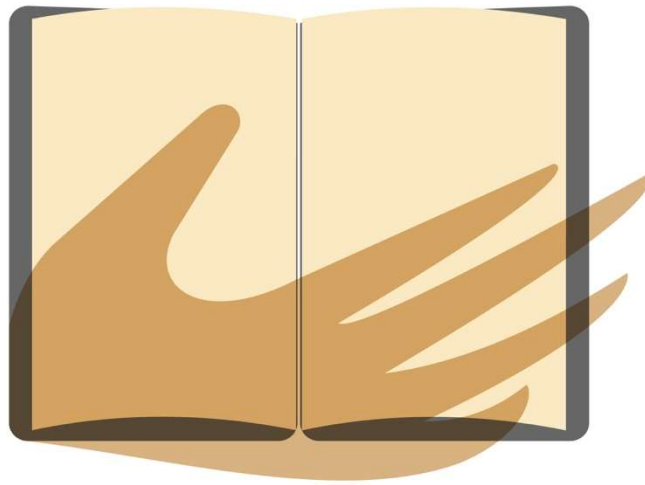


# SHAPED



# BY SCRIPTURE

Six Bible studies that illuminate Scriptural truth  
about our identity as children of God



# Introduction

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One of the primary ways that our identity in Christ is shaped is through regular encounter with the truth of Scripture. The purpose of these six Bible studies and the concluding activity “Writing Your Identity Charter” is to soak deeply in the truth of Scripture<sup>1</sup> about our identity as God’s people and to claim those truths and apply them to our lives.

## How to use this booklet

1. Make time for individuals to read through the passage a couple of times and make note of things that stand out to them or questions that come up. (5-10 minutes)
2. Discuss each of the observation and interpretation questions. Depending on time constraints and group dynamics, you can do this as one group or split into groups of 2-3. (25-30 minutes)
3. 15 minutes before the end of your Bible study time, move to the application questions. The application questions are the same every week and are designed to help each person synthesize the identity truth from the passage and consider how that truth impacts the way they think and live.
  - Note: The first application question invites people to write a personal identity statement based on the passage. It is important not to skip this question because these personal statements will be critical for doing the concluding Identity Charter activity.

## Identity Charter

The final section of this booklet involves writing an identity charter that synthesizes the Scriptural truths about our identity in Christ. This activity is a very helpful, practical way to allow our identities to be shaped by Scripture. If you do not have seven meetings to do this entire curriculum, we would encourage you to select some of the Bible studies and to be sure to leave a week for the Identity Charter activity.

Alternatively, you can ask small group members to write their identity charter and come ready to share it with the group.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture in this booklet is the New International Version (NIV)

# Week 1: Genesis 1:1-28

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1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18

to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” 23 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

# Genesis 1:1-28 - Discussion Questions

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## Observation

1. What do you notice about the language in this passage? Are there repeated words, phrases, imagery, or themes?
2. What do you notice about the structure of this passage? What seems to be the climax, and how can you tell?
3. How is the creation of humans similar to the rest of what's created in this passage? How is it different?

## Interpretation

Background Knowledge: In ancient times, kings who conquered a new place would make statues of themselves and have them placed throughout the whole country so that everyone would know who the king was.

4. This passage says we are made "in the image of God." What is the significance of this statement? What does it say about our worth? What about our purpose?
5. What does it mean to subdue the earth? What does it mean to rule over all the created creatures?
6. Why do you think the Bible starts this way? How does this passage prepare us to hear the rest of the story?

## Application

7. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more "I am" statements that express this truth.
8. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Week 2: Psalm 103

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Of David.

- 1 Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- 2 Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—
- 3 who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- 5 who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The Lord works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- 8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- 9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
- 14 for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.

15 The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;

16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.

17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—

18 with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.

19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.

20 Praise the Lord, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.

21 Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.

22 Praise the Lord, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the Lord, my soul.



# Psalm 103 - Discussion Questions

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## Observation

1. What are the attributes of God called out in this Psalm? Make a list of everything revealed about God here.
2. What words and images are used to describe human beings in this Psalm?
3. What contrasts are painted in this Psalm between God's perspective on people and the human experience and perspective on ourselves?

## Interpretation

4. What connection is demonstrated in this Psalm between the practice of worshipping God and clarity about personal identity? How are those things related?
5. What significance could be drawn from David addressing this entire Psalm to his "soul? (v.1, 2, 22)

## Application

6. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more "I am" statements that express this truth.
7. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Week 3: John 15:1-17

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1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

# John 15:1-17 - Discussion Questions

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## Observation

1. This passage begins with rich imagery from the gardening world. Draw or chart the images, naming who is represented by each image and what each image represents.
2. How is Jesus' love for his disciples described in this passage?
3. From the passage, what does it mean to be Jesus' friend?

## Interpretation

4. What does "remaining" in Jesus like a branch remains in a vine look like? How would you do that?
5. What is the difference between being Jesus' servant and being Jesus' friend?

