

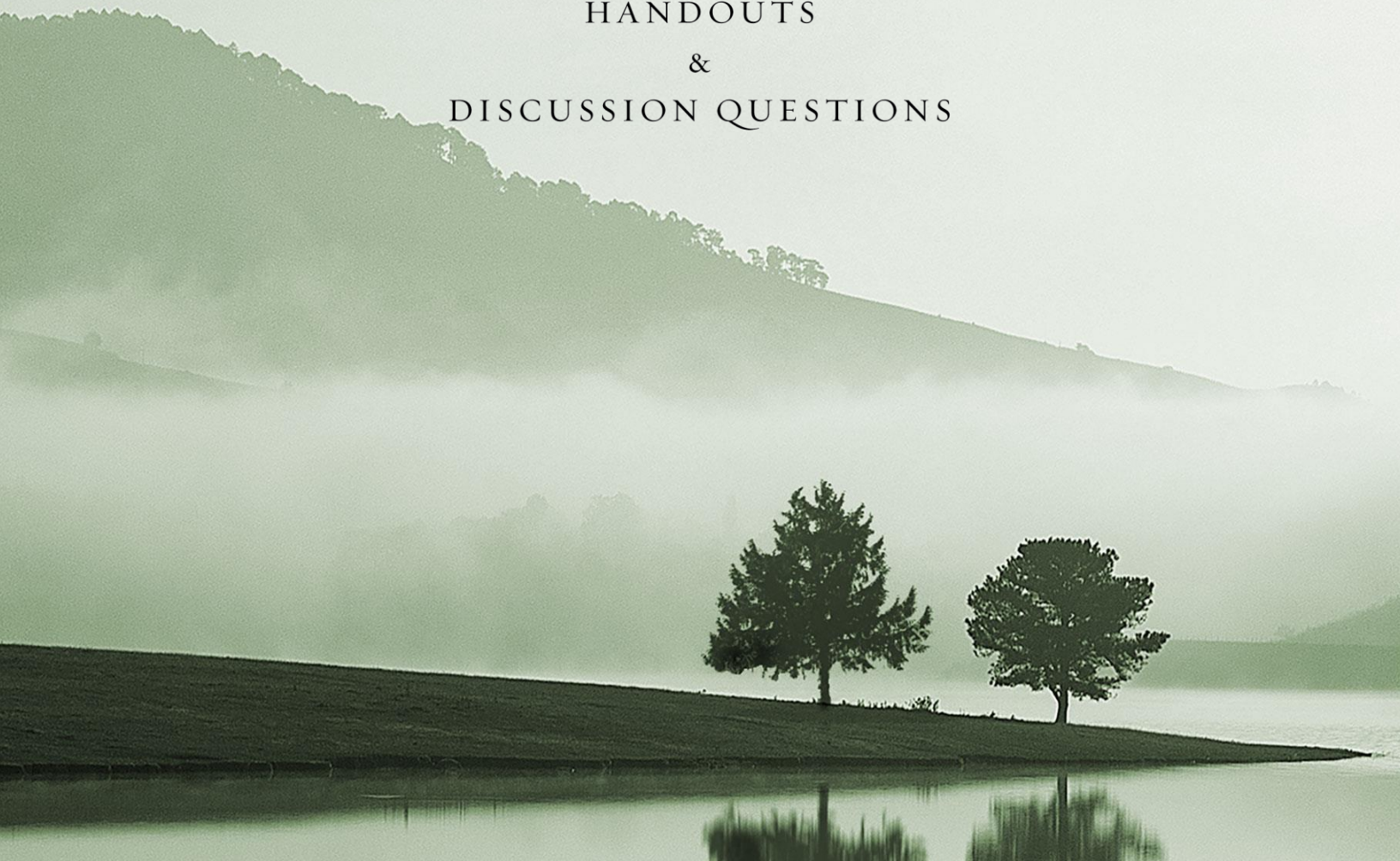
# BETWEEN TWO TREES

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OUR TRANSFORMATION  
FROM DEATH TO LIFE

8-WEEK VIDEO SERIES

HANDOUTS  
&  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



**Between Two Trees:  
Our Transformation from Death to Life**

By

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**SESSION 1: *Life Between Two Trees***

**I. The Good News**

- a. The Bible ends where it begins...Kind of.
- b. The Tree of Life (Revelation 22:1-2a; Revelation 21:3-4)

**II. The Problem**

- a. Lived *between* these two trees.
- b. And between these two trees, life is hard.

**III. The Reality**

- a. We all long to be someone different. Every one of us.
  - i. Even if it's just a better version of ourselves.
  - ii. As children we know this intuitively.
- b. This longing is not a curse, but a gift from God.

**IV. A Case of Amnesia**

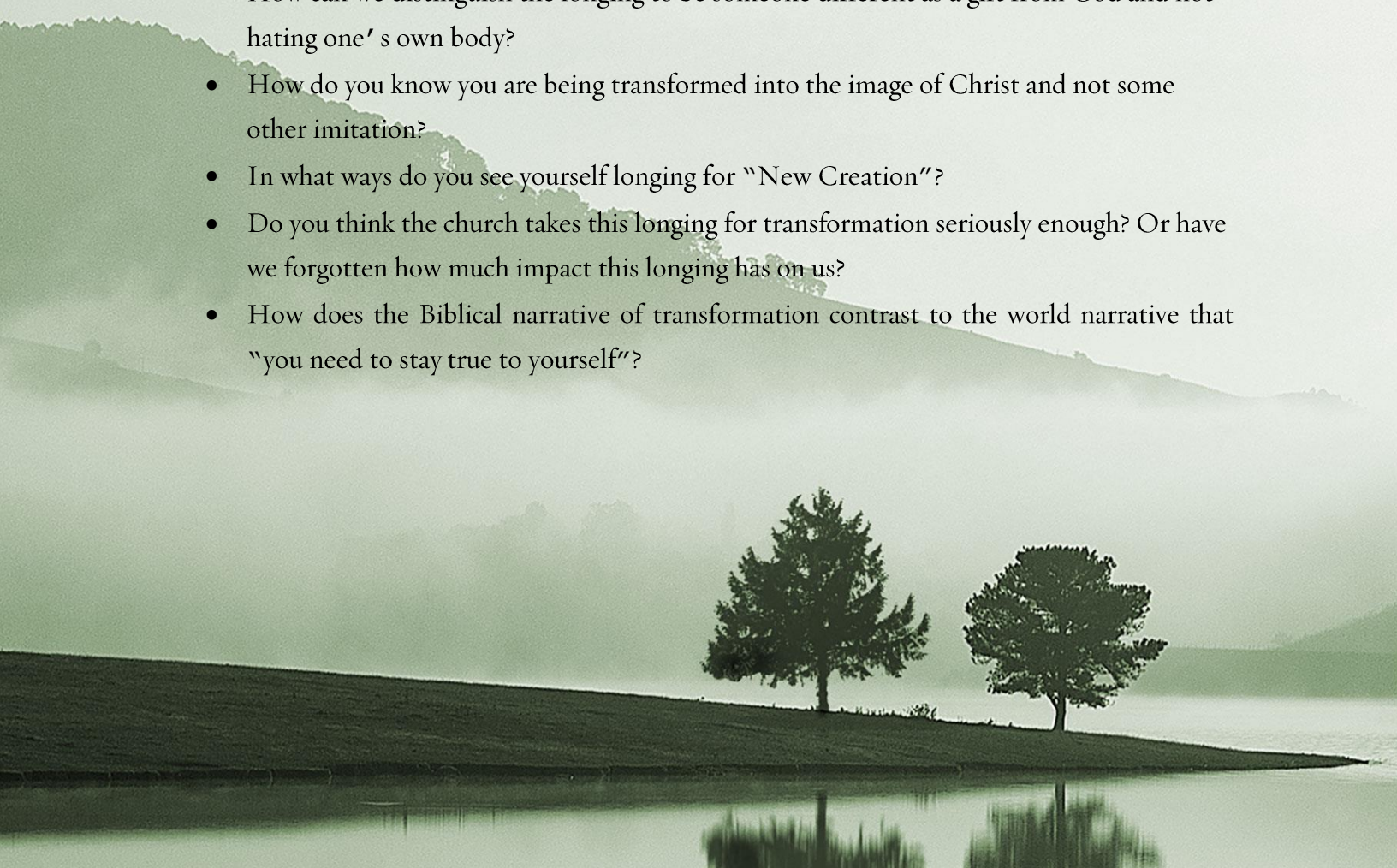
- a. Somewhere along the way, we forgot the gift of transformation.
- b. Yet the feeling never goes away; it just changes shape.

