a real relationship with Jesus Christ.



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DAY 1

*"All I'm suggesting is maybe there's more to the world than what we can touch and what we can measure."*



## **Psalm 19:1**

**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**

The scientific method teaches us that you have to test something in order to prove it's true. Science is looking at the world around you and trying to make sense of it all by verifying its truth. There's a word for that; it's called empiricism.

Empiricism means all things that are true can be verified. Basically, if I can touch it, then I can trust it. But what about what can't be measured?

There are many things that can't be measured, such as emotions. For example, have you ever been dumped and felt like life itself was over? Have you ever been so in love that you have to do everything in your power to stop yourself from shouting it from the mountaintops? Have you ever had your breath taken away by the brilliant reds, oranges, and purples of a sunset?

Life is beautiful. Sadness, joy, pain, happiness; it's all beautiful in its own way, and beauty has no scientific test to measure it. Neither does love.

## **1 John 3:16**

**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.**

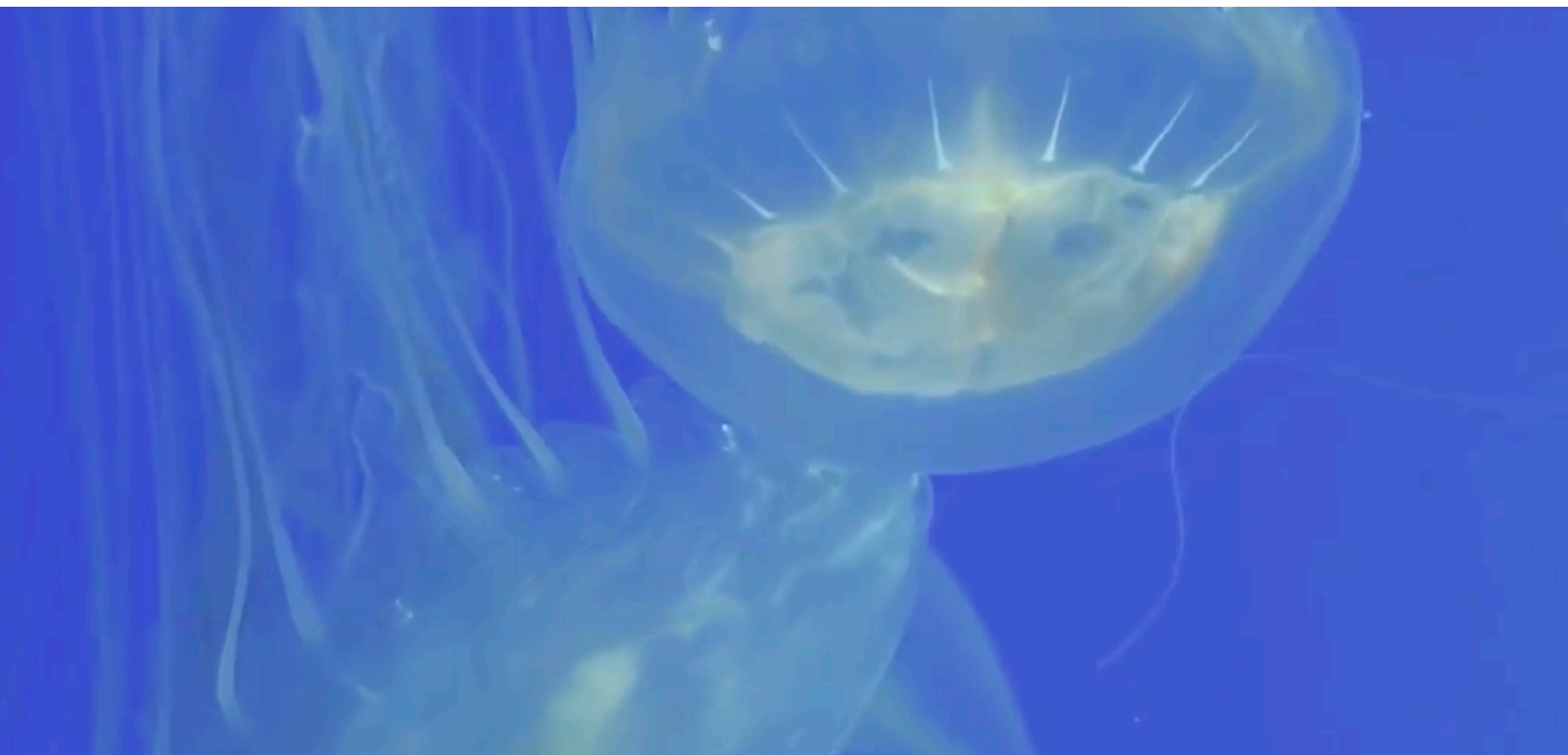
Think about this: when you cry or feel empathy during a break up song, you're not feeling those emotions because of what the singer felt, but because the singer was able to articulate how you felt. That speaks to the giftedness of the musician.



