

# FULLY DEVOTED

A GUIDE TO BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP



*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

—MATTHEW 28:19-20 (NIV)



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## WEEK 1

# YOU'RE INVITED...

Great news: You're invited on a lifelong journey to grow as a disciple of Jesus. The invitation Jesus extended to His closest friends in Scripture is the same He extends to us today:

***"Come, follow me."***

—MATTHEW 4:19 (NIV)

Those words are an invitation to learn the ways of Jesus—how He spent His time, interacted with people, and fulfilled His purpose.

The word **discipleship** isn't found in the Bible. At its most basic, the definition of disciple is learner. This means the process and journey of discipleship is simply learning how to follow Jesus, to trust Him, and live like Him more and more each day. Our church defines a disciple as, "a fully-devoted, reproducing follower of Jesus." This means you're someone who lives your life committed to following Jesus, and you allow what God has done in your life to impact others.

Like any journey, the goal is progress, not perfection. As you commit to learning how to follow Jesus, we want to encourage you to view it through the lens of training rather than trying. You don't need to try to be more like Jesus, you need to train to be more like Jesus. Training requires practice.

Let's pretend you want to run a marathon. If you were to try to run it tomorrow, you'd most likely not make it past the 26.2 mile marker. However, if you were to commit to training and practice running in small increments, building endurance over time, you could eventually run a marathon! The same goes for discipleship: it's training for transformation; it requires practice.

Over these months together, you'll practice how to follow Jesus in the following ways:

## Connecting **with God**

- Engaging in spiritual disciplines
- Reading Scripture
- Praying
- Engaging in communal worship at church services
- Reading weekly in your guide

## Connecting **with People**

Attending weekly meetings with your discipleship group that will consist of:

- Sharing your weekly highs and lows
- Scripture memorization
- Discussing the S.O.A.P. method and the weekly reading
- Reviewing accountability questions
- Praying

## Connecting **with Outreach**

- Serving together with your discipleship group in the community
- Growing in living for Jesus and sharing the gospel with your neighbors

Throughout your first week, spend some quiet time in prayer reflecting on the following questions:

1. ***How am I hoping to grow through this experience?***
2. ***What are some potential obstacles or challenges that might prohibit me from either fully engaging or completing this group? What steps will I take to overcome these hindrances?***
3. ***How would I describe my current spiritual life?***
4. Author A. W. Tozer wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." ***What comes to my mind when I think about God?***



## WEEK 2

# THE S.O.A.P. METHOD

This week is about laying down the groundwork for the coming months, the foundation upon which your discipleship journey will be built. And that foundation is the study of the Bible, God's Word. Biblical scholar and author Wayne Grudem once wrote, "If you will develop a daily self-feeding program from the Bible and allow yourself to be daily, hourly mentored by God's Holy Spirit, your life will undergo an unprecedented change for the better."

Reading your Bible is essential to your relationship with Jesus and the health of your Christian walk. If prayer is your way of communicating with God, then studying the Bible is the clearest way God communicates with you. It's the mechanism God has set up for you to hear from Him. If you don't spend time reading through the words of Scripture, you'll miss out on hearing from God.

It's been said the quality of the Christian life is dependent upon the quality and consistency of a disciple's devotional life. Now, there are several solid methods you can put into practice to help you get the most out of your study time. One really great, simple method is called S.O.A.P. The best thing about this method is how simple it is to put into practice. All you need is your Bible and a way to take notes!

## **S.O.A.P. stands for . . .**

**Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer**

**Scripture:** Choose a passage from the Bible to study. Read the Scripture and highlight meaningful or repeated words, phrases, or portions of the passage that stand out or resonate with you.

**Observation:** Write down what God shows you through this passage. Reflect on what you just read. What did you notice about what you read? Write down the key observations, words, and phrases that stuck out to you.

Below are some questions to ask yourself to spark your thoughts.

- ***What did I observe about the character of God and about who He is?***
- ***What stuck out to me? Did anything pique my curiosity?***
- ***Was anything confusing? Did I learn anything new?***
- ***What truth can I learn?***
- ***Did the passage remind me of any other Scriptures?***
- ***What is the overall message of this passage?***

**Application:** It's time to make your observations personal by answering this question: "How does what I just read apply to my life?" For example, it might be instruction, encouragement, and/or conviction about a particular area of your life. Write down how you can take this passage to heart and make it real in your everyday life and practically apply it.

You can ask yourself:

- ***Based on what I just learned about God, what habits, attitudes, or changes do I need to make?***
- ***How's God encouraging me to grow in my relationship with Him?***
- ***What's the one thing I can take away from this passage and apply to my life?***

**Prayer:** Finally, write a prayer to God based on what you learned. Is there something to ask, something to confess, or something to praise Jesus for? You may consider asking Him for wisdom to help you apply these truths to your life.

Here's a **S.O.A.P.** example:

**Scripture:** *"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."—James 1:19 (NIV)*

**Observation:** *The words quick and slow stick out to me. This passage encourages me to control my anger, to be slow to anger, to think before I speak, and to make sure I'm always listening to others.*

**Application:** *I realize I often get the two speeds out of order. I'm quick to speak and get angry, but slow to listen. I think God wants me to work on this.*

**Prayer:** *Lord, thanks for giving me the perfect example of how to approach the people I come in contact with. Help me today with the people I encounter, so I may display Christ-like qualities to them. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

What are your thoughts on the S.O.A.P. method so far?

Do you have any questions, concerns, or things you need to clarify before we continue?

## Time to Practice

Now that you have a basic understanding of the S.O.A.P. method, let's give it a test run!

Over the next 15–20 minutes, unpack John 10:1–21 using S.O.A.P.

Take your time, read it more than once if you need to, and let the Holy Spirit guide you as you reflect on this passage.

**Scripture:** [John 10:1–21](#)

**Observation:**

**Application:**

**Prayer:**

# WHO IS GOD?

## memory verse

*"I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways."*

—PSALM 119:15 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**GENESIS 1:1–3**

**GENESIS 1:26–31**

**1 JOHN 1:5**

**2 CORINTHIANS 13:14**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

**“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom.”**

—PSALM 145:3 (NIV)

Have you ever asked yourself, “Is there a God?” and “If God exists, what does He require of me?” These are two of the most important questions you can ever ask yourself.

On the one hand, it’s easy to look at the beauty and intricacy of creation (e.g., animals, birds, flowers, the ocean, the cosmos, etc.) and believe these things are the work of an intelligent, all-powerful creator—God. On the other hand, you may have wondered:

*Where is God?*

*If God can hear my prayers, does He care about what’s going on in my life?*

*If God exists, why does He allow bad things to happen?*

These are all very normal thoughts, feelings, and questions. The Bible has the answers to these questions and much, much more. Scripture tells you everything you need to know about the nature of God, His love and care for you, and how you can enjoy a fulfilling relationship with Him.

## WHO IS GOD?

Let’s look at a few of God’s character traits in the Bible to help us formulate a biblical perspective on who or what God is. God’s the first cause of all the universe. He stands outside of time, space, and matter. These concepts, while tough to grasp in our minds, play a big role in why He’s so trustworthy. Keep this idea in your mind as we look at His other divine attributes.

### God is All Loving

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase, “God is love.” That might sound strange because when we think of the concept of love, we think of love as one of our emotions. How can God be an emotion? We struggle with this because love is much more than a human feeling or emotion. True love emanates from the very nature of who God is, and when we embrace Him and get to know Him, we begin to discover a love that’s far greater than we ever conceptualized based solely on our emotions. Look at how the Bible defines God as the essence of love.

**“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."*

—1 JOHN 4:7–9 (NIV)

Not only is God defined as being the very essence of love, but He also displayed this love by sending Jesus, His only Son, to sacrifice for us and pay for all the world's sins. A few verses later, God turns to us and tells us how we ought to love one another. If you want to know what true love is all about, it starts with a relationship with the living, loving God of the universe.

**Reflect:** 1 John 4 tells us that God is love. What does that mean to you?

## God exists as the Trinity

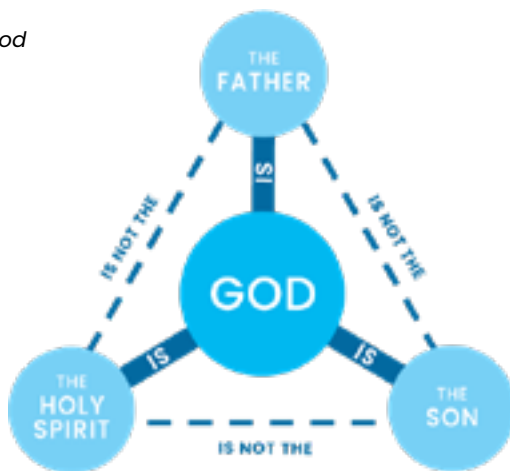
One of the most challenging concepts the Bible teaches about the nature of God is that He exists as the Trinity. The Trinity is laid in the Bible as God being one God, but simultaneously three persons who carry out various roles and functions in His relationship with you.

In the following weeks, you'll learn more about the Trinity and how it impacts your life. For now, it's just important to know that

while there's only one true God, He's a God of perfect love and everlasting community with the three persons of the Godhead.

The truth of the triune nature of God gives credibility to His perfect loving nature, and it's fascinating to realize that He desires a loving relationship with us! While this was a little more of a profound concept, let's look at a few other attributes of God.