**V. Conclusion**

- a. We are not asking just "how do we read the Bible?" but "how does the Bible read us?"
- b. Why does the Bible end the way it begins?
  - i. To finish an unfinished creation.
  - ii. You.

Discussion Questions for Video 1:  
*Life Between Two Trees*

- The longing to be someone else is normal. So how do we affirm this deep longing, while pointing to the “true tree of life”?
- Why do you think as a society we have shut down the idea that we have a need for transformation? How has the damaged us?
- When and why did the idea that transformation is a “bad thing” start?
- What is it that scares us about transformation?
- How should we begin to break the lie that transformation is a bad thing with our non-Christian friends and family?
- How do we explain to non-believers that the longing that they are experiencing is the product of a much deeper longing within?
- How do we show people the path to transformation in a way that doesn’t offend them?
- What does clinging to the tree in the middle (i.e., the cross) look like in each of our lives?
- What part of your identity is society telling you to embrace even though you know God is telling you otherwise?
- How can we distinguish the longing to be someone different as a gift from God and not hating one’s own body?
- How do you know you are being transformed into the image of Christ and not some other imitation?
- In what ways do you see yourself longing for “New Creation”?
- Do you think the church takes this longing for transformation seriously enough? Or have we forgotten how much impact this longing has on us?
- How does the Biblical narrative of transformation contrast to the world narrative that “you need to stay true to yourself”?



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**SESSION 2: *The Mystery of Eden – What Happened in the Garden?***

**I. The Question**

a. What happened in the Garden of Eden?

i. The Narrative

1. *Genesis 1* – God woos all of creation into existence.
2. *Genesis 2* – the creation account centered on day 6 (creation of humanity).
3. *Genesis 3* – tragedy strikes creation.

b. The Problem

- i. Reciting the narrative of Genesis doesn't answer the question.
- ii. Key Question: What if Adam and Eve's sin was far worse than just an infraction against a divine law? (Genesis 3:8-9)

**II. A New Question to Answer Our Question**

a. What is sin?

- i. Typical response: an "indiscretion" (intentional or unintentional) that demands punishment from God.
- ii. It can't be less than this, but what if it's worse than that?

b. What is union?

- i. To answer, "what is sin?" we need to answer, "What is union?"
  1. Answer: when two become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).
  2. We were created for union because we were created in the image of a triune God (Genesis 1:26-27).

### III. Conclusion

- a. What happened in Eden? We became “one flesh” with Death.
- b. And the results have been perilous.



Discussion Questions for Video 2:  
*The Mystery of Eden – What Happened in the Garden?*

- How did you view sin as a child? Or how did you view sin before you were a Christian? How has that view been changed?
- How has the church defined sin in your life?
- How does union with ungodly things affect our understanding of God?
- How do we point out the seriousness of humanity's union with Death to other Christians in an age where we hear so often in the church: "I'm only human, I make mistakes"?
- What are some ways that we choose a union with Death instead of union with the Father?
- What is the "forbidden fruit" you try to grasp?
- What kind of union is in your life right now, whether virtuous or not?
- In a society that is easily offended and hates talking about sin, how do we communicate the brutality of sin without turning the people away from the gospel?
- In what ways do you see us longing for union?
- Do we sell sin short in order to minimize the extent to which God is asking us to transform?
- How do you explain our union with Death to a Sunday school class of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys?
- Let's dissect God's phrase in Genesis 3, "where are you" a little bit deeper. He obviously knew where Adam and Eve were, so why did he ask the question?
- If God's calling is rooted in mourning, how can our own grief be a tool in the path to transformation?
- How does Christ's work impact our longing for union?
- How might Romans 8:22 connect with Gen. 3:8-9? What implications can we draw from all of creation's union with Death?
- How does God's act of creation reveal deeper levels of union? Like: Adam was created from the dust of the earth, Eve was created from Adam's side, all of humanity was created in God's image, etc.

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**SESSION 3: *The Tree of Death – When Love Became Flesh, Why Did We Kill It?***

**I. When Love became flesh, why did we kill It?**

- a. John 1:9-11
- b. Matthew 21:33-46

**II. The Depths of Union: The Depths of the Problem**

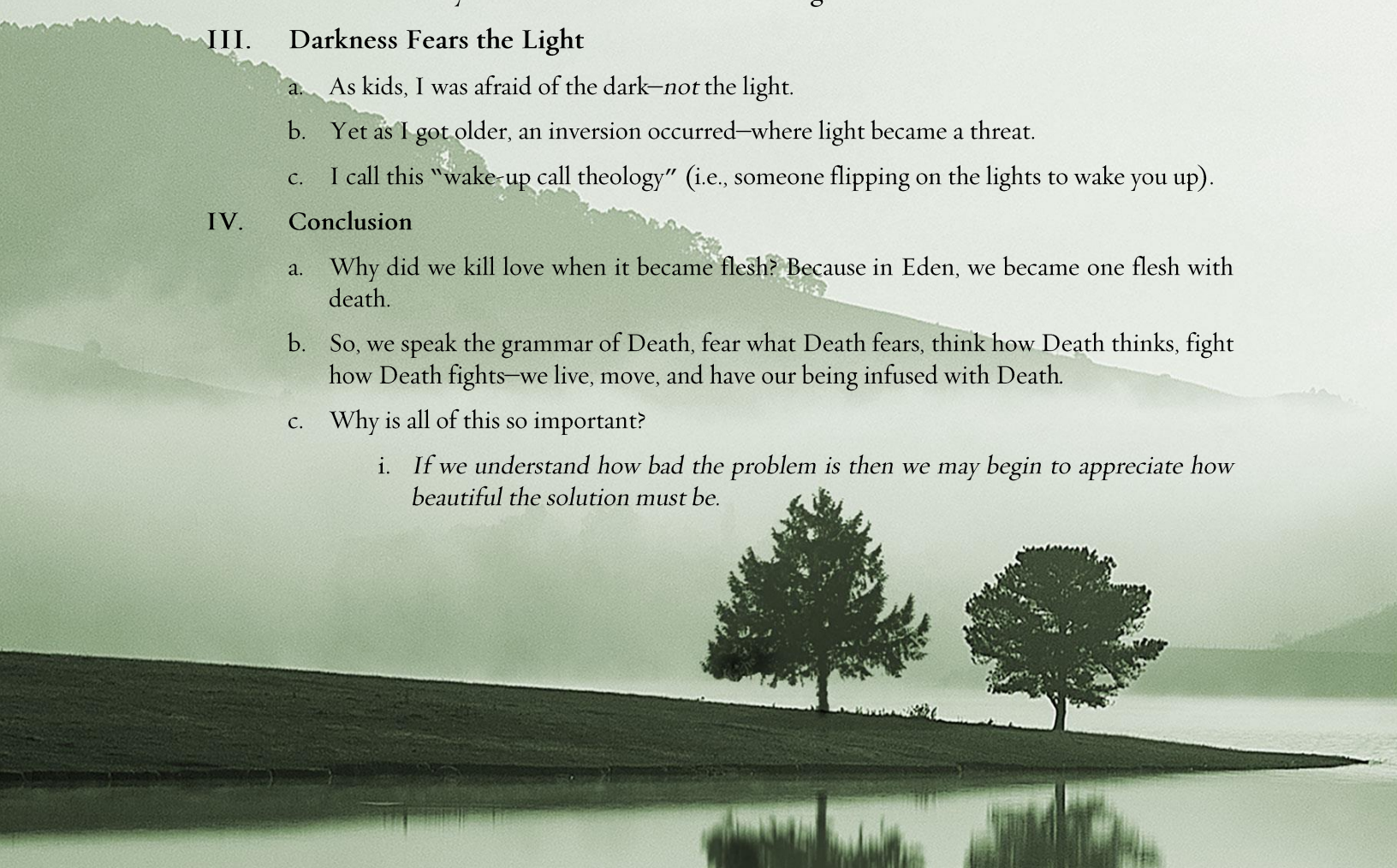
- a. Union isn't just "holding hands"—it is more like an ingestion of food or drink.
- b. If sin is "union with Death," then the problem of sin is way worse than we typically appreciate.
  - i. We are so consumed by darkness that if light came toward us, we would try to kill it.
  - ii. Why? Because "darkness fears the light."