When you look at a beautiful painting, you feel awe about the painting, but also awe for the ability of the painter. The beauty of the painting sings of the glory and the skill of the painter.

What amazes you? What recently have you looked at, or witnessed, and thought to yourself how amazing and beautiful it is?

*“Jellyfish really blow me away. I’m like, ‘It’s a floating clear glob with a nervous system. I can’t get my brain around that. And I’m amazed by its Maker.’”*



The ability to even appreciate science, beauty, a painting, or contemplate the very origins of the universe comes from something that we can't measure. There is so much that we just can't possibly even begin to explain.

So, what made beauty? What, or who, designed us to love?

### **Exodus 15:11**

**Who is like you among the gods, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?**

Read that verse again. No one is like him. He is majestic and awesome in praises. This is the same God who spoke the universe into existence with a breath, who made you and me, who instilled in us the ability to love and marvel at beauty.

We've put this majestic God into a tiny box, haven't we?

Yet so often, we're so stuck on what's in front of us. Our tiny, momentary problems cloud our vision and steal our awe. We become so blinded by life that the majesty of God fails to put us on our knees anymore. Have you felt this? As if you're living inside a grey cloud?

Could this be because you've taken your eyes off the one who designed it all? You've focused so much inwardly that you forget to look outwardly toward the only one who can truly help reignite that fire in you. Sometimes all you have to do is look into the heavens and witness with your own eyes the majesty of God.



*“You look at a sunset in a cumulonimbus cloud, and you’re like, ‘That’s beautiful.’ And that beauty is real. And that beauty had to come from somewhere.”*



How are you certain there is a God? What do you do when you start to have doubts? When the world seems grey?

Do you stare out into the cosmos and marvel at Him? Do you go into the woods and walk among his creation? Do you sit in the silence of a morning and listen to worship music? What do you do practically to realign yourself with the beauty of God?

What, in your life, might be distracting you from truly seeing and appreciating God?

**Psalm 8:1**

**O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.**

If you've found yourself putting God into a box, reducing him to a miniscule, mediocre lowercase "g" god, it's time to realign your heart and mind on Him.

Discover for yourself what helps you refocus on your Maker, on the all-powerful, beautiful God who is the definition of beauty and love.

You know in your heart where it is you feel closest to God, whether it be through nature, worship, quiet time in his Word, or even around good friends who encourage you in your walk with God.

Whatever it may be, find it, and when you stop marveling at God, go to that place. When your eyes are focused on His glory, the problems of this world, as the popular hymn says, "...will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

