

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS



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IT'S NOT
SUPPOSED
TO BE
THIS WAY

*finding unexpected strength when
disappointments leave you shattered*

What would
happen in our
lives if we
really lived in
the absolute
assurance of
God's love in the
midst of our
disappointments?

Welcome! (2 minutes)

Welcome to Session 1 of *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. If this is your first time together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourselves to one another before watching the video. Then let's get started!

Opening Discussion

(10 minutes)

Answer the following questions to prepare for this week's video teaching:

- How would you define disappointment?
- What was one sentence that resonated with you from the introduction or chapters 1–2 of the book?

VIDEO

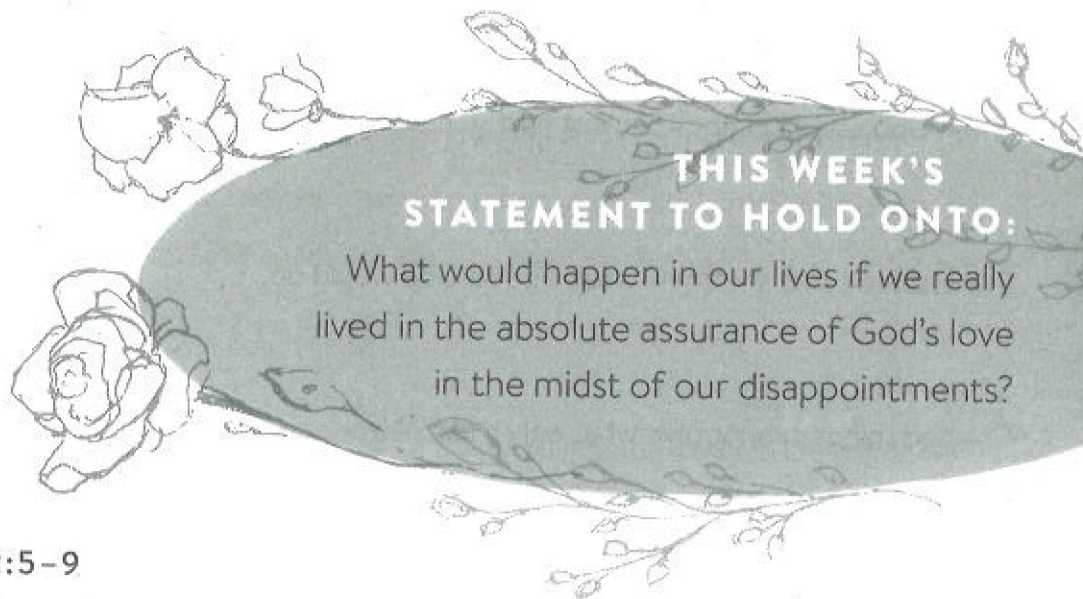
The Birthplace of Disappointment

(28 minutes)

LEADER:

Play the video segment for the Introduction, and then play the segment for Session 1.

Instruct your group to use the outline below to follow along or take additional notes on anything that stands out.



**THIS WEEK'S
STATEMENT TO HOLD ONTO:**

What would happen in our lives if we really lived in the absolute assurance of God's love in the midst of our disappointments?

GENESIS 2:5-9

- v. 7: Then the LORD God formed a man
- v. 9: ... trees that were pleasing to the eye

GENESIS 2:15-18

- v. 16: And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free ..."
- v. 18: "... I will make a helper suitable for him."

GENESIS 2:23-25

- v. 25: Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

GENESIS 3:1-9

"You must not" (Genesis 3:1) versus "You are free" (Genesis 2:16)

When God says "Do not = Do not hurt yourself" (Levi Lusko)

Eve assumed that she knew what a good God would do.

Created things cannot give what only the Creator can give.

You steer where you stare.

God could have been angry, but instead He asked two questions:

- "Where are you?"
- "Who told you that you were naked?"

Sin demands a sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).

In Genesis 3:22-23 (NIV), *banished* can be translated as "sent" in Hebrew (*shalach*).

Look at your disappointments through the lens of the great love of God. It will change how you see everything.

GROUP DISCUSSION

(45 minutes)

LEADER, READ EACH NUMBERED PROMPT TO THE GROUP.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you? Take turns sharing with the group.
2. Lysa explained that the reason we face so many disappointments in life is that we are living between two gardens. There's a garden in Genesis 2-3 at the beginning of the Bible and a garden in Revelation 21-22 at the end of the Bible. Our hearts were created in the perfection of the garden of Eden, but we don't live there.
Open your Bible to Genesis 2:8-25 and let's read aloud, changing readers every few verses.
What were the wonderful features of this garden? List as many as you can.
3. What do these beautiful details reveal about God and His nature? List and discuss.
4. Why was the provision of water (v. 10) important? What does it reveal about God?