**III. Darkness Fears the Light**

- a. As kids, I was afraid of the dark—*not* the light.
- b. Yet as I got older, an inversion occurred—where light became a threat.
- c. I call this "wake-up call theology" (i.e., someone flipping on the lights to wake you up).

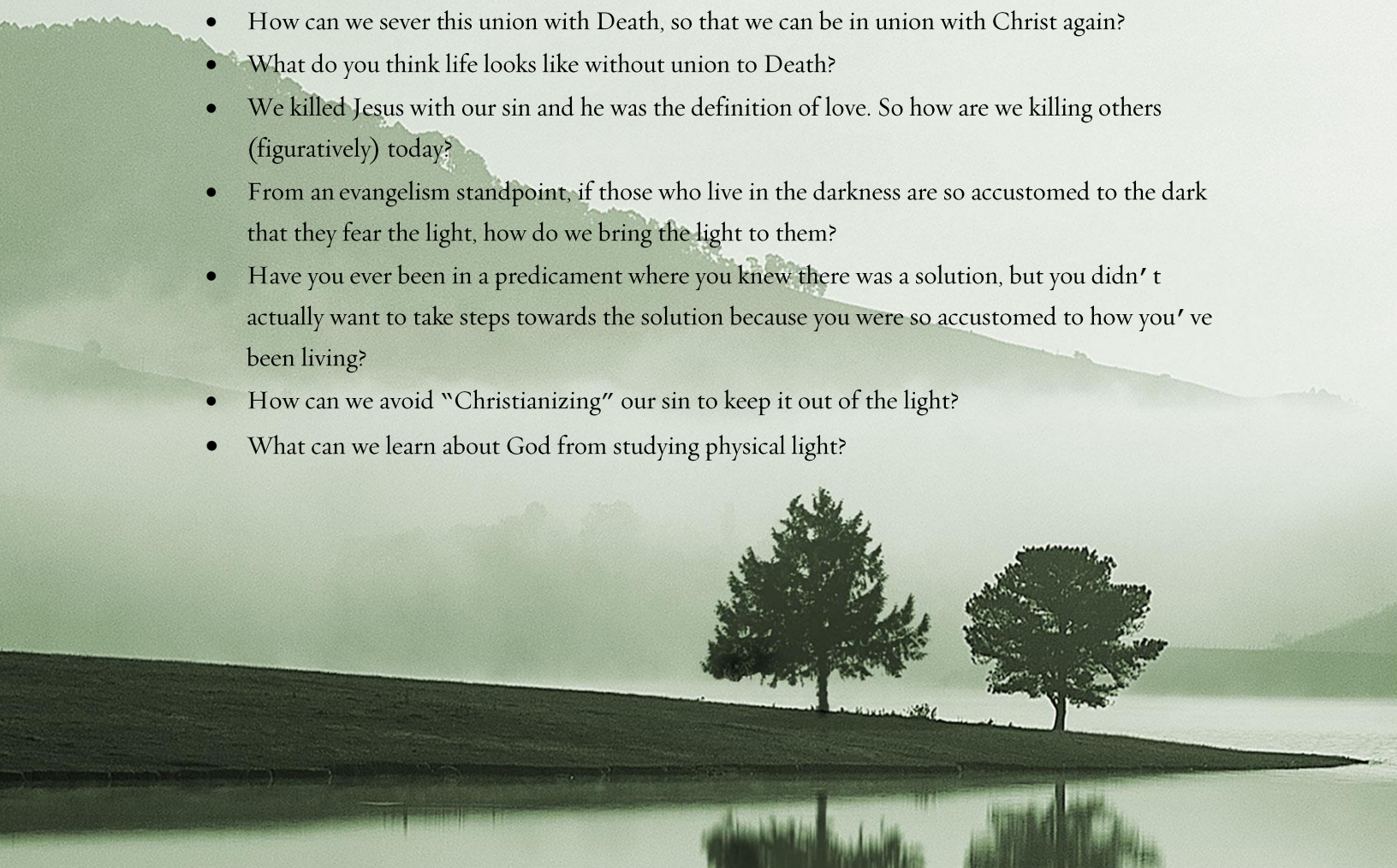
**IV. Conclusion**

- a. Why did we kill love when it became flesh? Because in Eden, we became one flesh with death.
- b. So, we speak the grammar of Death, fear what Death fears, think how Death thinks, fight how Death fights—we live, move, and have our being infused with Death.
- c. Why is all of this so important?
  - i. *If we understand how bad the problem is then we may begin to appreciate how beautiful the solution must be.*



**Discussion Questions for Video 3:**  
*The Tree of Death – When Love Became Flesh, why did We Kill it?*

- What is John's purpose in starting his Gospel by emphasizing that creation doesn't recognize or receive the Lord?
- How do we live in the light if we are unified with darkness?
- What is the vocabulary of the language of Death? What examples can we give of the grammar of Death in our lives?
- How do we become aware of the ways Death has infiltrated our language and actions?
- If you throw a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out. But if you throw a frog into a pot of cold water and slowly increase the temperature until it is boiling, it won't notice, and it will die. How do our habits sneak up on us?
- How can we help each other to become less sensitive to the light? How can we push each other out of the habits of darkness?
- Shane explained that when you try to separate two things that have become one it deeply impacts everything around them. How can we help others see this in our churches?
- Do you agree with Shane's perspective on our fear of the light? Why or why not?
- Where are you afraid of the dark?
- Where are you afraid of the light?
- How can we sever this union with Death, so that we can be in union with Christ again?
- What do you think life looks like without union to Death?
- We killed Jesus with our sin and he was the definition of love. So how are we killing others (figuratively) today?
- From an evangelism standpoint, if those who live in the darkness are so accustomed to the dark that they fear the light, how do we bring the light to them?
- Have you ever been in a predicament where you knew there was a solution, but you didn't actually want to take steps towards the solution because you were so accustomed to how you've been living?
- How can we avoid "Christianizing" our sin to keep it out of the light?
- What can we learn about God from studying physical light?