**Reflect:** Why is the Trinity a difficult concept to comprehend? What specific questions do you have regarding the nature of God as three in one?



## God is Holy

The word "holy" is a word that's often misused in the English language. The definition of the word holy is, "dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose; sacred."

Something holy is something that's set apart from normal or natural things.

The Bible says God's the definition of holy:

***“There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”***

—1 SAMUEL 2:2 (NIV)

***“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”***

—REVELATION 4:8 (NIV)

God's holiness teaches us that He's set apart from sin, and we need to remind ourselves of this as we approach Him as sinners! This is the very purpose for the atoning death of Jesus on the cross: to pay for our sin so we may exist in the presence of a truly holy God!

## God is Sovereign

You may have heard the phrase, “God's in control.” This is a very comforting idea to give someone, especially in a time of hardship or discouragement. Knowing we believe in an eternal God, who sees the beginning and end of every matter, should be comforting to us! There are no surprises to the God of the Bible.

He's created us for His purposes, and we can rest in the fact that God “works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NIV).

The question is, do you really believe He's in control? What about when things don't seem to go your way? It may be challenging to feel that God's “in control” sometimes, but the Scriptures are full of verses that describe the perfectly sovereign nature of our God.

Let's look at another verse:

***“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”***

—COLOSSIANS 1:16–17 (NIV)

God holds all things together! If we place our trust in Him, even when things are tough and discouraging, He'll always be faithful and good according to His purpose and will. And when we fight against God, we must remember He always gets His way! He's so in control that He gives us free will to do whatever



we want; yet, despite man's free will, God's plans still come to pass. Believers should place their trust and faith in this attribute of God and live their lives accordingly.

**Reflect:** *Has there ever been a time in your life when you doubted God's sovereignty? How has He shown up for you in ways you didn't expect?*

## God is All Knowing (Omniscient)

Omni means "all." The next four sections cover these aspects of God's nature: omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omnibenevolent.

First up, God is omniscient. Scient is defined as "knowledge, information, or skill." It's where we get our word for science. Thus, omniscient means God knows everything; He's all knowing. Can God really see us all the time? You better believe it! He loves us so much that He can't take His eyes off of us!

One of the most mind-blowing attributes of God in Scripture is that He knows all things. Nothing is hidden from Him, and He's never surprised by anything. He even knows the thoughts of our minds and meditations of our hearts.

*"If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."*

—1 JOHN 3:20 (NIV)

*"Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."*

—PSALM 147:5 (NIV)

When we feel anxious about the world and its trials, God tells us we should meditate on the fact that our heavenly Father isn't taken off guard by what's going on, but sovereignly bringing us closer and closer to the finish line of His perfect plan.

## God is All Powerful (Omnipotent)

Next, God is omnipotent. Potent means "power." Thus, God is all powerful.

Because God is infinite in control of all things, then He must have power over all things at all times and in all ways. Being omnipotent, God can do everything that's in line with His holy, perfect, and good character. This means He only uses His eternal power for what's good and never for what's evil because God is good and "in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5 NIV).

Perhaps one of the most profound verses on the infinite power of God is found in the Book of Psalms: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6 NIV).

How can power be any greater than as displayed by a God who can speak the universe into existence? By the power of His Word, all things were created! We believe in a God who has no limitations to His power. While this concept is possibly intimidating when realized by people who are truly limited, it should bring us a sense of awe as we worship the creator of the universe.

## God is **All Present** (Omnipresent)

Third, God is omnipresent. Present is defined as "in a particular place; existing or occurring now." Thus, omnipresence means God is literally present everywhere, at all times, and in every moment.

***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."***

—REVELATION 22:13 (NIV)

In this verse, Jesus defines Himself as the Alpha and the Omega. He's at the beginning

and the end at the same time. God is outside of and bigger than our time-space-matter universe.

***"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'"***

—EXODUS 3:14 (NIV)

Here, God describes Himself as in the eternal present. He's not just a thing of the past or a thing of the future, but He's in the eternal present.

Many verses point to God's spirit nature, which isn't bound by the laws of the physical universe. He's a spirit being that preexists the universe and who brought the universe into being. There's no time in history where He's not present. There's nothing He can't accomplish in creation; yet, even though He's outside of the universe He created, He's also present inside His creation at all places and times with all power and knowledge.

**Reflect:** *Does this concept give you peace about the future?*

*How can you work towards not trying to box God into the constraints of time?*

## God is All Merciful (Omnibenevolent)

Lastly, God is omnibenevolent. Benevolent means “good” or “charitable.” Thus, God’s absolutely good, and there’s no action, motive, thought, feeling, or anything else about Him that’s not purely good. He’s literally “all good.” In order to believe in a perfect being, we have to also believe that God must be perfectly good. Otherwise, He wouldn’t be perfect.

We’ve discussed how God’s holy, and we, as sinners, have every reason to be concerned about that if we desire to be in His presence. The beautiful thing about our God is that His merciful nature is so great that He sent Jesus, His only Son, to pay the penalty for our sins! His mercy is free and accessible to all who desire it. Here are a few verses that describe the mercy of our God.

***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”***

—EPHESIANS 2:4–5 (NIV)

***“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”***

—TITUS 3:5 (NIV)

**Reflect:** What does mercy mean to you? Think of a time when God or someone you love showed you mercy.

## God is Perfectly Just

Just is defined as being “morally correct; to be right or acceptable according to particular moral principles; to be fair and impartial.” So, when we say God’s perfectly just, we mean He’s perfectly righteous in His treatment of His creatures. There’s no bias, grading curve, or sliding scale when it comes to what’s true, right, and fair. He’s a God of perfect justice.

This means God can’t ignore sin or injustice. The Bible describes Him as the perfect judge of all the world. So, how can God be both a God of justice and mercy? How can He be perfectly just and, at the same time, be all merciful? There’s no other place where God’s justice and mercy are more clearly displayed than on the cross.

You see, as the prophet Isaiah writes, “The punishment that brought us peace was on him”

(Isaiah 53:5 NIV). God's just judgment for the sins of humanity was to place His righteous and perfect wrath upon Jesus, who, being perfect and innocent, offered Himself up to take our place and bear the weight of our sins. Thus, Jesus giving His life satisfied the justice and wrath of God, making it possible for Him to extend His mercy to all those who would receive Him.

This means that everyone who repents of their sins and puts their hope, trust, and faith in Jesus as Savior is forgiven and declared innocent, righteous, and justified by the blood of Jesus that was spilled to pay the price for their sins. However, for those who reject Jesus, the perfect justice and wrath of God is still upon them, which means when they die, they'll face the just judgment of God.

[illegible]

# WHO IS THE FATHER?

## memory verse

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”*

—ISAIAH 55:8–9 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages, using the S.O.A.P. method to unpack them:

**1 CORINTHIANS 8:6**

**JAMES 1:17**

**1 JOHN 3:1**

**LUKE 10:21–22**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard a “dad joke”? Everyone knows that dad jokes are the type of comedy that make you roll your eyes and giggle because it’s clever but silly all at once.

What do you call a broken clock?  
A waste of time.

Why did the teddy bear turn down a slice of cake? He was stuffed.

The best thing about dad jokes is that children normally are the ones who get a real laugh out of them. Dads know what will make their kids laugh, and they love doing it because they want to bring them joy! This is a small picture of God’s heart towards us as our heavenly Father.

### Our Heavenly Father

In Matthew 6:9 (NIV), Jesus says, “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’” For Christians, the Bible describes the first person of the Trinity as our “heavenly Father.” It describes the example God gives us through His love for us as to how a father should love their children.

The concept of God being a father can be challenging for some. You may have had a wonderful example of a good father or father figure. For others, the word father brings distress as they might be connected to a father who was

distant, unkind, hurtful, or ignorant. At the end of the day, though, earthly parents are limited and imperfect. Bad parenting shouldn’t be a reflection of our heavenly Father because He’s loving, perfect, caring, and compassionate. He can do all things and never lets us down. We may not always understand His ways, but we can trust He’s good. We can see God’s character even more clearly when we look at Scripture.

While the theology of God being three-in-one may seem complex, there’s beauty to this complexity because it emphasizes the mystery of God. As we dive into the Trinity these next few weeks, challenge yourself to embrace the complexity and the mystery as part of what makes God, God! Pray and ask Him to give you eyes to see and a heart to understand how He operates in our lives and relates to us in the Trinity. As you do, you’ll begin to recognize that a triune God is both intimately personal and majestically incomprehensible all at once!

**Reflect:** *What has the term “heavenly Father” meant to you in the past? What pictures of God have you had in your mind in regard to His fatherhood over us?*

### The Authority of God the Father

To understand God the Father, we must recognize that He is an eternal Father. Unlike our human

conception of fatherhood, God the Father is a Father to His Son eternally. God the Father has no Father Himself—never has He been a Son. His paternity is eternal and without origin, and He is a Father because He is the Father to the Son.

He's also the source of life in the universe. Every external act of the Trinity is a unified act of the whole Trinity. So, what does this mean? Their external works are undivided, meaning that the three persons act as one in salvation because they're one in nature and will. At the same time, particular works and roles are clearly given to each distinct person of the Godhead. The theological term for this is called "divine appropriations."