5. How would you describe the relationship between Adam and the woman (Eve) depicted in verses 18–25?
6. Sometimes we're trying to hold people accountable to a level of perfection in our relationships that's not realistic. Not that we permit or excuse behaviors in the abuse category, but what about those expectations we have of someone else who just isn't spiritually, emotionally, or relationally at the place where those expectations are realistic? How could understanding this help you in a current relationship that feels disappointing at times?
7. Is there a realistic option that could encourage growth in the relationship?

HAVE SOMEONE READ ALOUD:

The Hebrew for the words “suitable helper” in Genesis 2:18 doesn't imply a subordinate. The Holy Spirit is often described as our “helper” in the New Testament. And “suitable” here doesn't mean “good enough or just okay” but rather “perfect counterpart.” A suitable helper is a needed counterpart, someone who fills a need that Adam can't manage on his own.

Jesus himself says in John 16:7–8, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (ESV). Notice how the Spirit of God is described as our “Helper” in John 16:7. It's the Greek word *parakletos* and is translated as “helper,” “intercessor,” and “advocate.” The essence of this word lends to the reality that the Spirit was called or summoned to aid and help the people of God. Therefore, the perfect, suitable helper was given to us by God the Father just as He gave Eve to Adam as a perfect counterpart.

8. What clarifying revelation do you have after reading this insight on the word *helper*?

9. Before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve had a close relationship with God and each other. Communication didn't feel complicated. Work was a pleasure, and Adam didn't have to toil among thorns and thistles in order to feed his family. Eve never felt the sting of comparison and struggles that seem to never end. Neither of them knew the bitter taste of sin or shame. How does this bring context to some of the situations in your life that make you say, "It's not supposed to be this way"?

10. Open your Bible to Genesis 3:1–9 and let's read aloud, changing readers every few verses, noticing the slippery slope of compromise.

11. Lysa highlighted the difference between "You must not" in Genesis 3:1 versus "You are free" in Genesis 2:16. When looking at God's protective commands, do you tend to view God as a "You must not" God or as a "You are free" God? How does that affect the way you relate to Him?

12. Eve assumed that even if they touched the fruit they would die. She added to God's rule which created assumptions. Sometimes we assume we know what God should do in circumstances as well. Give an example of a way you've done that before.
13. Remember, God wasn't removing Adam and Eve from the garden out of anger. He was actually protecting them. This was an act of mercy, not cruelty. If Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of life, they would have lived forever in sin and would have been eternally separated from God. Write down how this example of His mercy, protection, and love could be playing out in your situation. Share your responses with the group.

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSION

Processing a Disappointment (25 minutes)

If your group meets for two hours, include this activity as part of your meeting. Allow 20 minutes total—5 minutes for the individual activity and 20 minutes for the group discussion.

Individual Activity (5 minutes)

Complete this activity on your own.

1. How would the way you walk through hard situations change if you processed all of your disappointments through the filter of knowing God is good and full of love and mercy?
2. Choose one word to describe this new perspective.
3. What area of your life would be most impacted by this new filtered perspective?

Group Discussion (20 minutes)

1. What is the most difficult aspect of processing life through the filter of God being good and full of mercy? What does this perspective require of us?

2. We know God asked Adam in the garden, "Where are you?" This is a profound question. Remember, Adam's physical location was not a mystery to God, but God was trying to call Adam out of hiding. The safest place to be exposed is in front of God Himself. One way for us to look at this in the context of our everyday lives would be: Where are you going or to what are you turning when you feel exposed or vulnerable? (For example: When you wake up in the morning, are you getting refreshed by God's Word or refreshing your feed on social media?)

3. Before the fall, it was common for Adam and Eve to walk with God in the garden. Picture them like little children hearing God's footsteps in the garden and running toward Him as if their Father had just walked in the door. But now that sin has entered in, they hear the Father's footsteps and are afraid. Sin always hinders our relationship with God. How does this play out in your life?

CLOSING ACTIVITY

(5 minutes)

1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you learned in this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.