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**SESSION 4: *The Tree Between Two Trees – The Cross of Christ***

**I. What is finished?**

- a. John 19:30, Jesus cries out from the cross, "It is finished."
- b. Which begs the question, "What is finished?"
  - i. His Life?
  - ii. Sin's Outstanding debt?
    1. *1 Corinthians 15:3*
    2. *Galatians 3:13*
    3. *Hebrews 9:15*
- c. "Yes" to both options, BUT the remedy must match the severity of the problem.

**II. Learning to Count**

- a. To answer the question "What is finished?" we need to learn to count.
- b. The Seven Signs of John:
  - i. John 2:11
  - ii. John 4:54
  - iii. John 5:1-15
  - iv. John 6:1-15
  - v. John 9:1-34
  - vi. John 11:1-44
  - vii. John 19:30
    1. "Seven," in Jewish literature, is a number of completion usually attached to creation (Genesis 1:1; cf. John 1:1—"In the beginning").

2. Jesus dies on the 6<sup>th</sup> day (John 19:31), rests in the tomb on day 7.

### III. Understanding the Problem to Understand the Solution

- a. We are “one flesh” with Death.
- b. These presents two significant obstacles if God wants to redeem us:
  - i. *God doesn't have direct access to Death.*
  - ii. *God can't obliterate Death without destroying humanity as well.*
- c. God's Solution = *the incarnation* (Philippians 2:6-8)
  - i. Christ became flesh, gaining access to Death.
  - ii. By entering Death and surpassing Death's reach (1 Peter 3:19), Jesus repurposed Death for union with God.

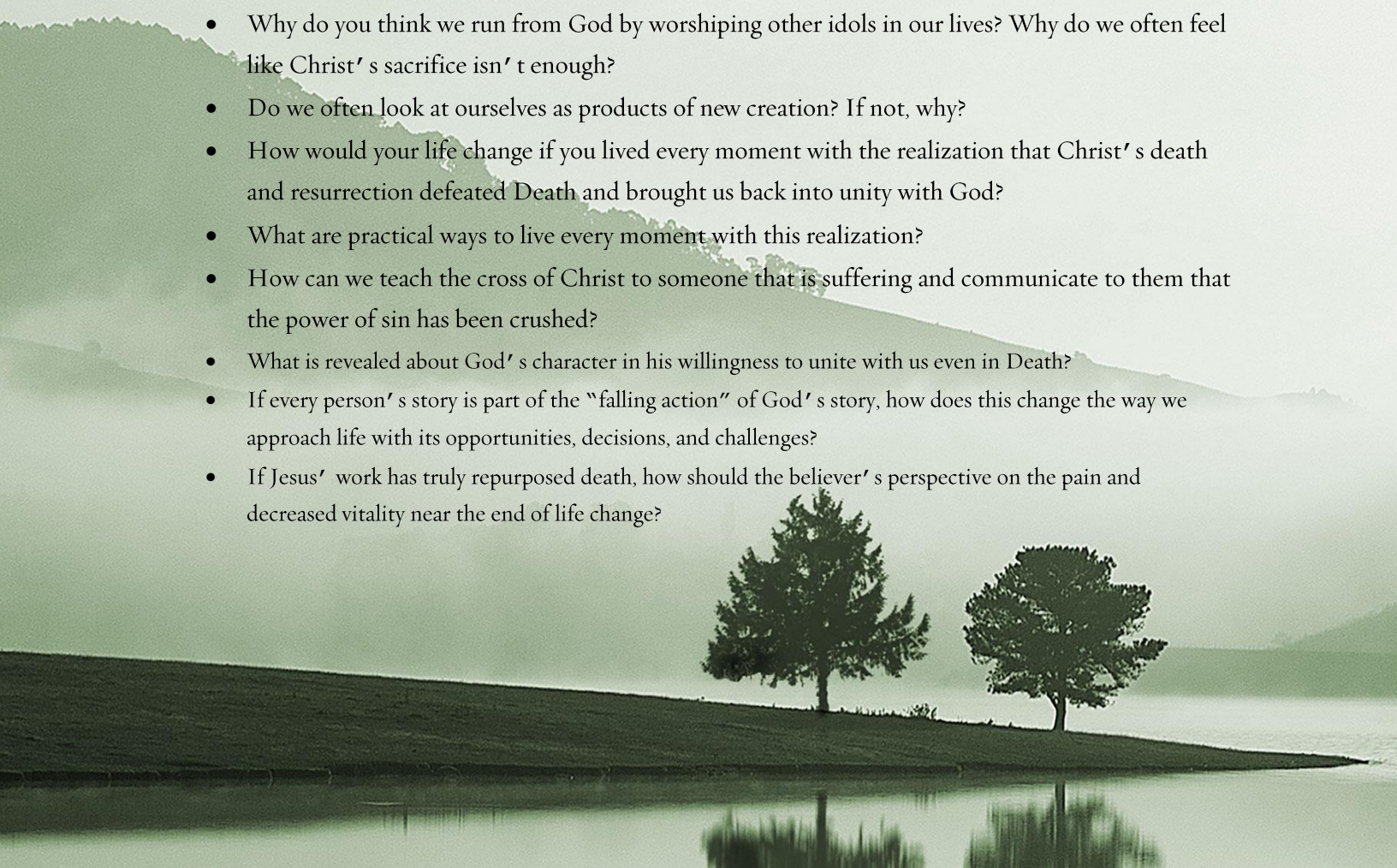
### IV. The End of Old Creation and the Beginning of New Creation

- a. What is finished? Old Creation. Death's reign of tyranny—in Christ alone.
- b. *John 19:41* = a new tomb in a garden.



**Discussion Questions for Video 4:**  
*The Tree Between Two Trees – The Cross of Christ*

- How has the chart expanded your understanding of the problem (p. 121 in *Between Two Trees*)?
- What are some things we believe “save us” other than Christ? What do we entrust ourselves to?
- What do you gravitate towards on a daily basis? You are in your house—what is it that you choose to do? How does this reinforce your union with Death or teach you to speak the language of love?
- The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18ff.). So how do we teach on the significance of death leading to life?
- The cross is humiliating, even at times to Christians. So how do we encourage believers to live in the shadow of the cross—to die in order to live?
- To lose our selfishness isn’t popular. How do we show the beauty of “dying to ourselves daily” in a culture that is self-centered?
- How do we apply the solution (the cross and God’s method of redemption) in our lives? What does this change, challenge, or confirm?
- Why do you think we run from God by worshiping other idols in our lives? Why do we often feel like Christ’s sacrifice isn’t enough?
- Do we often look at ourselves as products of new creation? If not, why?
- How would your life change if you lived every moment with the realization that Christ’s death and resurrection defeated Death and brought us back into unity with God?
- What are practical ways to live every moment with this realization?
- How can we teach the cross of Christ to someone that is suffering and communicate to them that the power of sin has been crushed?
- What is revealed about God’s character in his willingness to unite with us even in Death?
- If every person’s story is part of the “falling action” of God’s story, how does this change the way we approach life with its opportunities, decisions, and challenges?
- If Jesus’ work has truly repurposed death, how should the believer’s perspective on the pain and decreased vitality near the end of life change?



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**SESSION 5: *He Has Done It – Transforming the Grotesque into the Beautiful***

**I. The Pain of Our Stories**

- a. My story.
- b. It's easy to talk about the beauty of the cross, but sometimes it's easy to forget the pain of our story.