For example, the incarnation. It wasn't accomplished by the Son alone, but it was His role and task to take on flesh. Another example is seen in the Holy Spirit being tasked specifically with indwelling the believer, but it's still a work of the shared Trinity. Regarding the Father, while creation and salvation are works of all three persons, the Father's role in all of it is the architect. The Father creates the world through the Son by His Spirit. Similarly, the Father redeems repentant sinners through His Son by His Spirit.

Every work of God is a work of the entire Trinity, and each person of the Trinity gets to enjoy and accomplish different aspects of the work! We can understand the Father as the

authoritative architect and directing voice. How wonderful is that?

**Reflect:** *What does it mean to you that God the Father is the architect who works through the Son by the Spirit in our lives?*

## An Invitation to Adoption

There's something special about adoption that's clearly reflected in the heart of God.

James 1:27 says that true and undefiled religion is about caring for orphans and widows while keeping oneself unstained from the world. Psalm 68 says God is a father to the fatherless, while Romans 8 reminds us that we've been given the spirit of adoption.

Adoption is special because it involves inviting a child into your family who has done nothing to earn their place. You invite them in to take a place of honor because of love and compassion, and their identity changes. And our adoption by God into His family is even deeper than how we view earthly adoption, as Ephesians 1:5 tells us, "He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

What does this mean? Well, let's consider what sonship is. In both the Hebrew and Greco-Roman world, sonship wasn't just about biology; it was about status, identity,

inheritance, and representation. To have sonship meant:

**1) You bore your father's name and represented his character** (John 10:25).

**2) You were heir to your father's estate** (Galatians 4:7).

**3) You shared in his privileges, responsibilities, and authority** (2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Galatians 3:23–29).

**4) You were expected to imitate him and continue his legacy** (Ephesians 5:1–2).

This is why Jesus being called the Son of God wasn't just a familial term—it was a claim of divine identity and authority (John 5:18).

And adoption in the ancient world—especially Roman culture, which Paul draws from—wasn't primarily about rescuing a child without parents. It was about bestowing legal sonship and full status upon someone—often an adult male—who wasn't biologically born into the family. As part of this adoption, the adopted son would receive the father's name, become his legal heir, and gain all rights and privileges of a natural-born son.

So, when Paul writes things like, "You received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father'" (Romans 8:15) and "so that we might receive adoption as sons"

(Galatians 4:5), he's blending both adoption and sonship into one by saying that God brings us into His family by His grace, but we're not second-tier members because we are given full rights, identity, and inheritance as legitimate children of God—like Jesus (Romans 8:17).

Now, the Bible says that God is Jesus' Father, but it also says that we can become sons and daughters of God. Does this make us the same as Jesus? No. Our sonship is much different from Jesus' sonship with God. Unlike Jesus, humanity is born into a sinful state as children of Adam—NOT children of God. Here are some passages to help us understand our adoption:

***"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."***

—JOHN 1:11–13 (NIV)

***"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption"***



*to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."*

—GALATIANS 4:4–7 (NIV)

These passages show us a few things about our human relationship with God. Contrary to popular opinion, it shows us that not everyone is God's child! Only those who believe in the name of Jesus have been given the right to become sons of God! What makes this so beautiful is that it allows us to embrace adoption. Jesus did the work on the cross to reconnect us to God, now we just need to receive His grace by turning from our sin, which separates us from the Father, placing our faith in Jesus our Savior, receiving His forgiveness, and committing to place our new identity in being a child of God!

**Reflect:** *Why is the sonship of Jesus unique to and important for our faith?*

*Why is it significant that Jesus made a way for us to be adopted into God's family?*

*How does one become a "child of God?"*

## The Heart of Our Heavenly Father

Let's turn our attention to a very popular passage of Scripture known as The Lord's Prayer. In this Scripture, Jesus takes the time and attention to teach His disciples how they ought to pray. When we read this prayer, it also applies to how we should approach our relationship with God as our Father. Let's read it together:

*"This, then, is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

—MATTHEW 6:9–13 (NIV)

This passage shows us that through Jesus, we now need no mediator between ourselves and God. He desires us to come to Him and talk with Him directly. Even though He's the Creator of the universe, He also instructs us to come to Him personally and intimately, just as we would to our dad! When we look at the prayer, we can see the heart posture God wants us to have towards Him as our Father.

God wants us to trust Him enough to ask for His will to be done in our lives. He wants us to have a deep sense of His goodness and faithfulness that would lead us to pray like this. The same way small kids ask their parents for food, things they need, and things they want—without shame—God wants us to look at Him with the same childlike faith to know that He'll provide for us all we need.

Just like an earthly father is meant to do, God wants to provide for and protect us. Unlike an earthly father, God's always trustworthy, always attentive, always working, and always showering His love on us! He is perfect and holy, so we can take heart in knowing that God cares for us deeply.

**Reflect:** Read Matthew 6:26, 7:11, and 18:14. Based on these passages, what do we learn about God and how He wants us to approach and view Him?

## The Discipline of Our Heavenly Father

While our heavenly Father is a God of forgiveness and mercy, the Bible is also clear that He fairly and rightly disciplines His kids! Look at this passage from the Book of Hebrews:

*“And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, ‘My son, do not make light*

*of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.’*

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

—HEBREWS 12:5–11 (NIV)

The reality is we're not perfect—we're sinners, even after we become Christians! Even though we're forgiven for the sins we commit, the Lord loves us way too much to allow us to remain in any state of sinful behavior. He desires His best for us; therefore, God offers loving correction to His kids. The question is, when His correction comes to us, how will we handle it? How long will we resist? Or will we be quick to receive His discipline with humility desiring to rightly represent Him and to live our lives according to His will?

God wants us to be unashamed in asking Him for forgiveness. Although we may still reap the inevitable consequences for our sinful actions, our relationship with God our Father doesn't change because He is faithful and just to forgive and purify us when we confess (1 John 1:9). He also wants us to remember that He fights for us. We can pray for guidance and deliverance from struggles and temptations we face daily.

## The Abundant Grace of Our Heavenly Father

The last aspect of God as our Father we want to evaluate is His heart towards our rebelliousness.

In Luke 15:11–32, we see a parable of a wealthy father who has two sons. One of his sons decides he wants to leave his father's house because he believed the world

had more to offer him than his dad. As a result, he asks for his portion of the inheritance which would have been extremely offensive in that culture. Asking for your inheritance early would have been the equivalent of wishing your father was dead.

With a broken heart, the father gave his son what he requested. The son immediately left and pursued a life of sin squandering all of his inheritance. When the money was gone, he was left with no choice but to sell himself to work for a farmer feeding his pigs. He was so hungry he was even tempted to eat the pigs food.

The Bible shares his revelation with us this way, "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants'" (Luke 15:17–19 NIV).

How do you imagine the father responded? How do you think you would respond? After his son was disrespectful, disobedient, and distrustful, it seems like most parents would be too hurt to welcome them back in with the extravagant love we see in this story. Most earthly relationships would have a lot of strife and conflict in this situation, but this

story reflects the perfect love of God our Father towards all of us in our rebellion. Let's read the Father's response together:

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."*

—LUKE 15:20-24 (NIV)

Our heavenly Father's heart is filled with compassion for His kids, even when they mess up. Even though this son gave up his right to be called a son by leaving the house dishonorably, pridefully, and prematurely with

his inheritance, his father never ceases to call him, view him, and love him as a son!

Our heavenly Father allows us to get a taste of what we think we want in order to give us the freedom to choose Him, and as we do, He patiently waits for us to come to our senses and return with a repentant heart. He runs out to meet us with arms full of mercy and grace. He'll not shame or dismiss us. He desires our humble hearts to come before Him because only then can He mend it and make it whole.

**Reflect:** *How would you describe the heart of God our Father after reading this chapter?*

*What do you want to change about your relationship with Him as a result?*

# WHO IS THE SON?

## memory verse

*“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”*

—JOHN 1:11–13 (NIV)

## this week’s Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**JOHN 1:1–4**

**JOHN 1:9–14**

**COLOSSIANS 1:15–20**

**1 TIMOTHY 2:5**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week’s prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Who would you choose if you could live someone else's life for one day? A celebrity? Your parent or child? A friend? I can only imagine how fun it would be, but I can also imagine how after a few days, you'd begin to see the struggles and complications of that person's life. In every movie ever made about people switching bodies, apart from being super funny and entertaining, they also teach us a lesson about empathy and understanding.

When I think about what Jesus did in coming to the earth, I think of the ultimate experience of stepping into someone's shoes. This is part of what makes Him the Son of God. This week, we'll dive into what it means that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, and that He's the Son of God. Before we begin, take a moment to meditate on Philippians 2:6-8:

***"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by***

***becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"***

—PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8 (NIV)

## Who is Jesus?

In Luke 1:35, we read an incredible scene where the angel Gabriel visits the Virgin Mary and delivers perhaps the most shocking news a young lady could receive. This Jewish teenage girl, who's engaged and a virgin, is told by an angel she's now carrying a baby, what to name the baby, and that this child will sit on King David's throne and reign over Jacob's descendants forever with an unending kingdom.

We can only imagine what must have been going through Mary's mind. Perhaps one of the most difficult things to comprehend for her would be the statement about who this child's Father would be. In Luke 1:32 (NIV), Gabriel declares, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" God.