Personal Prayer

(8 minutes)

Write a personal prayer here that reflects the area of this week's teaching you feel most in need of prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

(2 minutes)

LEADER, READ THIS PRAYER ALOUD OVER THE GROUP:

Father God, it's hard to long for a perfection that will never exist on this side of eternity apart from our relationship with You. Disappointments are hard to navigate. So we offer to You our genuine feelings. You already know what they are better than we do. Thank You for loving us and standing with us in the mess of our disappointments. And we ask that You help us manage our feelings using Your truth, perspective, and holy discernment. We entrust this process of learning and growing to You. Give us the courage to make the changes we need to make and the grace to love others in their imperfections as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

Between-Sessions Personal Studies

LEADER, READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP BEFORE DISMISSAL:

Every session in the *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way Study Guide* includes five days of personal study to help you make meaningful connections between your life and what you're learning each week. In this first week, you'll work with the material in the introduction and chapters 1 and 2 of the book *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. You'll also have time to read chapters 3 and 4 of the book in preparation for your next group meeting.

PERSONAL STUDY

DAY 1: STUDY AND REFLECT

THE DISAPPOINTMENT CONTINUUM

Oftentimes we have a lot of feelings swirling around our disappointments, but we never process them. Let's do that now. We're not doing this to dwell on our disappointments, but rather to get to a better place as we process them.

1. There are various kinds of disappointment, from the annoyance of a friend canceling plans at the last minute to the devastating death of a loved one. Imagine a scale from 1 (minor) to 10 (major). What would you rate as a 10 on the scale of disappointments? What are some 8s and 9s? What are some 2s and 3s? Write down some examples below the continuum.

Minor
Disappointments

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1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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6

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7

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|

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10

Major
Disappointments

2. How do you typically respond to a level 3 or 4 disappointment?

3. Have you ever suffered a level 8, 9, or 10 disappointment? If so, how did you respond to that initially? How has it affected you over time? How do you deal with it now?

To draw an analogy: a man's suffering is similar to the behavior of a gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.

—Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

4. Read aloud the above quotation by Viktor Frankl. How does this encourage you that your disappointments big or small are worth bringing before the Lord and being processed by truth?

5. Today you're going to reflect on the introduction of the book *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. If you haven't already read the introduction, please do so now.

The introduction begins by raising our awareness of how deeply most of us long for a life that feels "normal":

There is a favorite story I like to tell myself. It's the one about how my life should turn out. Though it's riddled with missing everyday details, it's full of a general sense of okayness. No, actually more than okayness. It's the story where my toes can dig deeply into the sands of a glorious land called *normal*.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, page xi

6. What are a few words that define the "good normal" you long for?
7. Pick a circumstance in your life that isn't what you thought it would be. What would your version of normal be around this circumstance?

We feel very certain how things should turn out. But we live in the uncertainty of neither being able to predict nor control the outcome.

Humans are very attached to outcomes. We say we trust God but behind the scenes we work our fingers to the bone and our emotions into a tangled

fray trying to control our outcomes. We praise God when our normal looks like what we thought it would. We question God when it doesn't. And walk away from Him when we have a sinking suspicion that God is the one who set fire to the hope that was holding us together.

Even the most grounded people can feel hijacked by the winds of unpredictable change. We feel weighed down by grief while at the same time unable to get our bearings as the weightless ashes of all we thought would be fly away.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, page xii

8. How have you tried to control the situation so it will turn out the way you think it should?

9. What would be your biggest challenge if your version of normal isn't the way things turn out?

10. Read the following verses from Romans, and then write a statement of release to God so you can have a marked moment where you entrust to God the outcome for this situation.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26–27)

Also read how Eugene Peterson phrases Romans 8:26–27 in *The Message* paraphrase:

²⁶Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. ²⁷He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Now write your statement of release:

We motivate ourselves to get through the bad of today by playing a mental movie of the good that will surely come tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, soon. Very soon.

And this good that comes will be such a glorious outcome that we will exhale all the anxiety and finally say, "Whew, I can honestly say it was worth it." Cue the redemption song and a small ticker tape parade.

The good outcome will look like we dreamed. It will come as fast as we hoped it would. And it will make all the wrongs right, right, right.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, pages xii-xiii

But if you are a human who has been doing the adult thing for more than twenty-four hours, you've probably come to the same stunning revelation as I have. We cannot control our outcomes. We cannot formulate how the promises of God will actually take shape. And we will never be able to demand any of the healing from all the hurt to hurry up.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, page xiii

11. Sometimes God's promises are big instantaneous answers to prayer. Other times, they're progressive. We need to recognize the process of the promises. Name some evidence in your life right now that God's good promises are in process. If this is hard to see, list some things for which you're grateful.
12. Now, build on this. But in order to do so, you have to be actively looking for God's interaction and intervention in your life. Over the next twenty-four hours, challenge yourself to recognize evidence of God's faithfulness seven times and note each instance below. The more we look for God's faithfulness, the more we'll start to see it in a current situation that's hard.

