

## Lesson 1—Class Introduction

Scripture: Romans 11:36

<sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Welcome to the first day of *ReGen: The Curriculum for Christ-Centered Living* (developed for use in faith-based dorms).

It wasn't long after my release from prison, which you'll read more about later, that I enrolled full-time in Oklahoma State University. As a journalism major, one of the first classes I selected was called “Behavioral Marketing.” The professor, who had also written the textbook for the course, began the first day of class by telling us the class was based on 1) the theory of evolution, 2) Freudian psychology, and 3) William Glasser's *Control Theory*. And I remember thinking, “What a waste of time and money this is going to be!”

Despite my initial reaction to his introduction, however, I do think it will be helpful for you to know the beliefs on which this course is based. And given that you have plenty of time on your hands and are probably not paying for this course, I hope your reaction will not be the same as mine.

*ReGen* is based on the beliefs that 1) we were made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, 2) as a result of sin, we are born totally depraved, dead in our sin and 3) our only hope is found in Christ alone.

### **Glorifying and Enjoying God**

The Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism (which you'll learn more about later)

states that the “chief end (primary purpose or end goal) of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” In his *Confessions*, Augustine famously wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” And as I mentioned earlier, this curriculum is based on the belief that we were made to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

In my opinion, no modern pastor has done more to help the Church understand what this means than John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church (Minneapolis, MN). A prolific author and speaker besides, Piper has said that he has been most influenced by the works of Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758). For this reason, I will draw largely from Piper, Edwards others who have been influenced by them in writing this curriculum.

In *Don't Waste Your Life*, Piper wrote that “God calls us to dream and to plan and to pray and to work not to make much of ourselves but to make much of Him.” The goal of this study will be for you to learn how to dream and to plan and to pray and to work not to make much of yourselves—as was the purpose of your former way of living—but to make much of Him.

Before you can do that, you're going to have to learn about sin. Now, I know what you're thinking, “Wait a minute!” you might say, “I know all about sin.” But, I would say, you probably know less than you think you do. And the only way you're ever going to really appreciate the good news is to hear the bad news first. Let me illustrate what I am saying this way.

Imagine that you're going to see a doctor for the first time. You've never seen him before. You just need a physical and it's time for your "check up from the neck up." You walk in and before he's even examined you, he smiles and says, "You'll be glad to know you don't have cancer." What would be your reaction? You'd probably laugh, wouldn't you?

Now imagine that this isn't the first time you've seen this doctor. The first time was a year ago when he told you were going to die from cancer unless they started advanced chemotherapy right away. You began the treatments. You've been sick every day since. Your hair is gone. You've lost your car, your job, your house, your spouse. Everything's been killed by the cancer, except you, and you're certain you're not far behind. But now the doctor greets you with a smile and the good news, "The test results came back clean! You don't have cancer."

That would be good news! But you wouldn't have appreciated it unless you'd heard, lived and experienced the bad news.

### **Born In Sin**

The doctrine of total depravity derives from the doctrine of original sin. Almost all mainstream, Christian denominations—Catholics and Protestants alike—believe in the doctrine of original sin—that men are born in a state of sin as a result of the fall of man (because of the "original sin" of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). But fewer today hold to the doctrine of total depravity—that "every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin and, apart from the grace of God, is utterly unable to choose to follow God."<sup>i</sup>

This course, however, is based on the doctrine of your total inability to do anything, apart from grace, that pleases God. We'll discuss this doctrine in-depth later but what this means to you is that, contrary to so much of the self-help material that is available today, this course is not based on the beliefs that 1) you have everything you need within you to succeed, 2) you can do anything you want if you'll just set your mind to it or that 3) all you need is love...da da da da da da.

Growing up, all the way through high school, all I ever wanted to be was a doctor. As a teenager, I was even in the Baylor Medical Explorers Program. Yet, oddly enough, math and science were my worst subjects. It didn't matter that I studied long and late or sought tutoring. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get it. Then, finally, one day my physical science teacher in high school took one look at me and said, "Chandler, choose another profession. I have two bachelors, two masters, and I am working on my Ph.D. and it ain't easy! This is hard stuff. I am not one of those teachers that believe you should tell a student that they can be anything they want to be if they just set their mind to it. Some people have it, some don't, and you don't. Life is too short and you'll never make it. Find something you love to do and do that!"