**II. My God, My God, Why have You Forsaken Me?**

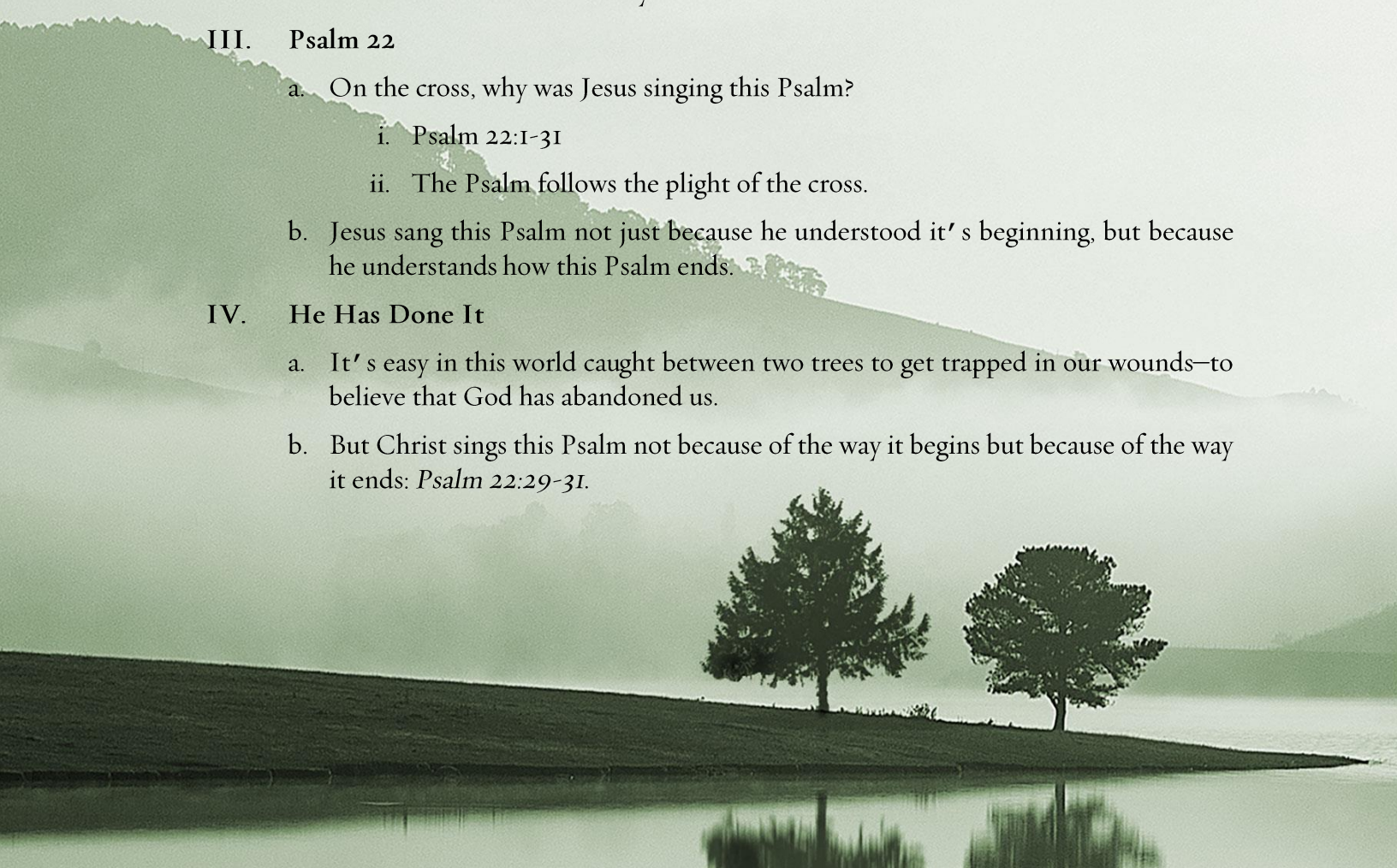
- a. Because of my story, I identify more with these words from the cross than anything else in the gospel story (Psalm 13:1-3).
- b. My response to my story's pain:
  - i. Tell no one.
  - ii. Hide it all from everyone...even God himself.

**III. Psalm 22**

- a. On the cross, why was Jesus singing this Psalm?
  - i. Psalm 22:1-31
  - ii. The Psalm follows the plight of the cross.
- b. Jesus sang this Psalm not just because he understood it's beginning, but because he understands how this Psalm ends.

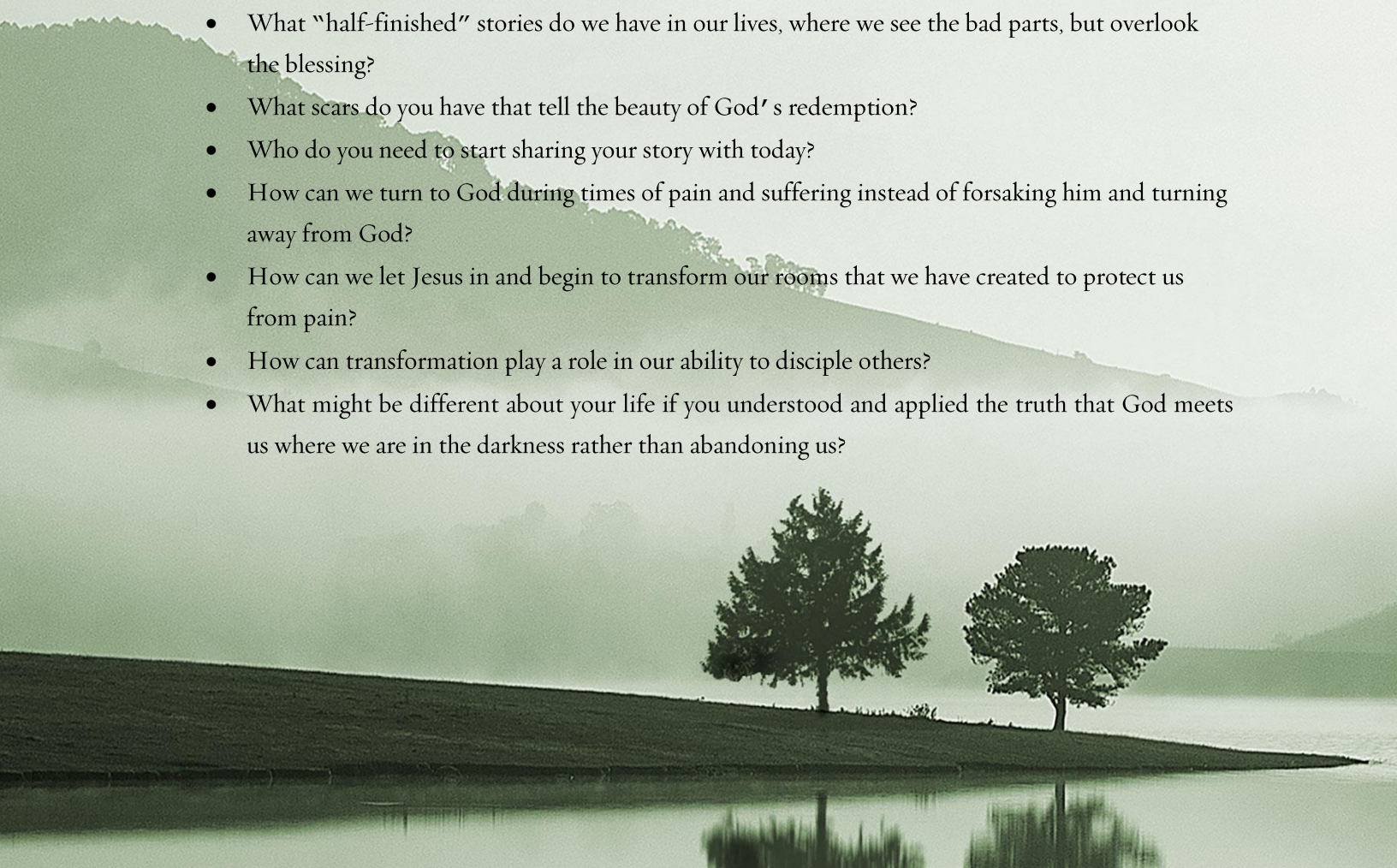
**IV. He Has Done It**

- a. It's easy in this world caught between two trees to get trapped in our wounds—to believe that God has abandoned us.
- b. But Christ sings this Psalm not because of the way it begins but because of the way it ends: *Psalm 22:29-31*.



