

As Yourself

Week 3 • Receiving the Self as God's Creature

Sep 2, 2026 • Hebrews 2:5–11 • Song of Songs 1:6; 8:12 • Dr. Geoffrey D. Lentz

Print reading: Chapters Three and Four, Capable and The Redeemed Vineyard, pp. 45–82

Tonight's rhythm: Opening prayer & Scripture 5 min • Teaching 30 min • Table time 20 min • Practice & closing 5 min

Teaching Block 1 • Capable of God (10 min)

Hebrews admits that we do not yet see humanity fulfilling its calling, then turns our eyes: “But we do see Jesus.” The Ascension is not mainly Jesus leaving. It is humanity entering divine glory in Christ and our “flesh being found capable” (Irenaeus). The risen Jesus remains embodied and even bears the wounds of crucifixion. The Incarnation did not end. It ascended. Our bodies, histories, wounds, and particularity are not temporary packaging God intends to discard. (pp. 45–49, 54–55)

Capax Dei means capable of God (Augustine): not able to master or contain God, but created with room to receive God's life. The whole embodied person is also *capax universi*, capable of receiving the world through attention and wonder (Aquinas), and *capax amoris*, capable of love. Sin contracts this openness around fear. Grace makes the self spacious again for God, creation, neighbor, and love. (pp. 49–55)

“The opposite of contraction is not self-importance. It is wonder.” (p. 57)

Table Time 1 • 5 min

Choose one question. Make room for each voice; anyone may pass.

What difference does it make to believe that God can meet you in your actual life—in your body, your personality, your story, and your circumstances?

What body, wound, failure, or limitation have you treated as an obstacle to God? How does the risen, wounded Christ change the way you see it?

Teaching Block 2 • Love Enters the Vineyard (10 min)

Near the beginning of the Song of Songs, the beloved says, “My own vineyard I have not kept.” Near the end she says, “My vineyard, my very own, is for myself.” She has not been lazy; she has spent herself tending fields assigned by others. Her vineyard is the embodied life actually entrusted to her: body, labor, desire, attention, voice, and freedom. She has been useful, but she has also become absent from her own life. Some neglect is chosen; some is imposed. (pp. 59–63)

Augustine prayed, “You were in me, but I was not in myself.” God was not absent; Augustine was absent from himself. Teresa of Ávila imagined the soul as a castle whose deepest room is already inhabited by God. Returning to the self is not narcissistic retreat. It is becoming present to the creature before the Creator who is already near. (pp. 62–63)

The beloved does not return alone. Love enters the neglected vineyard before the vines are repaired. This is the grammar of grace: justification is Love entering; sanctification is the vineyard becoming fruitful again. Communion is not the reward for successful cultivation but its source. Christ does not enter because the vineyard has become fruitful. The vineyard becomes fruitful because Christ has entered. (pp. 63–65)

Table Time 2 • 5 min

Choose one question. Listen for experience as well as ideas.

In what ways have you neglected your vineyard while tending the lives, needs, or expectations of others?

What changes if we believe God loves and accepts us before we have fixed everything that is broken in our lives?

Teaching Block 3 • Bernard's Strange Final Step (10 min)

When the beloved says, "My vineyard is my own," she is not declaring absolute ownership. She is receiving a gift and accepting responsibility for it. Possessiveness grasps; self-possession says, "This is the life entrusted to me, and I am responsible for how it is tended and given." A truthful no, needed rest, or a faithful boundary can protect the freedom of a future yes. The self must be received before it can be offered. (pp. 67–69)

Bernard's four degrees move from (1) loving the self for the self's sake, to (2) loving God for the self's sake, to (3) loving God for God's sake, and finally to (4) loving the self for God's sake. At the summit, the soul is given back. The anxious project of proving and protecting the self gives way, but the creature does not disappear. Iron remains iron when it glows in the fire. The self is received within God's larger love. (pp. 69–71)

Aquinas places the self inside charity because the self belongs to God and has a true good worth seeking. The opposite of selfishness is not self-neglect; it is rightly ordered love. The redeemed vineyard is not measured by relentless productivity. Its fruit is love. The self is received as gift so that it may become freely life-giving. (pp. 72–80)

Table Time 3 • 10 min

Begin with the first question, then move to the second if time allows.

Which of Bernard's four degrees feels most familiar? What makes loving yourself for God's sake surprising, difficult, or hopeful?

What fruit might begin to grow if you became more fully present to the life God has entrusted to you?

Practice & Closing • Tending the Vineyard

1. **Remember grace.** Christ does not wait outside until the vineyard is worthy. Love has already entered.
2. **Name the neglected place.** What part of the life God entrusted to you has gone untended: body, grief, prayer, rest, friendship, creativity, desire, or truth?
3. **Look for Love.** What kept you from tending this place, and where is grace already present there?
4. **Choose one small act.** Respond with patient attention: rest, ask for help, return to prayer, speak truth, say yes, or say no. (p. 81)

Closing prayer Christ of the vineyard, enter the places we have neglected, the places taken from us, and the places we fear to inhabit. Return us to the lives you have entrusted to us. Teach us to receive ourselves without making ourselves ultimate, to tend your gifts without grasping, and to offer love without disappearing. Make our lives fruitful through communion with you. Amen.