What would this mean? How could her child be God's Son? Mary wouldn't be the only person to struggle with this concept. We can better comprehend this by remembering Jesus was made 'the Son' in ROLE. He's not a son biologically. The author of Hebrews shows a few very interesting things regarding Jesus' relationship to the Father. In Hebrews 5:5 (NIV) it says,

"In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"

This Scripture shows that even though He had every right to, Jesus didn't come and step into His role as high priest immediately. This Scripture also quotes an Old Testament passage in Psalm 2 showing that Jesus preexisted in this role of "Son." Psalm 2:7 (NIV) states, "I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'"

Jesus is the almighty eternal God, but in this moment, He received the position of 'Son' and the task of taking on human flesh so He could be the spotless Lamb of God and pay for the sins of the world. This means Jesus held the role as the Son of God long before Mary was even born.

Jesus is also "the incarnate Word of God." What does this mean? In John's gospel, he introduces Jesus as the Word of God made flesh. Let's read the verses together:

***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . .***

***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."***

**—JOHN 1:1-3, 14 (NIV)**

Why would John choose to start his gospel in this way? So His followers would better understand His divinity and humility. Just like we read earlier in Philippians, when Christ took on human form, He chose to change His position, not His nature. He remained fully God while becoming fully man, and that's what incarnate means. Jesus willingly laid down His glory, honor, and privileges to become the only suitable sacrifice for our redemption!

***Reflect:*** *What's unique about Jesus' role as the Son of God? What does it mean that He is the incarnate Word of God?*

## The Divinity of the Son

First, let's take a look at His divinity. Jesus Himself preexists the entire universe! He was active in the creation of all things, and His role was specifically endowed by God the Father at the perfect timing in creation.

***"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created:***

*things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

—COLOSSIANS 1:15–20 (NIV)

According to these verses, Jesus eternally existed before all of creation. To be more precise, He exists OUTSIDE OF creation. He has the power to create all things. All powers, authorities, and rulers were created for Him and by Him. These attributes belong to God Himself because Jesus is God! Here's a list that will help you identify divine characteristics of Jesus as seen throughout Scripture.

### **Jesus is the Creator.**

(Hebrews 1:1–3)

### **Jesus is the Giver of life.**

(John 5:21; 10:28; 11:25)

### **Jesus forgives sins.**

(Mark 2:1–12; Acts 26:18; Colossians 2:13)

### **Jesus is omnipresent.**

(Matthew 18:20, 28:20; Ephesians 3:17, 4:10)

### **Jesus is omniscient.**

(Matthew 11:27; Luke 5:4–6; John 2:25, 16:30, 21:17; Acts 1:24)

### **Jesus is omnipotent.**

(Matthew 28:18; Mark 1:29–34; John 10:18; Jude 24)

### **Jesus is eternal.**

(Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; John 8:58)

### **Jesus receives worship as God.**

(Matthew 14:33, 28:9; John 9:38; Philippians 2:10–11; Hebrews 1:6)

Knowing this, you can even read through the Old Testament and find instances of the Son at work behind the scenes or in prophecies foreshadowing His incarnation. Jesus confirmed this Himself when He said that Moses wrote of Him (John 5:46) and explained all the Scriptures to the disciples concerning Himself (Luke 24:27). He also referenced a handful of prophecies in Scripture claiming they were fulfilled in Himself. Here are some of those passages:

### **Jesus would be sent of the woman to crush Satan's head.**

(Genesis 3:15)



**Jesus would be the descendant of David.**

(2 Samuel 7:12-16)

**Jesus would be born of a virgin.**

(Isaiah 7:14)

**Jesus would bring good news to the poor and set the captives free.**

(Isaiah 61:1)

**Jesus would be mocked, betrayed, unjustly hurt, and killed.**

(Psalm 22)

Additionally, various stories in the Old Testament either point to the ultimate sacrifice of the Son or display a preincarnate appearance of the Son as “the angel of the Lord”:

**The angel of the Lord called out to stop Abraham from killing Isaac and provided a ram instead, foreshadowing His own sacrifice for our sins.**

(Genesis 22:11-18)

**The angel of the Lord stood in the fire and protected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.**

(Daniel 3:25)

**Looking to the bronze serpent for healing foreshadowed looking to the Son of Man for salvation.**

(Numbers 21:4-19; John 3:14-15)

Therefore, we can say Jesus is God! He exists as the Son of God—fully God; yet, taking on our flesh and becoming fully human to be the

perfect sacrifice. He’s always existed from the beginning because He, being God, is outside of time! Willingly stepping into time and onto earth, at just the right time, He embraced His role as the Son in order to fulfill the plan of salvation and redemption set in place for us. He’s so worthy to be praised!

**Reflect:** *Why is Jesus being fully God important? How do you see His divinity in Scripture and in your life?*

## The Humanity of Jesus

The humanity of Jesus is equally as important as His divinity. If He wasn’t fully human, then His death and resurrection, His sacrifice, wouldn’t have done or meant anything for us. The author of Hebrews says it like this, “For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17 NIV).

When you take a moment to think about it, it’s truly an incredible thing! Jesus grew in Mary’s womb. He was born and went through the same ages most of us experienced! He went from being a baby that could do nothing for Himself, to being a child running around with His siblings and friends, to being a teenager and undergoing the normal Jewish schooling of His time, to being a young adult and learning the carpentry trade of His earthly father, Joseph!

He had the same natural physical needs as us and even experienced human emotions like us! Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) encourages us by explaining how “we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

Another way we can observe the humanity of Jesus is through His submission to the Father’s will. In John 6:38 (NIV), Jesus states; “For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but to do the will of him who sent me.” Jesus intentionally never brought glory to Himself but regularly reflected glory to the Father.

The most intense example of Jesus’ submissive attitude towards the Father is shown when He was in the garden of Gethsemane in the moments before His arrest. Jesus knew He was about to be arrested, tried, and condemned to a horrific death on the cross to face God’s wrath and atone for the sin of humanity; yet, he still “fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (Matthew 26:39 NIV).

Now you may be asking why Jesus would need to be submissive to the will of the Father if He was God and shared in the same divine nature as the Father. Does Jesus’ role as the Son make Him

less than God? The answer is no! Jesus’ submission to the will of the Father doesn’t make Him any less; rather, it displays the perfect union between God the Father and God the Son.

When Jesus humbled Himself to take on human flesh, He chose to take on the role of a servant, and because He left His divine glory in heaven for a while, the Father was greater in that sense for the time. The Father didn’t experience the same pain, illness, and death as the Son because that wasn’t His role, but it doesn’t make the Son any less God! For this reason, Jesus is seen continually submitting to the will of the Father and proclaiming He’s here to accomplish the will of the Father (John 4:34).

Because they are one, Jesus had to continually point to the Father so His disciples would eventually recognize His divinity and oneness with God, for “the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19 NIV).

Not only is Jesus our perfect sacrifice because of His sonship and incarnation, but He’s also our perfect example of how to live as children of God once we accept His sacrifice! In His humanity, Jesus also modeled for us what it looks like to walk in a real and personal relationship with God the Father.

**Reflect:** *Why is Jesus being fully human also important? What does it mean for us and our faith?*

*What can we learn from the way Jesus submitted to and pursued a relationship with God the Father?*

## The Promised Messiah

Let's finish by looking at Jesus as the Christ. You may or may not be surprised to know that Christ is not Jesus' last name! It's the title "Messiah" translated into Greek. Earlier, you saw a list of some prophecies surrounding Jesus being the Messiah. For thousands of years, believing Jews awaited the coming of their deliverer who would free them from captivity and bring glory to Israel and God's chosen people. What many of them didn't anticipate or recognize in all of those prophecies was how Jesus would be a Messiah for all people! In another messianic prophecy, we read it this way, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6 NIV).

In His ministry on the earth, Jesus made this very clear. He extended His grace, compassion, and healing to people both Jewish and Gentile alike! He told the Samaritan woman He was the Messiah (John 4:25–26). When Peter declares He's the Messiah, Jesus confirms the Father revealed it to him (Matthew 16:16–17).

When Jesus claims to be the gate by which people can enter to be saved and the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, He also says, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16 NIV). Jesus is truly the Messiah for all mankind; yet, He's also to be distinguished as the only Savior for all mankind.

In John 14:6 (NIV), Jesus confidently states, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In today's society, this presents itself as an issue because the world has idolized tolerance as a virtue. How dare Jesus claim to be the only way to heaven. Don't all paths and religions lead to heaven? That's the exact opposite of what Jesus claims here. The Bible is clear that Jesus is the only way to the Father because He's in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 14:10).

Without Jesus, we're lost. We'll find ourselves walking through the wrong gate. The wide gate may seem easier, more comfortable, and more popular—and it's true! Yet we must not forget that Jesus said those who enter through the wide gate will be led to destruction, "but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only few find it" (Matthew 7:13–14 NIV).

As the promised Messiah, we can also view Jesus as both the Lion and the Lamb. He came as the Lamb of

God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The Israelites expected the promised Messiah to be a King that would reign over them justly and lovingly, and the prophecies gave them reason to believe this! What they missed was recognizing that Jesus would first have to suffer before being glorified. Because Jesus came as the Lamb, we can take hope in His return as the Lion! We wait for the second coming of the Messiah to establish His eternal throne and complete His plan for redeeming His people and creation.

Those who treat Jesus as their King now will one day enter the city where there is no temple, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it” (Revelation 21:22–24 NIV).