**Psalm 95:3-6**

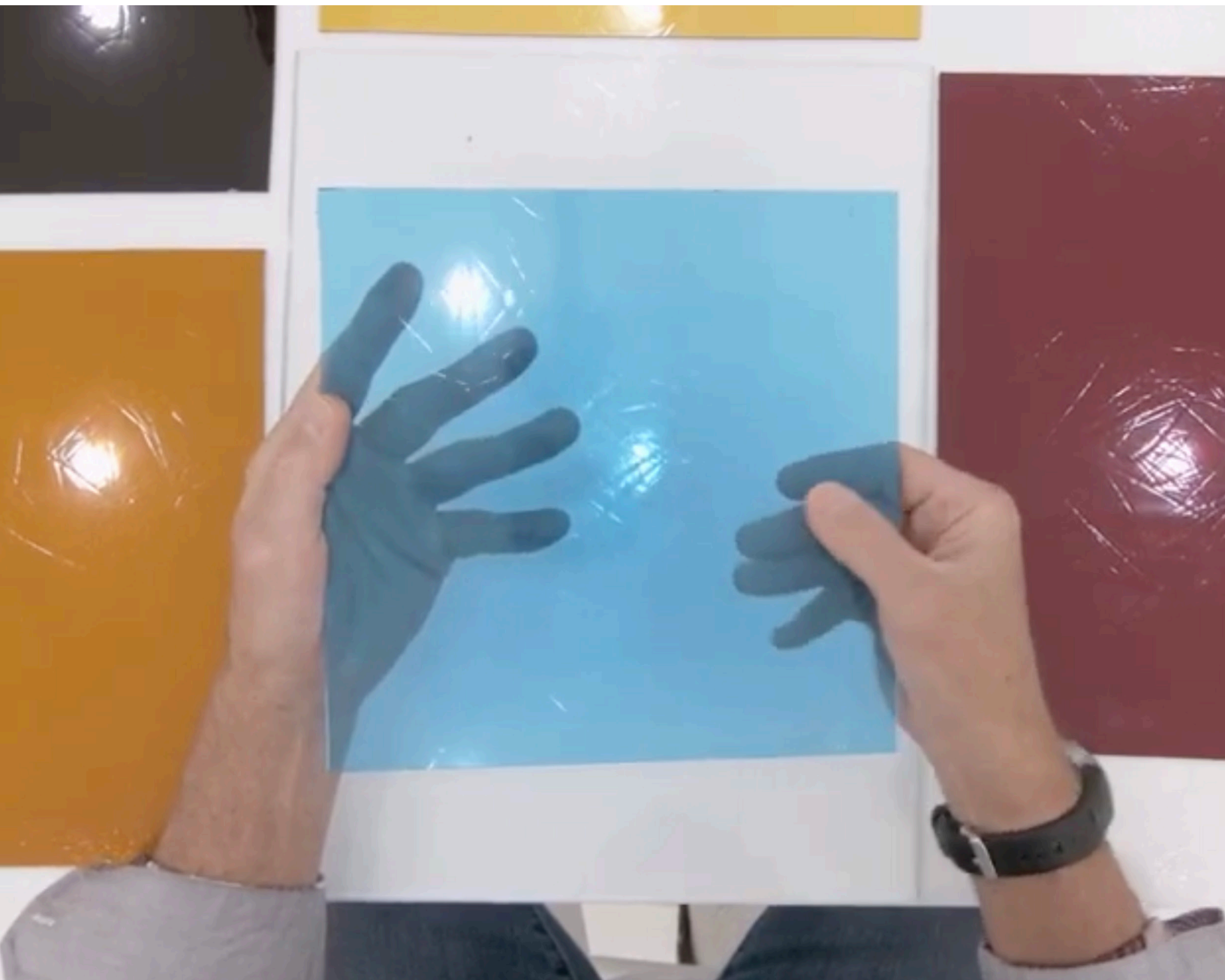
**For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods, in whose hand are the depths of the earth, the peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it, And His hands formed the dry land.**





DAY 2

*“Nature is screaming at you. It’s yelling beauty, order, design, purpose, symmetry. It’s glorious. It’s yelling that you have not yet even begun to understand me. You have not even mapped the entirety of the ocean.”*



## **John 8:12**

**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

We can all agree that life is mysterious, right? Sure, we’ve been to the moon, we’ve been to the ocean floor, we’ve conquered Mount Everest, but there is still so much we haven’t even begun to explore or understand.

Try to wrap your head around this; scientists say there are anywhere from 200-billion to 2-trillion galaxies in the universe, and there are about 100-million stars in each galaxy. We won’t even begin to try to calculate that number of total stars in the universe. But even then, the universe is so big scientists are still unsure. It’s a massive mystery.

Let’s bring it a little closer to earth, yet no less mysterious than the number of stars in the sky; what kind of questions do you have about God? Just stop and think about a few. Why is there suffering? Why did God allow Adam and Eve to sin? Why is there evil? Why did He send His son to die for us? Is there even a God?

## **Job 11:7-9**

**“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.”**





Here's Job, a man called "blameless" and "upright," who was wondering this very same thing. He was a devoted follower of God, yet one day Satan approaches God and argues that Job is only good because God has given him so many blessings. Satan asks for permission to punish Job so that Job will renounce God, and surprisingly, God grants it.