After the initial shock wore off, I did as she recommended and I was in sales for more than 20 years before God called me to this ministry. Interestingly enough, she is the only teacher I remember by name.

It's ironic that the best news I've ever received in life has been that I was unable to do what I

desperately wanted to do. First, my teacher told me I didn't have what it takes to become a doctor and later I learned the Scripture teaches that I don't have the ability to save myself either. And the reality is that accepting both has resulted in greater freedom than I ever enjoyed as long as I continued to live in denial of these facts.

Contrary to the beliefs that we have everything we need within us, or that we can be and do anything to which we set our mind, stands the gospel. The Scripture teaches that we don't have everything we need in ourselves. In fact, according to Scripture, everything in and all that comes out of us (as we'll study later) is only evil (Genesis 6:5, 8:9; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19; Romans 3:10-12). Because of sin, there isn't any good thing in us (Romans 7:18). For this reason, we must be saved by One who is outside us. We must have the savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

For example, do you remember how long it's been since the first time you told yourself, your parents or a loved one that you were going to stop doing this or that? Stop getting in trouble? Perhaps stop coming back to prison? Stop drinking? Stop doing drugs? Stop using and abusing people? Be a good person? Get a good job? Save money? Lose weight? How many people have told you, "You can do it! All you have to do is set your mind to it." How's that working for you? My guess is that it's not going well.

I remember the time one guy who knew what I believed regarding the total depravity of man wrote and made a slew of derogatory comments regarding what I believe and those

who teach it. He was sure that man has a free will and the ability to change. When I asked him to tell me more about himself, he explained that he had been raised in a Christian group home to memorize Scripture, he'd studied this and that, he knows Greek and Hebrew, but he's been in and out of prison his entire life, nine times at last count! I know I shouldn't have laughed as I read his letter but I did. I wrote and asked him, "How's that free will working out for you?"

What I want, and hopefully what you want, is for you to really change this time. It's not enough to "Just Say No," but we want the kind of change that will work for our eternal good and God's glory! It's the kind of change that begins in the heart!

This curriculum isn't about getting you to say a few magic words so we can add another notch to our belts—"Look," some say, "Another one came to Christ!" But inside the man never changes. Is it any wonder the church is full of hypocrites! And as you'll learn, I was one of the worst.

In part, it's about demonstrating your complete inability to change apart from Christ. But in his *Studies in the Atonement*, Dr. Robert Morey wrote, "To see sin as it really is, contemplate what it cost to remove it. If we had fallen into a deep pit, we could tell how deep we had fallen by the length of the rope let down to save us. In the same way, we can only understand the depths of depravity into which sin has brought us by lengths to which God must go to redeem us."

My prayer is that God will enable you to recognize the extent of your own sinful condition and that you'll accept and trust that your only hope for glorifying and enjoying God is found...

### **In Christ Alone**

The whole purpose Christ came was to "save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) In *Studies*, Morey concludes the Introduction by writing, "Therefore, ignorance of the Biblical doctrine of the atonement means ignorance of the work of Christ, the Scriptures and the history of redemption."

Some of you may have been raised in church your entire life. I wonder how many of you can Biblically define the words: omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability, election, sin, calling, atonement, regeneration, redemption, justification, propitiation, expiation, sanctification, glorification, etceteras, all words used in Scripture, all terms that define and explain God, what Christ came to do and what it means for us? Or, how many of you can define and defend the doctrines of the Trinity or the infallibility, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture? These may be words not specifically used in Scripture but are nonetheless significant to the Christian faith.

"We must not be content with a mere intellectual grasp of the atonement. If our study of this precious truth of God's Word does not spiritually profit us in terms of salvation and sanctification, we have missed the underlying purpose of the study," wrote Morey.

I am persuaded the only real motive for change is gratitude. For this reason, I believe that after

you've learned the nature of our depravity and what Christ has done for us, you will want to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

### **How We'll Get There**

To write this curriculum, besides Scripture and my own experience, I am going to rely on the best in Christian teaching and Biblical counseling that is available today.