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Though we can't predict or control or demand the outcome of our circumstances, we can know with great certainty we will be okay. Better than okay. Better than normal. We will be victorious because Jesus is victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57). And victorious people were never meant to settle for normal. . . .

What if the victory is only in part how things turn out? What if a bigger part of being victorious is how well we live today?

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, page xiv

13. Open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 15:55–58. What do you think it would look like to live victorious even in the midst of the hard situation you are currently facing?
14. What does it mean to you to be victorious regardless of how your circumstances turn out?
15. How does the promise that you will be victorious—better than okay—encourage you?



DAY 2: STUDY AND REFLECT

Today you're going to reflect on chapter 1 of the book *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. If you haven't already read chapter 1, please do so now.

The human heart was created in the context of the perfection of the garden of Eden. But we don't live there now.

This is why our instincts keep firing off the lie that perfection is possible. We have pictures of perfection etched into the very DNA of our souls.

We chase it. We angle our cameras trying to catch it. We take twenty shots in hopes of finding it. And then even our good photos have to be color corrected, filtered, and cropped.

We do our very best to make others think this posted picture is the real deal. But we all know the truth. We all see the charade. We all know the emperor is naked. But there we are, clapping on the sidelines, following along, playing the game. Trying to believe that maybe, just maybe, if we get close to something that looks like perfection it will help us snag a little of its shine for ourselves.

But we know even the shiniest of things is headed in the direction of becoming dull. New will always eventually become old. Followers unfollow. People who lift us up will let us down. The most tightly knit aspects of life snag, unravel, and disintegrate before our very eyes.

And so we are epically disappointed.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, pages 6–7

1. In what ways do you try to capture or project an image of perfection? How does the lie that perfection is possible show up in what you do?

2. How has the search for perfection disappointed you?

3. Have you ever looked at someone else's image of perfection posted online only to find out that their reality didn't match up with that perfection? For example, you've always admired how that friend's house looks on Instagram, but if you were to go over to her house, it isn't as it appears online. Or you look at someone else's marriage and hold it up as perfect, but then she confides in you how much they're really struggling. How do these misunderstandings and assumptions of other people's perfection taint your own life?
4. How do you think the enemy uses these pictures of perfection to compound our disappointment?

At Bible study next week, be prepared to share with the group some of the “less shiny” parts of your life that people might assume about you. These kinds of honest conversations will help everyone keep their own imperfections and disappointments in perspective.

We [either] don't feel permission to do so or we just don't know how to process our disappointments. Especially not in Bible study or Sunday church. Because everyone says, “Be grateful and positive, and let your faith boss your feelings around.”

And I do believe we need to be grateful and positive and let our faith boss our feelings around. But I also think there's a dangerous aspect to staying quiet and pretending we don't get exhausted by our disappointments.

In the quiet, unexpressed, unwrestled-through disappointments, Satan is handcrafting his most damning weapons against us and those we love. It's his

subtle seduction to get us alone with our thoughts so he can slip in whispers that will develop our disappointments into destructive choices.

If the enemy can isolate us, he can influence us.

And his favorite entry point of all is through our disappointments. The enemy comes in as a whisper, lingers like a gentle breeze, and builds like a storm you don't even see coming. But eventually his insatiable appetite to destroy will unleash the tornado of destruction he planned all along. He doesn't whisper to our disappointed places to coddle us. He wants to crush us.

And counselors everywhere are telling brokenhearted people sitting on tear-soaked couches that one of the reasons their relationships failed is because of conversations they needed to have but never did.

If we don't open up a way to process our disappointments, we'll be tempted to let Satan rewrite God's love story as a negative narrative, leaving us more than slightly suspicious of our Creator. Why would He create our hearts in the perfection of the garden of Eden knowing that, because of our eventual sin, we wouldn't live there?

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, pages 7–8

5. "If the enemy can isolate us, he can influence us." How does this play out in your life?
6. To wrestle well means to acknowledge our feelings but move forward, letting our faith lead the way. What are some feelings that need to be balanced with the biblical truth you've learned this week?

7. What might moving forward in the midst of those feelings look like? How can you let your faith lead the way?
8. Read Psalm 88 in your Bible. It's a psalm of lament, a psalm of wrestling. Are you surprised that it doesn't end with everything resolved? How does this comfort you?



DAY 3: STUDY AND REFLECT

Today you're going to reflect on chapter 2 of the book *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. If you haven't already read chapter 2, please do so now.