Yet Job doesn't curse God in his afflictions, he instead marvels at the mysteries. Job didn't have the answer as to why he was suffering, and sometimes neither do we. And you know what? That's okay.

But so often we go searching for answers to life's deepest questions in all the wrong places.

All of us have chosen our own mediators; some choose friends, so we collect people around us. Others choose money, and money will allow you to collect things and that will somehow bring you happiness. If you buy a house, somehow that brings stability and security. You gain approval from posting photos of yourself, and people tell you they like it. These are mediators.

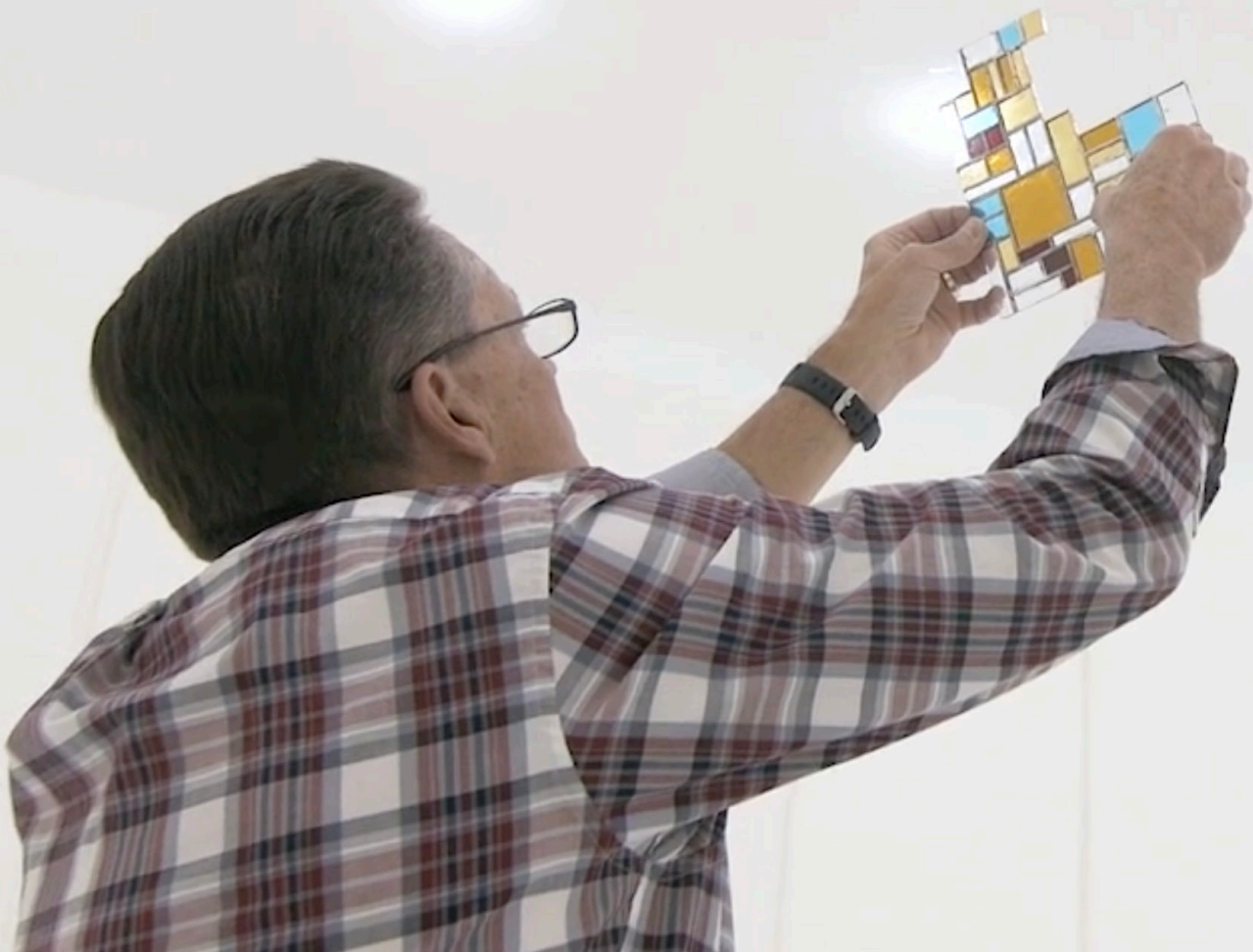
But the problem with all of these “mediators” is that they fall short. We think that pouring ourselves into these passions will bring us joy and purpose, and provide a meaning for our life, but none of these lasts. Jesus tells us that there is only one mediator between God and man, and that's through him.