**Discussion Questions for Video 5:**  
*He Has Done It – Transforming the Grotesque into the Beautiful*

- How do you feel that God has forsaken you in your life? In other words, where is the brokenness in your story?
- How has the Lord shown up for you when you cried out to Him: “Where are you, Lord, and why have you forsaken me?”
- How has our pain blinded us to God’s presence?
- Why do humans hide? What is the role of shame?
- What are some ways that our story can keep us locked up and hidden away from everyone?
- Do you let people in? Do you have the community established in your life where you can go to them with anything you have faced? Why? Or Why not?
- What does bringing our story to the cross look like?
- How do we talk about and celebrate the victory of “Christ’s triumph” when people are in the midst of their greatest pain?
- How can our brokenness benefit others?
- What song are you singing with your life?
- How does Ps. 22 teach us to worship?
- How can artistic expressions of pain (Psalms, paintings, poems, etc.) fuel our transformation?
- What “half-finished” stories do we have in our lives, where we see the bad parts, but overlook the blessing?
- What scars do you have that tell the beauty of God’s redemption?
- Who do you need to start sharing your story with today?
- How can we turn to God during times of pain and suffering instead of forsaking him and turning away from God?
- How can we let Jesus in and begin to transform our rooms that we have created to protect us from pain?
- How can transformation play a role in our ability to disciple others?
- What might be different about your life if you understood and applied the truth that God meets us where we are in the darkness rather than abandoning us?



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**SESSION 6: *Permission – The Path to Transformation***

**I. What's the first step in transformation?**

- a. Where are we right now:
  - i. We were united with Death.
  - ii. Christ repurposed Death for union with God—a God who doesn't abandon us but meets us in our wounds.
- b. So, what's the first step in transformation from Death to Life?

**II. The Mystery of Permission**

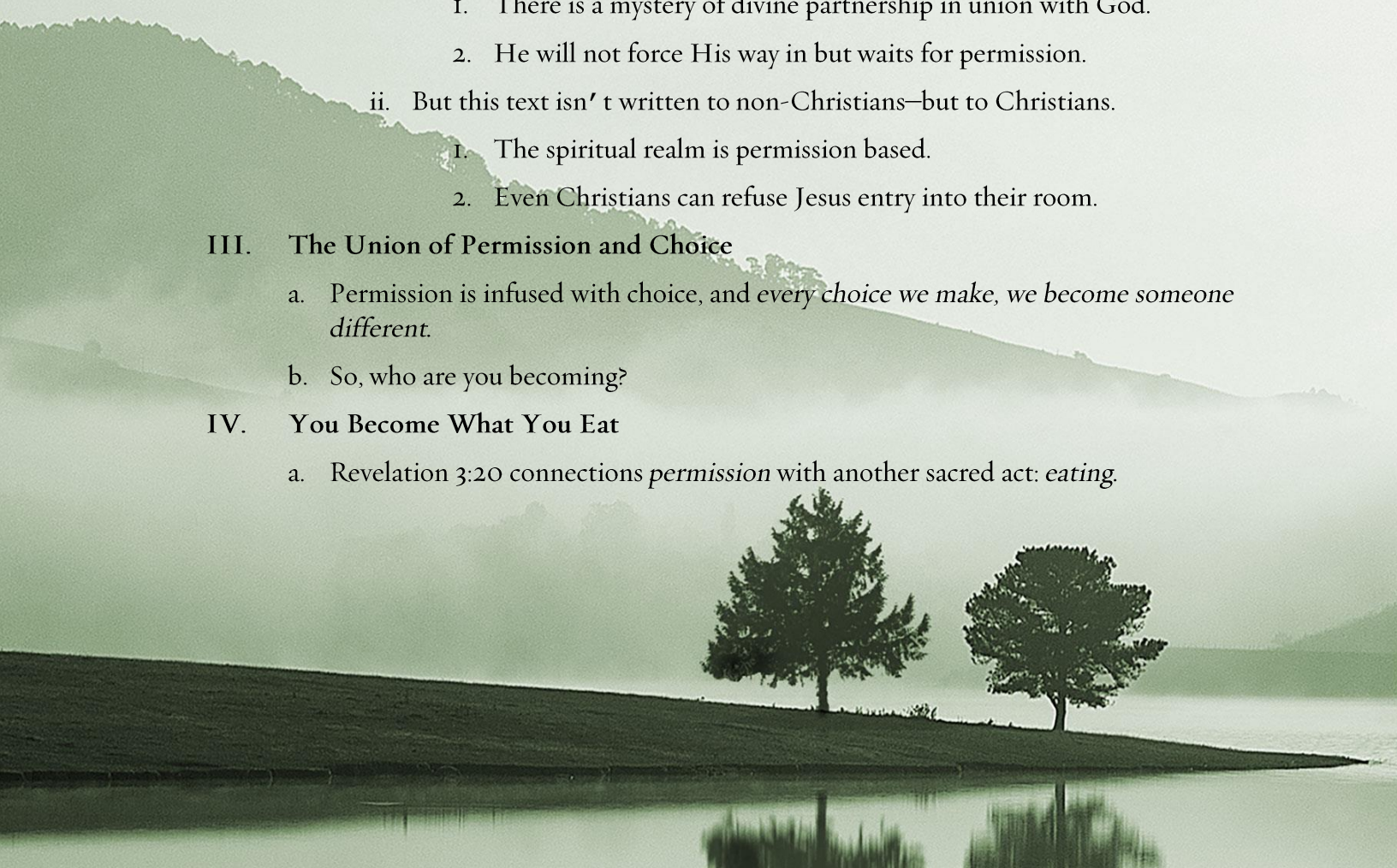
- a. Revelation 3:20
  - i. Why would God need to knock?
    1. There is a mystery of divine partnership in union with God.
    2. He will not force His way in but waits for permission.
  - ii. But this text isn't written to non-Christians—but to Christians.
    1. The spiritual realm is permission based.
    2. Even Christians can refuse Jesus entry into their room.

**III. The Union of Permission and Choice**

- a. Permission is infused with choice, and *every choice we make, we become someone different.*
- b. So, who are you becoming?

**IV. You Become What You Eat**

- a. Revelation 3:20 connections *permission* with another sacred act: *eating*.