**Reflect:** *What does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah? How would you share that with someone who’s never heard of that before?*

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# WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

## memory verse

*“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

—JOHN 14:16–17 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**JOHN 15:26–27**

**JOHN 16:12–15**

**ROMANS 8:14–17**

**2 CORINTHIANS 3:17–18**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Did you ever want to be an astronaut when you grew up? Astronauts capture the hearts of many children because they're like modern-day superheroes. They get to explore a realm we hear about all the time and see through photos, videos, and up in the sky at night, but we never get to experience up close and personal.

Something they may not always realize; however, is that astronauts don't do it all on their own. They have an entire team of scientists and experts supporting them while they're in space. In order to accomplish their mission, they must be attached to a headset that allows the chief officer to communicate with them about what to do, where to go, and what they can't see right in front of them. The data everyone in the command center sees is communicated to the astronaut through the chief on the other side of their headset, and this allows for proper direction, guidance, protection, and knowledge to be shared.

Why are we talking about this? Because this week's chapter is all about the Holy Spirit who shares a lot of the same responsibilities as the chief on the other side of an astronaut's headset. He's our personal navigator and heavenly helper!

*"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."*

—JOHN 14:16–17 (NIV)

Jesus said this on the eve of His arrest and crucifixion. He refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth." This promise wouldn't only change the disciples' lives, but the world. As they faced the reality of Jesus being physically separated from them, Jesus assured them that His presence would be replaced by the presence of "another," and that's who the Holy Spirit is!

Nobody but Jesus understood the significance of this promise, but as we'll see, it was as significant as anything Jesus ever said. In fact, He'd go on to say that it was actually more beneficial for His first followers (and every single Christian since) if He were to depart in order for the Holy Spirit to be present with them (John 16:7). Let that statement sink it! How could anything be better than to have Jesus, the Son of God, physically present with you?

This week, we'll explore who the Spirit is and what He does in the life of a Christian in order to better understand what Jesus said.

## The Holy Spirit's Identity

It could be argued that nothing has led to more confusion, apprehension, and division among Christians than the subject of the Holy Spirit. For the most part, the church can agree on the core beliefs of the Christian faith. We understand that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and is coming back to rule over the earth. But when it comes to the subject of the Holy Spirit, a lot of Christians ask, "What is it?" And this very question reveals why there's so much confusion: We first need to understand the Holy Spirit isn't an "it," but a "Who." He's not an impersonal force like in *Star Wars*; He's not an aura, principle, or feeling as many are led to believe. Rather, He's a living person . . . just as much of a person as we are. God's Word shows us this in two primary ways.

First, the Holy Spirit is identified with personal pronouns. In speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus stated: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" (John 16:13–14 NIV). It's safe to say that nobody understood the Holy Spirit better than Jesus, and He understood the Holy Spirit to be a person.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit also has personal attributes. There are three important ingredients that make a person a person: their mind, will, and emotions.

1 Corinthians 2:10–11 tells us that the Holy Spirit has a mind that searches out and knows the things of God. The same letter reveals the Spirit gives out different spiritual gifts as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). And Ephesians 4:30 commands us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. If the potential exists to grieve the Spirit, it reveals He possesses the emotional capacity to grieve.

All of this points us to the fact that the Holy Spirit is more than a something, but rather a someone. So who, exactly, is He?

## The Holy Spirit is God!

As early as its first chapter, the Bible teaches us that God is a compound unity. Genesis 1:26 (NIV) says, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" We use the term Trinity to define this truth for us because it expresses both the unity and diversity of God's nature. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity. He's one with the Father, one with the Son, and He's God. How can we be so sure of this?

The Bible consistently testifies to this truth by referring to "God" and the "Holy Spirit" interchangeably. When Peter confronted Ananias about his dishonesty, he declared Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit,

but in the very next verse, Peter said Ananias had lied to God (Acts 5:3–4). In his first epistle, Peter said the Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote the Scriptures (1 Peter 1:21), while Paul wrote they were inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). In Hebrews 9:14, it tells us that Christ offered Himself through the eternal Holy Spirit, which is an attribute that can only be ascribed to God. And 1 Corinthians 2:10 declares the Spirit as all-knowing, another attribute that belongs only to God.

The Holy Spirit is also invisible, which presents itself as another difficulty in understanding Him until we begin to understand that seeing is not believing. The Israelites were accompanied by amazing manifestations of God as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, but they failed in their faith when the time came to trust Him (Hebrews 3:16–19). Nobody saw more miracles than the disciples during their time with Jesus, and yet they fled and doubted His promises once He was arrested and crucified (John 20:19).

There's a pattern here. Seeing doesn't guarantee believing. In fact, faith grows when we trust in something without being able to see it (John 20:29). In John 3:8, Jesus teaches Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit and shares that the Holy Spirit is a lot like the wind, which can't be seen or naturally perceived. Its effects can be seen over time, but the wind, itself, is invisible. Since invisibility is one ingredient for a

deeper faith, God, in His wisdom, doesn't allow us to see the Holy Spirit. He's real, but invisible—and our faith is deepened as a result.

**Reflect:** *What are some things that stand out to you regarding the Holy Spirit's identity? How would you share them with others?*

## The Holy Spirit's Character

One of the greatest tragedies to ever befall the church is the way the Holy Spirit has been misrepresented. Bizarre behavior is often chalked up to being "Spirit-filled," resulting in church services that resemble three-ring circuses instead of gatherings patterned for us in Scripture. Consequently, a lot of Christians are intimidated by the mere mention of the Holy Spirit.

This is tragic because the Spirit never acts in a way that would scare or terrify anybody. He doesn't do things that are freakish or weird. Case in point: Jesus was the most Spirit-filled person to have ever lived. And yet, we don't read about Jesus doing anything off-the-wall or eccentric. He did sensational things, but not in sensationalistic ways. He worked supernaturally, but still maintained a natural appearance. The Holy Spirit doesn't push or influence people toward inappropriate behavior. In fact, if there was ever a person who we should want influencing us, it's the Holy Spirit. His tact and timing are always perfect.



Besides being orderly and full of wisdom, the Holy Spirit is also primarily relational. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NIV), Paul writes, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” What does it mean to have “fellowship” with the Holy Spirit?

The word used here for fellowship is actually the word *koinonia* in the original Greek text. It’s one of the more significant words used throughout the New Testament. It’s used to describe the sense of community within the early church (Acts 2:42) as well as our spiritual connection with Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:9). Dictionaries define this word as “partnership, participation; to communicate, or to carry on communion with.” In a word, *koinonia* means relationship.

It would be impossible to invent a better friend than the Spirit! Relationships are only strong; however, when they’re intentional and consistent. There needs to be an exchange of things, of life, in order for a relationship to move from the theoretical to the actual—and that’s exactly what happens in life as the Holy Spirit actively works in our lives in a variety of ways.

**Reflect:** *What are some aspects of the Holy Spirit’s character that you find encouraging and comforting?*

## The Holy Spirit’s Activity

Our understanding of the Holy Spirit’s activity needs to start with three

distinct ways He chooses to relate to us. He operates alongside us, lives within us, and comes upon us. What does this mean? Let’s start by reading John 14:16–17 (NIV), which says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

In speaking to His disciples, notice how Jesus said that up to this point the Holy Spirit had been dwelling with them. The word for with in the original Greek language here is *para*, and it essentially means “by the side of.” We see the Holy Spirit come alongside people to convict and convince them of their need for a Savior (John 16:8–9). Anyone who’s placed their faith in Christ can relate to this. The Holy Spirit is the One who walks by our side, gently and purposefully giving us an unshakable sense of our need to be reconciled to God. He opens our eyes and draws us to the Father.

But Jesus didn’t stop there. He also said the Spirit “will be in you.” First, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us, leading us to repentance and salvation in Christ, but when we respond to the Spirit’s working with us, He then comes to live in us.

Ephesians 1:13 says when we heard the message of truth and believed, we were marked and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. This teaches us the Holy Spirit personally comes into each and every person who places

their faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

This means if you're a Christian, at this very moment you have the Holy Spirit of God inside of you! He dwells/abides in you. Everywhere you go, everything you do, He's right there because He's in you. Even more amazing, the original word here for in means "to settle down and take permanent residence." So when the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit comes inside of us, think of it in housing terms. He has literally taken up residence in your heart. Jesus paid for your heart in full and the Spirit moved in and will never move out. He's there to stay forever!

When it comes to the Spirit coming upon us, this is more about the power of the Spirit. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He made another promise to His disciples about the Spirit saying they'd be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49 NIV). The Greek verb that corresponds with our English "clothe" is *epi*, which means "to overflow in abundance." When the Spirit comes upon a believer, His presence fills them in a way that results in us overflowing with truth, power, and a radiating presence of God. It's important to note that this filling of the Spirit isn't simply for us to experience and enjoy; it's given so the Spirit can accomplish His work in and through us—so He can draw others to the Father, to minister to others, and to glorify God. The Spirit equips us to live on mission for God.

Lastly, it's important to recognize the Holy Spirit as someone who teaches us, reveals God's will, and prays for us. When Jesus speaks about the Spirit, He explains He "will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV). This means we have the Spirit as a continual teacher and friend to remind us of the truth we read in the Bible.

The Spirit is also infinitely greater than the sum of our insecurities, which means He's always able to assure us amidst our doubts and fears. Romans 8 explains that it's through the Holy Spirit that we receive adoption into God's family, which grants us security and belonging.