### **1 Timothy 2:5-6**

**For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.**

It is only through Jesus that we can find our purpose, satisfaction, security, and freedom. Jesus died for us so that we may have eternal salvation and now, through Him, we have a renewed purpose. He died so we could have life. But that doesn't mean we still won't have questions.

*When I met my wife and decided to marry her it's not like I knew everything about her. She didn't write a PHD dissertation on who she is. I don't know everything about my wife, I just know I'm all in. She has captured my heart. The love that I felt for her didn't need all the answers.*





The same is true for our relationship with God. We don't need all the answers to know that we're all in. Are you all in? Do you love God enough to give yourself completely to Him? What is holding you back?

We get it, it's so much easier to feel like you're finding your purpose in the things of this world, but it is ultimately so empty. Giving your life to God is the only thing that truly satisfies in this fallen world. So, what are you going to do?

**James 4:7-8**

**Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.**

DAY 3



*"I'm not the artist, I'm the canvas."*

## **Ephesians 2:10**

**For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**

There are so many aspects of our lives that we have no control over. This could include who our family is, what year you were born, your ethnicity, what country you were born in, sicknesses, the list goes on and on.

How does this make you feel? To know that you had little to no control over where you came from or many of your circumstances?

Honestly, it can be scary. It can be insanely frustrating. It can even be sad or maddening.

## **Psalm 139:13-14**

**For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.**

How do you feel after reading that verse? Before you were even a thought in your parents' heads, before they even knew each other, God knew you. He has known you since the beginning of time. Let that sink in for a second.

Picture this; you all know Bob Ross, right? He was the soft-spoken painter on PBS who painted "happy little trees," and would create masterpieces in less than 30 minutes. For the first 20 minutes or so, his painting would just look like a blob of color. But suddenly, within the last 2 minutes of the show, the painting would emerge, and you would see all these glorious colors harmoniously come together to create a masterpiece.



Now imagine if, during the first 20 minutes when everything looked all blobby and gross, one of Bob's happy trees comes alive and starts telling him he isn't doing it correctly. It's crazy, right? Bob isn't going to make a hideous painting, he's going to do the best work he possibly can.



He saw the finished product in his mind before he put any paint on the canvas.

When you're creating art, people will often look over your shoulder and have opinions on your art and how things are supposed to look, but they aren't in your brain. They don't see what you see. I look at this and know where I'm going. I see the finished product.

Bob Ross examples aside, this idea can help us with our self-identity and worth. How often have you cried out to God telling him He's wrong, or that he messed up on you, or that you know better than Him? We've all done it.

Before you were even born, God had the finished product of you in mind. He knew all your ups and downs, all your ins and outs, before you were the masterpiece you are today.

But how often do you feel like a masterpiece? Doesn't 99.9% of your day feel more like that blobby painting than a Bob Ross masterpiece?

### **John 16:33**

**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**

What are some of the troubles you have in your life? They could be big or small. What about the really big issues like natural disasters, starvation, unfair governments, and genocide?

*Life can suck. There's pain and suffering and it's all over the world.*



When we experience pain for ourselves and see it all over the world, we begin to feel like we aren't in control. It's during these rough patches that it can be hard to remember that God is in control, that the Master Artist is still sculpting you into His masterpiece.

What brought on all this pain and suffering was sin, and it's sin that separates us from God. Sin is the part of us that rebels and says that I want control of my own destiny. Sin is our selfishness that attempts to elevate us to God's throne where we can shake our fist at Him and tell Him "You are not the controller of my destiny."

We all have this sin nature in us, and with that comes desires for things we know ultimately aren't good for us. What are some of these desires that you might struggle with?

### **Romans 7:18-19**

**I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh; for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do. Instead, I keep on doing the evil I do not want to do.**

Here's Paul, arguably one of the most influential Christians of all time, saying that he is constantly struggling, consistently doing what he knows he shouldn't be doing.