- b. You are what you eat.
  - i. Why? Because eating is granting permission—a choice of transformation.
  - ii. The Lord' s Supper (Matthew 26:26-28)

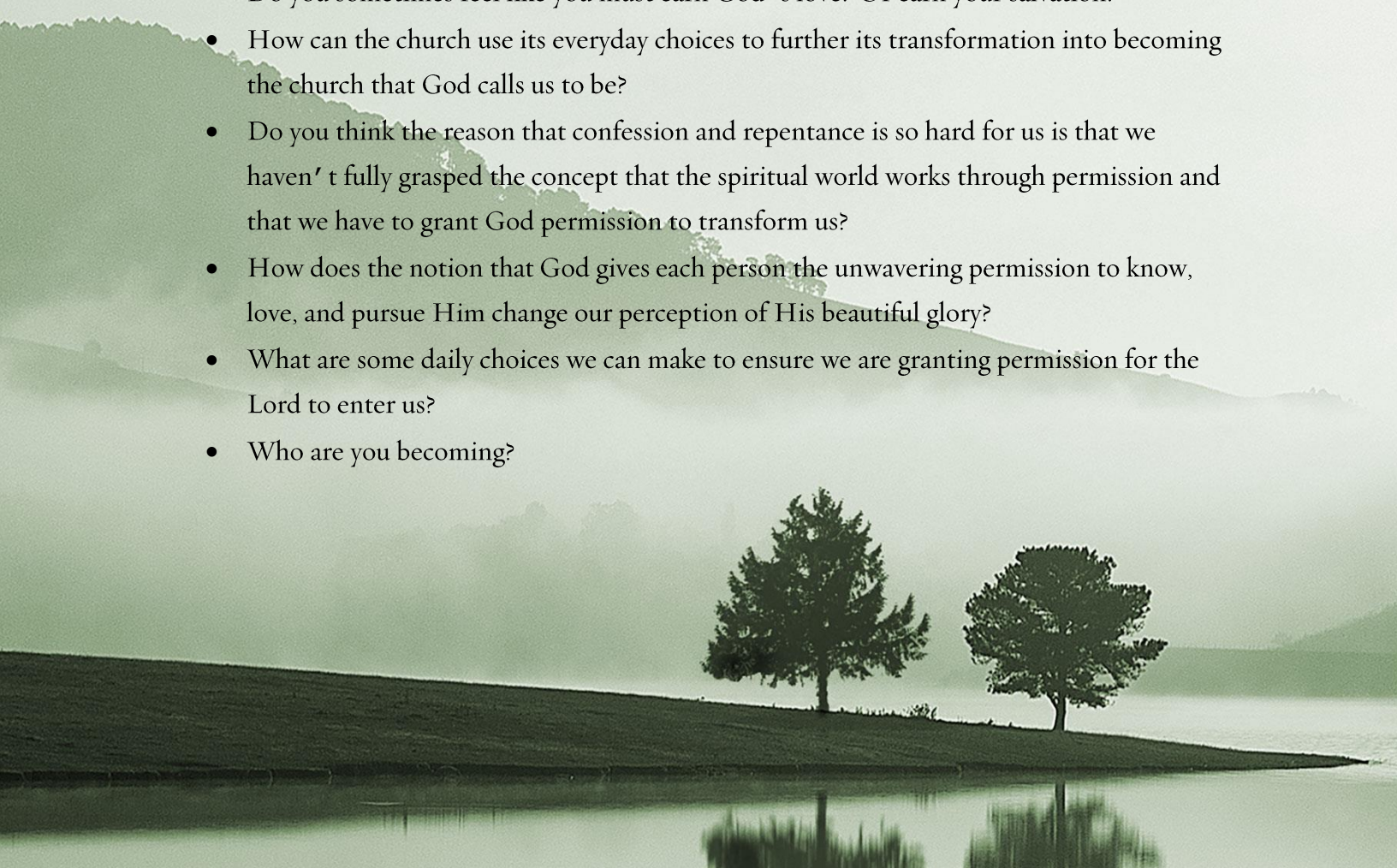
V. **Conclusion**

- a. We must empty ourselves of ourselves daily (Luke 9:23).
- b. The first step of transformation is granting permission for Christ to enter—*daily*.



**Discussion Questions for Video 6:**  
*Permission – The Path to Transformation*

- Think about what you have done today. How are these choices shaping who you are?
- How is transformation a daily choice we make?
- What are good questions to ask ourselves or other people to reveal permissions we are granting?
- What “permissions” is our culture more prone to?
- What are things we participate in that affects us for better or for worse (e.g., sports teams, malls, rotary clubs, jobs, etc.)?
- What “permissions” should we grant to begin transformation in our lives?
- Are there parts of your life that you let God into, but others that you don’ t? How can you let God into every single aspect of your life?
- If what we “dwell on” we become, what do you spend the most time thinking about (e.g., your job, not being like your mom, etc.)?
- Is daily union with Christ an active or passive action? What does that look like in our daily life?
- Do you sometimes feel like you must earn God’ s love? Or earn your salvation?
- How can the church use its everyday choices to further its transformation into becoming the church that God calls us to be?
- Do you think the reason that confession and repentance is so hard for us is that we haven’ t fully grasped the concept that the spiritual world works through permission and that we have to grant God permission to transform us?
- How does the notion that God gives each person the unwavering permission to know, love, and pursue Him change our perception of His beautiful glory?
- What are some daily choices we can make to ensure we are granting permission for the Lord to enter us?
- Who are you becoming?





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**SESSION 7: *From Death to Giving Life – What do we do with Works?***

**I. A Parable**

- a. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*
- b. My main point: Stop Sinning.

**II. Our Relationship with Sin**

- a. The “seeker sensitive” approach
- b. Danger = embracing the inevitability of sin in your life isn’t admitting to the possibility of making mistakes but is proclaiming a union with Death.

i. *Romans 6:1-2, 12-14*

1. Paul says: Stop Sinning.
2. This is not a call to perfectionism, but a call to union with Christ (1 Peter 1:16).

ii. This is a call to *become truly human*.

**III. Becoming Truly Human**

- a. Sin is NOT a pre-requisite to be human.
  - i. If it was:
    1. Jesus was never fully human because He did not sin.
    2. Adam and Eve weren’t human until Genesis 3, essentially making Death humanity’s true creator.
  - ii. To be human is *not* “to sin.” In fact, “to sin” is to be less than human.
- b. So, what does it mean to be truly human?

- i. The answer is *not* found in sin; the answer is found in Christ (Hebrews 4:15).
- ii. Jesus was without sin, which doesn't make him less than human, but truly more human than you or I have ever experienced.

#### IV. What do we do with Works?

- a. Ephesians 2:8-9
  - i. We are not saved by works:
    1. I agree. We are saved by the one work done in Jesus Christ.
    2. BUT this doesn't mean works don't matter.
  - ii. The problem is: we don't know what works are.
    1. Typically, we define works as saying "thank you" to God.
    2. But this falls woefully short.
- b. Ephesians 2:10
  - i. **Grace** = a movement of God toward us (that only God can do).
  - ii. **Faith** = our movement toward God (that only we can do)
  - iii. **The Result:**
    1. **Union** (Ephesians 2:10)
    2. **Works** = the natural outworking of our union with God.

#### V. Conclusion

- a. The call of transformation is not a call to perfectionism, but a call to union.
- b. We don't begin this journey holy and perfect, but broken and sinful—but because of his sacrifice, we follow Christ on the road *He* paved with patience and grace.