Not only that, but Romans 8 also tells us that when we struggle with knowing what or how to pray, the Spirit knows exactly what we need and will intercede for us according to God's will because He's also God (Romans 8:26–27)! The Spirit will also prompt us to pray in accordance with God's will because He's the One who reveals God's will for our lives. The Holy Spirit will work in tandem with the Word of God to direct us in every step of our lives, whether it be who He wants us to encourage in the grocery store, a new job opportunity to pursue, or overcoming a temptation.

**Reflect:** *What activities of the Holy Spirit do you most relate to and feel the need to gain more experience in?*

## The Holy Spirit's Gifts

The Holy Spirit is a gift in and of Himself, but He also gives us things that far and away surpass anything else in this world! This is because the Spirit Himself is of the supernatural world. Therefore, the gifts He gives us are all deeply rich and supernatural! Let's see what those key gifts are...

**The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life.**

**The Holy Spirit gives us freedom and power.**

**The Holy Spirit gives us perfect love.**

**The Holy Spirit gives us eternal hope.**

In John 3:5 (NIV), Jesus tells Nicodemus that "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of the water and the Spirit." This is referring to baptism by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who brings us spiritual life once we choose to put our faith in Jesus.

Remember, because of sin, we are born spiritually dead. So when we receive Jesus, the Spirit brings our spirit to life, thus we're born again. He also cleanses us and renews our hearts and minds (Titus 3:5). And He continually, daily works in us to purify and sanctify us in our walk with the Lord, standing ready whenever we experience an unclean moment, not to criticize or condemn, but to lovingly correct and cleanse us.

Now, because we'll still struggle with obedience as long as we live on the earth, the Holy Spirit is also there to remind us of God's grace and empower us to walk in freedom and self-control. Though we're free from the law, we aren't free to live according to our sinful desires. When we trust in Jesus, we're given a relationship with the Holy Spirit that governs and guides our hearts. It's not a matter of being lawless, it's a matter of being Spirit-led. And as the Spirit leads us, He also empowers us to obey Him (Galatians 5:16–18). By doing so, He frees us not only from our sinful desires, but also from the frustration of not meeting His standards.

This ultimately leads us to receiving an endless amount of God's perfect love in our hearts. The greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to love our neighbor, so the Holy Spirit fills us with this love so we can fulfill this command! This is why Paul writes, "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5 NIV).

We must receive it first before we can give it, and when we feel like we can't give it, we must remember the Holy Spirit can.

These gifts of the Spirit leave us with an eternal hope that can't be taken away! Through His sovereign power, He alone produces something inside of us by kindling our hearts with an awareness of Christ's return (Titus 2:13) and of heaven (Colossians 1:5).

## WEEK 6: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

—ROMANS 15:13 (NIV)

*With this new understanding of the Holy Spirit, how do you plan to approach your relationship with God and your daily faith journey differently?*

[illegible]

# WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

## memory verse:

*“Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*

—EPHESIANS 2:3–5 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**ROMANS 3:23**

**ROMANS 6:23**

**ROMANS 5:8**

**ROMANS 10:9–10**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

According to a recent sociological experiment, good news travels faster than bad news. Dr. Jonah Berger, a world-renowned expert on word of mouth, viral marketing and social influence, summarized the findings of this extensive study by stating, “If I’ve just read this story that changes the way I understand the world and myself, I want to talk to others about what it means.”

What’s the best news you’ve ever heard? Think about it. What comes to mind? What memory? What made it such good news?

## The Gospel Defined

The word *gospel* is one of the most important words you’ll ever hear. The interesting thing is you sometimes hear non-Christians use this word. You’ll hear stuff like “take it as gospel,” “accept it as gospel,” or “it’s gospel truth.” In these instances, it seems that gospel has been taken to mean truth or absolute truth, but this isn’t the proper use of the word. So, what is the proper use?

The first time we see the word used in the Bible is in Mark 1:14–15 (ESV): “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” The Greek word here is *euangelion*, where we also get

our word for evangelism. It literally means “good news,” specifically “*God’s* good news.” So, what is the good news?

## In the Beginning

In order to understand the gospel, we must start the story at the beginning . . . back to Genesis, to the garden, to Adam—the first man.

In Genesis 1:27, we’re told about the sixth day of creation. After having created the whole universe, the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, the seas, the trees, all plant and animal life in the air, on the ground, and in the ocean in the first five days, we’re told, “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.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them” (Genesis 1:26–27 NIV).

The crowning jewel of the Lord’s good and perfect creation, Adam, which is also the Hebrew word for “man,” was given life. But not just any kind of life, not like the animals. He wasn’t just spoken into being. Genesis 2:7 (NIV) tells us, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

It's easy to pass this over, but it's so important. Not simply spoken into being like everything else, Adam was given a spirit. We're specifically told he was made alive by the breath of God.

In the Greek, the word here for "breathed" is *pneuma*. Interestingly, this word we define as breath is also the same word used to refer to both our spirit and the Holy Spirit. So, what this often-overlooked aspect of the creation story is showing us is how unique mankind is among all of God's creation.

We were made by God and for God, to know Him, to have relationship with Him, and to be with Him forever as His children. And Adam and Eve were placed in paradise, a beautiful, perfect garden where they got to do just that! Can you imagine what it was like in that garden? Did you know there are currently more than 20,000 species of edible plants in the world and more than 2,000 types of fruits? Imagine how much more and how much better the fruits and vegetables were in the garden. Imagine how good a strawberry tasted; imagine what cauliflower was like. Adam and Eve had that and more!

Humanity was the cross section between earth and heaven—the natural, made of dirt and earth and the eternal, brought to life by the Holy Spirit through the working of the Son (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:15–19). This is what it means to bear the image and likeness of God.

## The Bad News

When it comes to the gospel, before we can truly understand the good news, we need to understand why it's good news. We need to come to grips with the bad news. The story so far is beautiful and wonderful, but it doesn't stay that way for long.

God commanded, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:16–17 NIV). You'd think with all the amazing options, they'd be satisfied and content for all eternity. But along came a serpent to plant a simple seed in their mind: "God's holding out on you!"

So now, even with limitless, delicious, perfect options all around, we read "the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom" (Genesis 3:6 NIV).

Can't you just see it play out in your head?

**Eve sees the tree . . . "That's one good looking tree! How can something so beautiful be bad?"**

**Eve sees the fruit . . . "That looks delicious. There's no way something that tasty looking can kill me."**

**Eve remembers the serpent's words . . . "It'd be nice to be like God, to know everything He knows. How can you go wrong in becoming like Him? He must be keeping something from you."**

And just like that, with the desire of becoming "like God," Adam and Eve disobeyed and rebelled against God. They sinned. According to Romans 5:12 (NIV), sin entered "the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people."

In that moment, the pneuma, the spirit of life God breathed into them, died. They were separated from the closeness they had to God. They also began to physically die slowly through aging, as they had become subject to disease and decay. And every child born since then has been born into this—spiritually dead and subject to physical death, doomed to return to the dust from which they were made.

## The Wage Scale of Eternity

Have you ever negotiated a salary? The goal in these negotiations is to ensure someone receives fair wages. If you're negotiating on your behalf, you want to be paid what you feel is rightly owed to you based on your work. If you're the employer or represent the employer, your goal is to make sure the employee receives the compensation their work has earned them.

In the salary negotiation of eternity, the fair and just wages for our sin was determined to be death. This is what the apostle Paul means in Romans 6:23 (NIV) when he says, "For the wages of sin is death."

Now, many people don't agree with this assessment. Many believe they're "good" people, that they've done enough good to outweigh the bad, that their performance and works has earned them eternal life as compensation. They base this assessment on a human standard of comparison and a scale of balance between evil and good works.

But the problem is the standard isn't human, as God is holy and perfect, and the scale can never be tipped by any good done by us, because as Romans 3:12 (NIV) declares, "There is no one who does good, not even one" because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 NIV). Ephesians 2:3 (NIV) makes it clear that because of our sin, we're "by nature deserving of wrath."

This is the bad news: Sin distorted the image of God in us by making us dead in "transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1 NIV) and thus separating us from God. But that's not the end of the story.

**Reflect:** *What is the bad news here, and why does it make the gospel such good news?*



## An Insufficient Payment

God loved Adam and Eve. And so, in order to cover the debt of their sin, which as we just established was death, something needed to die in place of the sinner. For this reason, the act of sacrifice became necessary in order to pay for the debt of sin. Why? Because the cost of our sin is death “and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22 NIV).

The first instance of this is seen directly after the fall. Genesis 3:21 (NLT) says, “And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.” In order for God to cover the shame of Adam and Eve’s sin, an innocent animal had to be sacrificed. This was the origin of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. In Leviticus 17:11 (NIV), it states, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

For this reason, once a year the Jewish people would make an offering to pay for the debt of their sin. But here’s the thing: Hebrews 10:1–4 (NIV) says, “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after

year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

You see, a greater sacrifice was needed. To this, Jesus said: “Here I am” (Hebrews 10:9 NIV).

**Reflect:** *How does this new understanding of the cost of our sin and the sacrifice that was needed change the way you think about the gospel?*

## The Good News

Remember, Romans 6:23 (NIV) tell us, “For the wages of sin is death.” It’s the bad news we’ve been exploring so far in this section summed up in seven short words. But there’s a second half to that verse. It’s where we get the good news: “But the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23 NLT). Jesus came to reverse the curse that began in the garden; to restore what was broken. He came to make a way for us to be made right with God, to have a relationship with Him, to have eternal life in heaven, to rescue us from sin, death, and hell, and to breathe life into us once again!

Conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by man, thus free from the curse of sin, Jesus lived a perfect life, free from sin, and then died on the cross in our place to pay for our sins in full. In Romans 5:8 (NLT), it says, “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

But why did the Son of God have to die? Because as we already learned, Hebrews 10:4 (NIV) tells us, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” And as sinners who are dead in our transgressions, not one single human being can rescue us from our sins. It had to be Jesus, God in the flesh, because He was the ONLY sacrifice that would be sufficient.

You see, Jesus is fully God and fully man. As fully man, He was able to live and die, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. And as fully God, His death was sufficient to not simply cover our sins like a bull or goat or lamb would, but to remove them, to pay for all sins for all time!

1 Peter 3:18 (NLT) says, “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring [us] safely home to God.” Isaiah 53:5 (NIV) says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

We call this the great exchange! In 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB), the apostle Paul says it this way: “He made Him

who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In the eyes of God, on the cross Jesus was sin. And He bore its full weight and full punishment. He endured a brutal, inhumane, torturous death . . . our death; the death we all deserve. And He did this so we could BE the righteousness of God in Him!

And when we receive His free gift of salvation, we’re saved, set free, and become a child of God. How do we receive it? By faith!

John 3:16 (NIV) says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” When we do this, we’re given the guarantee that God has rescued us from sin, death, and hell (Colossians 1:13), that our faith in God has justified us, that we, who were once enemies with God as sinners, are now at peace with Him (Romans 5:1), that we’re no longer condemned (Romans 8:1), that “because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4–5 NIV), and “having been justified by his grace,” He has made us “heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7 NIV). This is God’s good news!

**Reflect:** *How does this deeper understanding of the gospel impact the way you view your life, your purpose, your relationships, and your day-to-day life?*

*How would you explain what you learned in your own words?*

# WHAT IS BAPTISM?

## memory verse:

*“And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.”*

—1 PETER 3:21 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**ROMANS 6:1–8**

**ACTS 2:38–39**

**EPHESIANS 4:4–6**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever taken a really good bath after a long and tiring day? The smell of some lavender soap, the suds on your skin, and the warm water rinsing it all away. It's refreshing, relaxing, and cleansing! Afterwards, you put on your favorite pair of comfy pajamas and hit the bed with a good book in your hand. That sounds like an incredible time to me! The reason I painted that picture for you is because this week we're talking about baptism, which Paul uses these two analogies to describe. Not only Paul, but many other instances in Scripture describe baptism in terms of being washed and clothed in new life (Galatians 3:26–27; Acts 22:16)!

Despite these common ideas and baptism being one of the most commonly practiced rituals within the Christian faith, it's also widely misunderstood. What's the purpose of baptism? What does baptism do (or not do) for a believer? Does someone need to be baptized to go to heaven or to get their sins forgiven? If you were baptized as a baby and don't remember it, should you get baptized again? Let's look at Scripture to find the answers to these questions.

## A Response to God

The definition of the word baptism is “to submerge for religious purposes” or “ceremonial washing.”

Baptism is a part of just about every Christian denomination and is practiced in varying degrees in many other religions as well, but the meaning and significance of it varies depending on the theology behind it. In many Christian church settings, baptism is something that takes place when someone joins the church or has newly professed their faith. Baptism sometimes happens when a church member has a baby as well. In some churches, baptism is a necessary action in order to achieve salvation and forgiveness of sins. All this to say, most people go along with a baptism at the request of a church leader or family member without ever fully understanding what it actually means.

In 1 Peter 3:21 (NLT), the Bible gives us a clear picture of what baptism is: “And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

When we analyze this passage of Scripture, there are a few things that stand out that can help us create a doctrine around the topic of baptism. First of all, it reminds us that baptism is a response to God from a clear conscience toward God. Baptism isn't what gives us a clean conscience before God because that's what we've received through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV) says,

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

The beauty of the gospel message is that in our sinful, hell-bound state, God loved us enough to pay for the sins of the world by sending Jesus to the cross. All that’s required of us to receive the free gift of salvation is our faith in Him. For this reason, we can have a clear conscience before God, and our response to this should be baptism! Why? Let’s look into the purpose of baptism next.

**Reflect:** *What is baptism a response to?*

## A Holy Sacrament

Some believe baptism is a necessary action in order to receive salvation or forgiveness of sins, but Scripture tells us something very different than that. Baptism is a response to the work of Christ on the cross and in the grave that granted us reconciliation with God.

You might be asking, “What is a sacrament?” In the words of early church father, Augustine, a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.” Baptism is a sacrament! In modern times, the church has forgotten what sacraments are and why they’re

so beautiful and important. Sacraments, like baptism and communion, allow us to practice something physically that brings us to the feet of Jesus and lets us experience and remember His action, His grace, and His transformation! It also reminds us of Jesus, who came to earth in bodily form and embraced our physical state, in order to accomplish something much more meaningful and eternal.

Tertullian, another early church father who lived in the early 200s AD, was the first to coin the word “sacrament” from the Greek word “sacramentum” which describes a pledge that Roman soldiers would take for the emperor. Tertullian thought that just like a soldier’s pledge or oath signified their new commitment, baptism also signifies a new commitment to Christ and the new life He grants us! Sacraments in our faith are not just important for this deeply symbolic reason, but also because they were practiced by Jesus Himself! Let’s read about Jesus’ baptism together.

*“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”*

*Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.*

*At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"*

—MATTHEW 3:13–17 (NIV)

When you look at John's ministry, which started before Jesus started His, his message and reason for baptizing people was always the same: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2 NIV).

John would baptize people from the entire region who desired to repent of their sins and commit themselves to the Lord, but when the Pharisees came to where he was baptizing, he told them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:7–8 NIV).

This shows us the heart of baptism before Jesus even goes to the cross! It's a display of our repentance—laying down our sins to then take up a life of righteousness. It pointed to the baptism Jesus would implement

that's all about walking in His newness of life and with the Holy Spirit!

So then, why would Jesus get baptized? He didn't need to repent from any sin because He was sinless! Jesus says it was necessary to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15 NIV). He knew getting baptized would provide us with an example of what it looks like to walk in the righteousness He would later purchase for us. If Jesus, being sinless, would humble Himself to go be baptized publicly in front of many, we, too, should follow His lead and do the same. This is what the sacrament of baptism is all about!

**Reflect:** *What is a sacrament? Why is baptism considered a sacrament?*

## A Command of Christ

Another reason baptism should be understood as the proper next step in choosing to follow Jesus is because Jesus commanded it Himself! Throughout the New Testament, the command to repent or believe is often followed by the instruction of being baptized. Let's look at a few examples of this:

*"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"*

—MARK 16:15–16 (NIV)

***“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”***

—ACTS 2:38 (NIV)

***“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”***

—ACTS 22:16 (NIV)

***“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”***

—MATTHEW 28:18–20 (NIV)

To paint a picture of this relationship between salvation and baptism depicted in these verses, I want you to think about a proposal. Whenever you see or hear someone getting engaged, you assume

there’s a ring. It’s expected there are rings at a proposal because the ring is a symbol of a new status between the couple. Nonetheless, there are stories out there of people getting engaged spontaneously without rings. A couple might be on a romantic hike with a beautiful view, and the man just decides it’s the right time to get down on one knee and propose! Does the lack of a ring make their engagement void? No! They both agree to engagement in that moment, but the ring will probably come soon after to reflect it.

In these Scriptures, we have the words of Jesus in Mark and Matthew, and the words of Peter and Paul in Acts, instructing people to get baptized in tandem with their decision to receive salvation. It was assumed that someone receiving salvation would then get baptized because it’s the public declaration of their personal and spiritual decision. It’s the ring attached to the proposal!

You may still be curious if you need to get baptized to go to heaven or have your sins forgiven. The plain answer is no. One doesn’t need to be baptized to be forgiven of their sins and saved. Romans 10:9 (NIV) says it like this, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” In Luke 23, we read about two thieves that were crucified on each side of Jesus. While on the cross, one of the thieves had

a change of heart and declared he deserved his punishment because of his sinful life, but Jesus did not. He then called Jesus “Lord” and asked Him to remember him when Jesus entered His kingdom. Jesus answered him by saying, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43 NIV). What a statement! This thief died on the cross without ever being baptized, yet Jesus told him that he was going to heaven because of his repentant heart and declaration of Jesus’ Lordship.

Additionally, the Bible doesn’t give a specific age for baptism. Because it’s attached to the conscious decision of believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, baptism isn’t seen imposed on small children. Parents will dedicate their children to the Lord, just like Hannah did with Samuel and Mary and Joseph with Jesus, but baptisms are seen in the lives of those who’ve consciously repented and chosen to follow Christ. If you call yourself a disciple of Christ, then my encouragement and challenge to you is to get baptized if you haven’t done so already! It’s a beautiful and spiritual step of obedience and devotion to the Lord that should be honored and celebrated.

**Reflect:** *How would you describe the difference between the moment of salvation in a believer and their baptism? What is their relationship to one another?*

*Does someone have to be baptized to receive salvation? Why is baptism important?*

## A Symbol of Resurrection

Knowing that baptism is a response to God’s saving grace, a command from Christ Himself, and a sacrament that’s been honored since the beginning of the church, let’s finish by reflecting on how baptism provides us with an incredible symbol and promise of resurrection. Paul writes it like this in Romans 6.