## Application

6. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more "I am" statements that express this truth.
7. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Week 4: Romans 8:9-17

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9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

# Romans 8:9-17 - Discussion Questions

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## Observation

1. What do you notice about the language in this passage? Are there repeated words, phrases, imagery, or themes?
2. What comparisons and contrasts do you notice in this passage?

## Interpretation

3. Verse 12 starts with the word "therefore," connecting what comes before it with what comes after. How are the conclusions in v. 12-17 connected to v. 9-11?
4. In v. 15, "slavery" and "fear" are contrasted with "adoption" and "sonship"? What is the significance of this imagery? What does it teach about our identity in Christ?
5. What does it mean that we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"?

## Application

6. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more "I am" statements that express this truth.
7. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Week 5: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

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14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 - Discussion Questions

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### Observation

1. What do you notice about the language in this passage? Are there repeated words, phrases, imagery, or themes?
2. What are the primary metaphors used in this passage?

### Interpretation

3. What is the significance of Christ's death according to this passage? What does it accomplish?
4. What is the significance of the metaphor, "We are Christ's ambassadors"? What does that tell us about our role and identity?
5. In verse 21, what does it mean that Christ became sin and that we become the righteousness of God?

### Application

6. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more "I am" statements that express this truth.
7. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Week 6: Ephesians 2:1-10

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1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.



# Ephesians 2:1-10 - Discussion Questions

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## Observation

1. In this passage, Paul describes a “before” and an “after.” Make a list of what characterizes each.
2. In the process of moving from death to life, what does God do? What do people do?
3. What attributes of God are called out in this passage? What attributes of people?

## Interpretation

4. What does it mean that you have been made alive with Christ and are seated with him in the heavenly realms? How can that be true, given your experience of daily life?
5. What does it mean to be God’s handiwork? What difference does that description make in the way you see God, yourself, this life?

Note: This passage is loaded with rich theological terms. After you’ve done some Observation and Interpretation work, you might be helped by reading it together in Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, *The Message*. To the extent that theological terms lose meaning and/or carry baggage, the fresh take of the paraphrase might be helpful to your personal insight and group discussion.

## Application

6. What can you learn about your identity from this passage? Write out one or more “I am” statements that express this truth.
7. What do you think God wants you to do in response to this passage? Is there a pattern of thinking he wants to change or something you could do in obedience?

## Conclusion: Writing an Identity Charter <sup>2</sup>

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All of these Bible studies have focused on aspects of our spiritual identity. This week we are going to put the pieces together by writing an identity charter. An identity charter is a statement of our identity, written as if God were speaking it over us. Here's how to do it:

### Step 1 - On your own

Look back over the Bible passages in this booklet and remind yourself of the truths about your own identity that were highlighted. Each week you were asked to write a personal statement of identity based on the Bible study, which may be helpful for this activity.

Also look over the passages on the following two pages, reading through them and circling any phrases that really jump out at you or speak to you deeply.

### Step 2 - On your own

Arrange those verses or phrases into a meaningful personal charter that expresses what God is saying directly to you about your identity. (You'll find some examples below)

- The very first word of your charter should be your own name, so that the entire thing is addressed to you.
- You'll need to do some careful translation with any passages that are not already phrased as direct address from God ... i.e., you might translate the first portion of John 3:16 into: "For I so loved you that I sent you my only beloved son...."
- Don't try to put every single meaningful idea into the charter, just the words from God you are currently finding the most compelling. Your whole charter will likely be 4-6 sentences. If you find this exercise helpful, you can always revise your charter over time as different verses attract your attention.

### Step 3 - In the group

Share your identity charters within your small group and pray for each other.

Moving forward: If you are willing, set aside ten minutes each day for the next month to be alone. Picture the risen Christ sitting alongside you, speaking these words to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to press home the message of your true identity. Notice your own inner responses (including places you feel resistant) and share them with God.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Beloved Charter activity in *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity* by Trevor Hudson (IVP Books, 2010).

## Example: Henri Nouwen's Identity Charter

"I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knit you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me.... Nothing will ever separate us...."

## Potential “Beloved Charter” Scriptures that Convey the Way God Values our Lives

Psalm 139:13-16 ESV

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Ephesians 2:4-9 ESV

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...

Matthew 6:25-34 ESV

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ...

Luke 12:6-7 ESV

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Romans 5:8 ESV

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

John 3:16 ESV

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 8:28 ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Titus 3:4-7 ESV

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 4:16 ESV

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Samuel 16:7 ESV

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

Romans 5:6-8 ESV

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:1-39 ESV

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

John 1:12 ESV

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...

2 Peter 1:3 ESV

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence ....

Genesis 1:27 ESV

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1 John 1:9 ESV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 8:32 ESV

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Ephesians 2:10 ESV

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Zephaniah 3:17 ESV

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Isaiah 41:10-24 ESV

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Psalms 8:1-9 ESV

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ...

Ephesians 3:20 ESV

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us ...

Romans 8:35 ESV

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Song of Solomon 2:4 ESV

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Psalms 62:5 ESV

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

Isaiah 49:15-16 ESV

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

Psalms 139:14 ESV

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

John 15:15 ESV

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.







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