Discussion Questions for Video 7:  
*From Death to Giving Life – What do we do with Good Works?*

- What are some thoughts about the connection between Ephesians 2:8-10 and James 2:26?
- Do you believe it is possible to have true faith without works? What roles do both faith and works play in this?
- What does it look like to have works, but not faith? What are the implications of that?
- How do we lovingly communicate the truth about good works?
- How unified with sin do we think we are? Does society paint a picture of “fallen-ness” as being normal?
- How do we teach people to stop sinning, when the idea that “We’ re all sinners here” is so prevalent?
- What are some practical steps to take daily in order to stop sinning (or, at the very least, to stop repeating the same sins over and over)?
- How do we make it obvious that we do not sin as much as we used to without sounding arrogant or running the risk of making people feel unwelcome?
- We are saved only by grace. Do you feel like you can mix up grace for works?
- How can we teach someone to stop sinning without telling them to strive for perfection, but instead unity with God?
- What is the difference between legalism and calls to holiness?
- If we are truly a new creation, why is it so hard to stop sinning (e.g., Romans 7)?
- Why do people think that sin is necessary to be human?
- When people look at you, do they see more of Death or God?
- With Shane’ s statement (talking about the church): “We are the body of Christ and our actions should not differ much from His,” reflect on the works of the church today. Then reflect on your own works. What surfaces?
- What might our churches look like if we chose to believe and embrace that sin makes us less human?

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SESSION 8: *The God Between Two Trees – The Power of With*

I. The Revelation in Gardening

- a. Gardening is infused with patience:
  - i. Tilling the ground, spreading compost, waiting and watering, fighting against critters, etc.
  - ii. To garden, you must be willing to dig; you must be willing to endure pain. You must repurpose death, creatively fend off enemies, submit to the mystery of growth, and, yes, you must be patient.
- b. But this isn't just gardening. This is transformation.
  - i. To fully engage transformation, we must embrace our pain and patiently endure *daily*.
  - ii. Which is why I'm so thankful that God's favorite word is *with*.

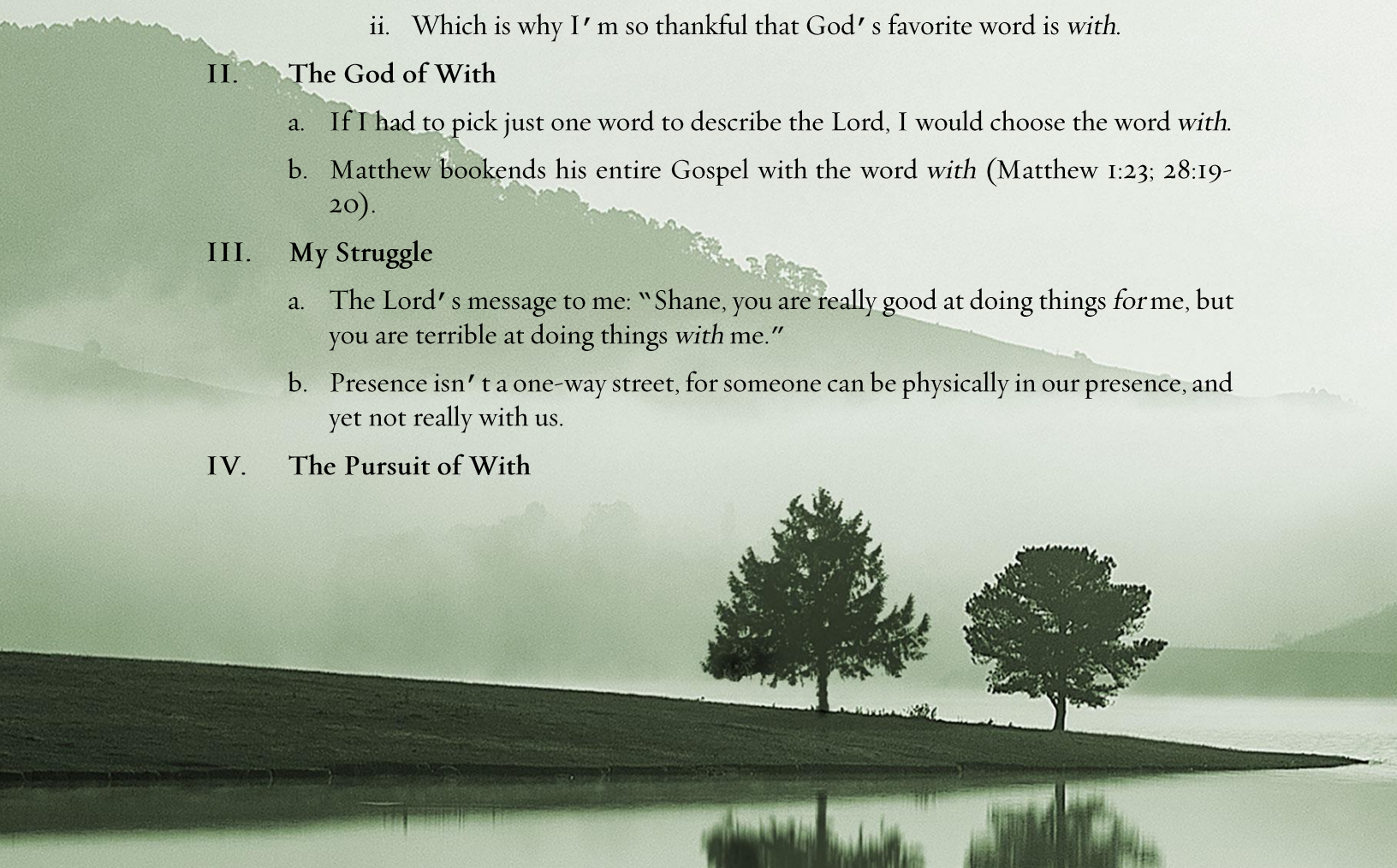
II. The God of With

- a. If I had to pick just one word to describe the Lord, I would choose the word *with*.
- b. Matthew bookends his entire Gospel with the word *with* (Matthew 1:23; 28:19-20).

III. My Struggle

- a. The Lord's message to me: "Shane, you are really good at doing things *for* me, but you are terrible at doing things *with* me."
- b. Presence isn't a one-way street, for someone can be physically in our presence, and yet not really with us.

IV. The Pursuit of With



- a. It's easy to forget that in this world caught between two trees, we serve the God of *with*.
- b. He longs to be *with* us and us *with* him. Truly with him (Revelation 21:1-4).

V. **Conclusion**

- a. Transformation is a celebration of the God of *with*.
- b. Transformation is an invitation for union—an invitation that begins and ends with the word “Come.”



**Discussion Questions for Video 8:**  
*The God Between Two Trees – The Power of With*

- What does it look like to do everything “with” God on a daily basis?
- What preposition would you use to characterize your relationship with God?
- What has been your process of transformation in the Lord?
- Who do you want God to transform you into in [insert current year or the upcoming year]?
- How much can we learn about a creator from their creation?
- How do we communicate the urgency of experiencing painful transformation in a culture preoccupied with pleasure?
- How do we truly show others we are with them? How does being with others communicate God’s presence?
- How do we encourage and remind people that in the midst of life, God is still with us, especially when He feels so far away?
- How do we practice the value of being present, both with people and with God?
- If just “being around people doesn’t mean you are present with them, then: are you present with people? Do you ever look at people in the eyes and let them know that you care about them?
- What is preventing you from being transformed completely into who Christ wants you to be?
- What would be different about your life if you lived WITH God?
- When do you feel pursued by God?
- What is the difference between doing things “with” God and “for” God?
- “The only way you can be WITH God is if you COME.” What did Shane mean by that and how might we do that?
- Do you think the church does a good job of teaching that God longs to be with us? What would you change or continue to emphasize?
- How have you been reminded of God’s presence with you? How might regular reflection on such moments (e.g., in the morning, at lunch, before we go to bed) enable you to face your present separation from God?