Jay E. Adams is often referred to as the founder of the Biblical counseling movement in this country. In 1970, Jay wrote a watershed book called *Competent to Counsel* that has since sold millions of copies and been translated into multiple languages. In it, he defends the ability of Christ, who is the Word, to change lives more effectively than secular psychology or any other form of counseling.

Countless people would ask him, "But what about people who don't believe in God but manage to get the help they need from a therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist, Alcoholics Anonymous or some other program? What about the good they do?" To which Jay, from Matthew 16:26, would rhetorically reply, "What will it profit a man if he gains the world and forfeits his life?" In other words, what good is it if a man learns how to stop drinking but goes to hell because he doesn't know Christ?

Nonetheless, some will challenge, "But shouldn't we send troubled people to a professional? After all, you don't go to the Bible to learn how to build a jet." To which Adams reply would be something like, "The Bible wasn't given to teach us how to build jets. But it was given to teach us how to love God

and our fellow man. It was given to produce much more than just the superficial change of helping someone learn how to stop abusing themselves and others. It was given to produce the kind of eternal change that pleases God. And if one grows in that knowledge, the rest will follow.”

There are many curriculums out there to help you stop using and abusing in twelve easy steps or less. If you want to know that you’re okay and I’m okay, looking for a formula or wanting to learn more about the habits of highly effective people, you’ve come to the wrong class.

At the end of the gospel of John, doubting Thomas makes what is perhaps the clearest, personal statement regarding who Christ is in all of Scripture when, in response to his having touched the wounds of the resurrected Christ, he exclaims, “My Lord and My God!” Just after, John tells us that his threefold purpose in writing was that his readers would know that 1) Jesus was the Christ, 2) the son of the living God, and that believing, 3) they would have life in his name. I cannot do better than that. This is the goal of *ReGen: The Curriculum for Christ-Centered Living*: that you would know Christ.

What you’re going to learn, the order in which it will be taught, the very model on which this curriculum is based is the gospel and what God continues to teach me as He saves and sets this captive free.

The plan is to provide in-depth, practical, Christ-centered instruction from God’s Word coupled with mentoring and accountability during and, should you choose, after your incarceration

through local churches with which we partner or that we will assist on your behalf.

At the end, I want you to be able to confidently say with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me,” 2 Timothy 1:12 (ESV).

### Curriculum Outline

This curriculum is divided into 26 weeks. The first week is fairly introductory. You’ll learn some of the guiding principles behind this curriculum. You’ll learn more than you want to know about me. And then we’ll get started with the basics.

First, we’re going to talk about *The God We Don’t Enjoy*. Next, we’ll consider the doctrines of sin, total depravity, Satan’s devices to cause us to sin and God’s precious remedy. Then we’ll consider the work of Christ, why it was necessary, what He accomplishes, how it’s applied to our life and what it produces. We’ll study what it really means to glorify God and to enjoy Him in everyday life. And we’ll conclude by preparing you for your release from prison.

“True Biblical faith involves assent and trust as well as knowledge. It is not enough to know...you must assent to and trust in the saving work of Christ. A new or deepened understanding of every aspect...should be followed by the affirmation of the heart, ‘Lord, I believe,’” wrote Morey.

As you study *ReGen: The Curriculum for Christ-Centered Living*, on behalf of myself, the board and supporters of Hope Prison Ministries, it is our prayer that as you learn you’ll begin to

apply it to your life. As you grow, take a minute to pray, thank God and affirm, “Lord, thank You for your grace. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief and enable me to live what I believe.”

### **How to Use This Study**

Throughout this book, there will be sections of the text that have been offset in different ways. Below is the guide to help you understand why and how particular text has been offset.

1. **Pray** before you begin each lesson that God would give you the wisdom to learn what He would have you learn from the lesson.
2. **Praise** God whenever you learn something, take a minute to thank God for what you’ve learned and for what it means to you.
3. **Confess** sin to God whenever you’re convicted by something you’ve read.
4. **Rule of Interpretation** - These are rules of interpreting Scripture that will help you learn more about how to read, understand and apply what you’re learning.

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<sup>i</sup> “Total Depravity,” Wikipedia - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total\\_depravity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_depravity)