We live in a broken world where broken things happen. So it's not surprising that things get broken in our lives as well. But what about those times when things aren't just broken but shattered beyond repair? Shattered to the point of dust. At least when things are broken there's some hope you can glue the pieces back together. But what if there aren't even pieces to pick up in front of you? You can't glue dust.

It's hard to hold dust. What was once something so very precious is now reduced to nothing but weightless powder even the slightest wind could carry away. We feel desperately hopeless. Dust begs us to believe the promises of God no longer apply to us. That the reach of God falls just short of where we are. And that the hope of God has been snuffed out by the consuming darkness all around us.

We want God to fix it all. Edit this story so it has a different ending. Repair this heartbreaking reality.

But what if fixing, editing, and repairing isn't at all what God has in mind for us in this shattering?

What if, this time, God desires to make something completely brand-new? Right now. On this side of eternity. No matter how shattered our circumstances may seem.

Dust is the exact ingredient God loves to use.

It's Not Supposed to Be This Way, pages 16–17

1. How does this revelation speak to you right now?

Read Genesis 3:1–7 again:

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

2. What experience tempts you to doubt God?

3. What are you tempted to believe about Him that isn't true?

4. Read Genesis 2:9 and compare it to what you just read in Genesis 3:6. Do you see how all the trees in the garden were good for food and pleasing to the eye? Do you see how when Eve got fixated on the one thing that she thought would make her life better, she missed out on all the good things around her? How does this speak to a current situation you're in?

5. Read Genesis 3:15. This is known as the Protoevangelion (pronounced pro-toe-eon-gell-eon), the first good news, because it contains the first promise of the Savior recorded in the Bible:

“And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

Here, God speaks to the serpent in the garden. He promises that there will be perpetual enmity between Eve's offspring and the enemy. As the book of Genesis unfolds, it is revealed that the promised offspring of Eve will include the patriarch Abraham. God fulfills His covenant promise to Eve through Jesus, who comes from the genealogy (seed/line) of Abraham. Jesus is the one who has forever crushed Satan through His victory over sin and death (Galatians 3:16, 19, 29; Hebrews 2:14-18).

Why is it important for you to keep close to your heart the fact that even on the day when He was sending Adam and Eve out of the garden, God was already promising to send Jesus to rescue them and us?

6. Look at Genesis 2:25: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." What were they designed for? What was their natural condition supposed to be prior to the fall?

- *They were innocent.* This innocence left Adam and Eve without shame and without any reason to hide from themselves or each other. Genesis 2 is a stark contrast to Genesis 3. When innocence was lost with sin, Adam and Eve were exposed physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Their first reaction was to cover up and hide.

How do you relate to the tendency to cover up and hide?

- *They were without need.* Throughout Genesis 2 we see exactly how God handled every need for provision that Adam had (2:9, 19). God's provision did not stop at the fall but extended into the mess of sin. God provided clothing for Adam and Eve (3:21), and even this clothing had a cost: the death of animals. This was the first evidence of the blood that would need to be spilled to cover the cost of sin's consequences and restore and redeem all that was lost.

What needs weigh on you often right now in your life? How have you taken those to the Lord and asked for help? How can you be more consistent with asking for His help?

- *They were confident.* Adam didn't doubt his purpose. He didn't doubt who was his Creator and King. Adam and Eve's confidence was based on knowing explicitly who they were based on who God was. The evidence of their confidence was their lack of humiliation at their nakedness. They felt no shame. In fact, this is the only place in Scripture where nakedness is not associated with some kind of humiliation.

How do the effects of shame play out in your life?

- *They had perfect vision.* Adam and Eve could see in a perfect and unfiltered way. There was no confusion or disillusionment. They had no context of sin or evil, and so their eyes saw purely. The fall opened their eyes not only to the evil that now marked humanity but also to the good that they lost.

How does confusion and disillusionment sometimes affect you?

7. Of these four aspects of the life you were designed for, which are you yearning for most in your current situation . . . innocence, needs, confidence or vision?

8. On the next page are some verses to show that no matter which of these aspects you're most missing, through a relationship with Jesus, God is providing these things for you today.

INNOCENCE

²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. (Colossians 1:22–23)

NEEDS

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19 esv)

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Timothy 6:17 esv)

CONFIDENCE

Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? (Job 4:6 esv)

For the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught. (Proverbs 3:26 esv)

VISION

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19–20 esv)

Write out which of these verses you want to commit to memory:



DAYS 4&5: REVIEW AND READ

Catch-up time! Go back and complete any parts of the study and reflection from previous days this week that you weren't able to finish. Review any revelations you've had and reflect on any growth or personal insights you have gained. Make note of them here.

Spend the next two days reading chapters 3 and 4 in *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.