This happens to us on a daily basis. We think, *Today will be the day I finally stop hating that person. Today will be the day I finally stop cheating on tests. Today will be the day I finally stop looking at porn.* But what happens? We do what we don't want to do. The sinful desires are strong, but guess what? God is so much stronger.





*Sin caused us to have a corrupted hard-drive.*

Jesus came to be the wedge between us and sin. He came to set us free from the death we deserve. He came to give us abundant life. He came to clean up our corrupted hard-drive.

But first, we need to recognize our weaknesses and our need for a Savior and accept the free gift of eternal life He gave each of us. Once you accept this gift, you will begin to see the world differently. Instead of seeing everything through a selfish, “I know best,” lens, you’ll see the world and your neighbors through the eyes of God.

### **Mark 12:31-32**

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these.**

Doesn’t all this sound so much better than just living for yourself? Isn’t it so much more freeing to know that the Master Artist has a plan for you and a grand design rather than trying, and failing, to forge your own path?

God gives us gifts of love, belonging, joy, purpose. The life you were seeking on your own, is instead found when you give control of your life over to the Master Artist.



*"You are not the artist. You're the canvas."*



DAY 4



## **Hebrews 12:2**

**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Jesus died on the cross for us, and his death, burial, and resurrection made it possible for us to reconnect with God, to function the way we were meant to function, to have a meaningful life, and so much more. But do we trust that the Master Artist can give us that life we were meant to live?

We certainly don't live that way, do we? We put so many safeguards up to protect us from the world and we try to do this life largely on our own despite saying we trust God to take care of us. We try our best to live a good life and hope that, because we do that, then everything will work itself out.

We have this picture of Christianity that's really just these weird boxes, that are really just about what you can and can't do. Like a Christian is judgmental and arrogant, or you're marked by what you don't do: "So I don't drink this, I don't do that, I don't hang with those people." That's not at all what Christ talked about. That's not the life that Jesus presented. You got to break out of those things.

What boxes have you put yourself, and your faith, into?  
What boxes have you put God into?



**2 Corinthians 3:17**

**Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.**

What a simple and encouraging verse. God has set us free from all the chains we've weighed ourselves down with for so long, all the boxes we've thrown over our heads, the depression, hate, unworthiness, self-deprecation, self-loathing, and the list goes on and on.

You have been set free.

And with that freedom, God has called us into his narrative; a story that says it isn't about me. You see, we aren't on this earth just to go to school, get a good job, buy a house, get a boat, get married, pay taxes, have kids, pay more taxes, and then just grow old and retire. While all those examples are fine, that's not the main reason we're here.

We are here to glorify God and to share the love of God with everyone around us, to show them that they too can be free, that they too can have a purpose. You get the opportunity to serve others.

Not only am I a work of art, but all humans are a work of art. And suffering is not just something I experience, but something we all experience. And there's a masterpiece that God is making out of all of us.

What do you think serving others looks like? What has serving others looked like for you in the past? When some people imagine serving, they picture themselves going to foreign places and having adventures and everything going all peachy. Sure, that may happen, but sometimes the places God is calling us to go to or to do won't be what we had in mind, and won't be glamorous.

**John 13:14**

**Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.**



Jesus didn't come to be a conquering king. The proof of that is when he humbled himself enough to bend down and wash his disciples' feet. That is the example God is giving us for what serving others should look like.

Sometimes the places you're called to serve, they ain't going to be pretty. It may not fit in your box, these people may not look like you, they may come from a different culture or neighborhood. It's not necessarily going to be the easiest and most comfortable thing.

So how are you going to break out of your box? What does your box look like and how is it holding you back? Pray that God would help you break free. Tell a good Christian friend or a mentor about what's holding you back, and have them pray with you or hold you accountable.

Pray that God will humble you, that he will give you the courage to serve others without fear. That God will give you the courage to go to uncomfortable places so you can present the beautiful, glorious narrative of Jesus.

### **Galatians 5:1**

**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

The yoke of slavery mentioned in the verse above could also be swapped with the word "box." Walk in the freedom of Christ, and don't let yourself be weighed down again by the box.



*Break out of it. Live in the freedom of Jesus.*



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