*“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

—ROMANS 6:4 (NIV)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the historical moment the Christian faith rests on. In this moment, Jesus proved to all of the world He is Lord over everything, including death itself. Death couldn’t contain Him and neither will it contain us. When we live in Christ, we have the promise of taking part in a bodily resurrection one day just as Jesus did. That’s what baptism is symbolic of! When a person goes down into the water, their action represents the death of their flesh. When they’re raised out of the water, they in turn are displaying the resurrection life they’ve found in Christ!



Additionally, baptism is something that unites all believers. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NIV), “We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

We live in a world that thrives off of chaos. People are living in division, confusion, and pride. They don't know Jesus, but even in the Christian world, there are many believers who aren't imitating Christ in their lives either. They're getting swayed by the influence of the world and are too distracted to actually read the Bible, learn from Christ's example, and model their lives accordingly.

When you choose to follow Him, it's expected that you surrender your own desires and take on

the desires of Christ! This is part of becoming a new creation—the Lord renews your mind and transforms you from the inside out (Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 3:18). When you get saved, you also join the family of God which means that, whether you like it or not, you belong to the family of believers around the world!

There's one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:4–5). If baptism is part of your declaration of faith, it's not just a representation of your resurrection and new life in Christ, it's also a representation of your commitment to being continually transformed and of belonging to the church!

**Reflect:** After reading this section, how would you explain what baptism means?

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# SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

## memory verse:

*“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”*

—PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13 (NIV)

## this week’s Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

1 TIMOTHY 4:7–8

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24–27

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13

COLOSSIANS 2:6–7

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week’s prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been on a diet? Perhaps you've tried multiple diets. There's the Mediterranean Diet, the Daniel Diet, Atkins, Carnivore, Paleo, Vegan . . . there are even what's called "crash diets" like the Master Cleanse where you have nothing but cayenne pepper, maple syrup, and lemon in water for at least 10 days.

The problem with so many different diets is that they involve massive changes that are simply unsustainable and often unhealthy because they're not balanced or enjoyable. Most of the time, we jump into these plans and see marginal results or no results, and then we quickly fall off and gain back all the weight . . . and then some.

What does work, though, is intentional, incremental lifestyle change to help create good habits and plans—starting small and working our way up. This is generally the best way to experience lasting, sustainable results for our overall well being . . . through discipline and devotion to healthy living. And the same is true of our walk with the Lord! That's why the apostle Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4:7–8 (NASB), "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily training is just slightly beneficial, but godliness is beneficial for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

But what does this look like practically as it pertains to our relationship with Jesus and our journey as His disciples? How can we discipline ourselves for godliness? How do we grow to become healthier as believers, to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)? By engaging in spiritual disciplines! You see, friends, spiritual disciplines are to your spiritual health and vitality—and to literally every other part of you—what exercise and diet are to your physical health.

**Reflect:** *What does it take to develop a good habit?*

## The Heart Behind the Habits

Why do we engage in and put spiritual disciplines into practice? The answer to this question is of vital importance. Because the WHY can't be to be more sanctified. The WHY can't be to shine the light of Jesus. It can't be to live a good and godly life. It can't be so God will work in us. And as crazy as this sounds, it can't be to become more like Jesus.

All of these things are results and byproducts—they're the natural outcomes of God working in us through spiritual disciplines. But if these things—becoming more like Jesus, becoming holier, becoming spiritually healthier—are the end and not the means, then like a crash diet or a New Year's resolution to go to the gym every day, it won't stick, it won't become a lifestyle, and we'll be missing out on the TRUE purpose of

these practices. Instead, the reason WHY we devote ourselves to our own sanctification, working out our salvation through the practice and development of spiritual disciplines, is so much greater—it's Jesus Himself!

The great end to the means is knowing Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior more and more each day and enjoying Him. It's finding ourselves drawn deeper into the One who is supremely valuable and worthy of our affection and devotion, the One in whom we find our identity, belonging, and purpose, the One who fills and satisfies our souls, and the One who makes our joy complete.

Consider the way you get to know, enjoy, and love another person in your life—a friend, a sibling, a parent, a spouse, a child. You have to practice spending intentional time with them. You talk. You do activities together. You have fun together and learn together. We should approach our relationship with Jesus in the same way! The true purpose, final joy, and end goal of each discipline is so perfectly stated by the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:8 (NIV): "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

When we approach spiritual disciplines from this mindset, from a desire to know, love, and enjoy Jesus more and more each day, everything changes!

**Reflect:** *How does this purpose of spiritual disciplines change your perspective on them?*

## The What and Why of Spiritual Disciplines

Consider the words of Colossians 2:6–7 (NIV), where the apostle Paul says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught," or Philippians 2:12 (NIV), where he instructs believers to, "continue to work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling."

Now, please note Paul doesn't tell us to work for our salvation. This is important because it's easy to take this verse out of context. Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV) reminds us: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works." We're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In Him, our salvation is complete, secure, and not something we ever have to work for. But it's something we work out! You see, what Paul's describing here isn't salvation, but sanctification.

So, what's sanctification? It's a lifelong, ongoing, and active process through which a believer becomes more like Jesus. One pastor called it the training process through which we become fit for the holy purposes of God.

Spiritual disciplines are that training process! They're the practices that allow us to experience spiritual blessings and grow in godliness—in becoming like Jesus.

Professor Donald Whitney describes spiritual disciplines as “practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Author David Mathis uses a different term; he calls them habits of grace. Why? Because these practices are habits we develop in order to experience a deeper measure of God’s grace and the spiritual blessings that come from our relationship with Jesus!

Ephesians 3:17–21 (NIV) says, “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Don’t miss this: There’s no limit to the love of Christ you can experience; there’s no limit to the grace, peace, wisdom, power, and spiritual blessings you can walk in

and “grasp” and “know.” He can do immeasurably more than we can ever imagine. The ones who put a cap on how much of those blessings can be experienced are us! As it pertains to experiencing the abundant life Jesus came to give us, all He created us to be, and how we can walk in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), we get out of it what we put into it!

**Reflect:** *What’s your understanding of spiritual disciplines? How do they help us grow in our relationship with Jesus and, in turn, grow spiritually?*

## The List

The following is a list of spiritual disciplines. Keep in mind, this isn’t the end-all, be-all list. There are some lists out there that include more and some that include less. This list provides a good balance between personal and interpersonal disciplines/habits/practices. They also can often overlap as you practice spiritual disciplines together with other believers.

### Personal Spiritual Disciplines:

- **Scripture (reading, studying, meditating, memorizing)**
- **Prayer**
- **Worship**
- **Fasting**
- **Journaling**
- **Silence and Solitude**
- **Sabbath**

## Interpersonal Spiritual Disciplines:

- Fellowship
- Service
- Stewardship
- Evangelism
- Confession

## Getting Out of It What You Put Into It

There's no way around it: If we want to grow strong in our faith, then we have to put in the work. We can't just "let go and let God" when God's calling us to take an active role in our sanctification! But the good news is we're not alone in the process. Look once more at Philippians 2.

***"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."***

—PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13 (NIV)

This is one of the most amusing and inspiring paradoxes in the Bible. After telling us to work out our salvation, Paul tells us that it's actually God who does the work in us!

Hebrews 13:21 (NLT) says God equips us with all we need for doing His will. He also produces in us "through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him."

Isn't that amazing? God works in you! If you're a Christian, God's always at work in you!

So, when we put in a little dedication, when we incorporate spiritual disciplines or habits of grace (or whatever you like to call them) into our daily lives and practice them consistently, the Holy Spirit then takes what we put in and produces more than we ever could imagine.

For example, when we do something as simple as replace 30 minutes of scrolling through social media with 30 minutes of meditation on Scripture or 20 minutes of Netflix in order to take a prayer walk with the Lord, by the power of the Spirit at work within us, we begin to see real change in the way we feel and view the world.

Think about what it takes to plant seeds in a garden. You plant them in the right soil and environment, you water them, and the rest is in nature's hands—God does the actual growing!

When we prioritize the spiritual disciplines God gave us for our own growth, we're putting ourselves in the right environment for Him to change us from the inside out. It's us being available and open handed so God can soften our hearts, mold us, transform us, and ultimately grow us into the beautiful creation He always meant us to be.

[illegible]

*How can your group help and encourage you to grow in these practices?*

# SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

## memory verse:

*“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”*

—PSALM 119:105 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**JOSHUA 1:8**

**PSALM 119:9-16**

**2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17**

**HEBREWS 4:12**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?



## INTRODUCTION

What are you thankful for? Have you ever built a structure of some sort? A house or building? A shed? How about a sand castle? A Barbie dream house? A house of cards, Legos, or Lincoln Logs?

What do you need to successfully build a house? You need the right materials, the right tools, and the land needs to be right. But there's one thing that's the absolute most important: **the foundation!**

An article from a masonry expert explained that the foundation's "primary purpose is to hold your house up. The foundation bears the load of everything that's built upon it." This is true of houses, sand castles, and Lego towers, but it's also true of your life. We see this clearly in Matthew 7:24 (NIV). Here, Jesus tells us that "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

You see, your life—along with everyone else who's ever lived—is a lot like a building project . . . a house, if you will. And for all of us, there are only two paths—there are no other options, no third path, no way around it, no in between. If your life is built on the foundation of Christ and His Word, then as Jesus says in this passage, it'll stand the test of time and remain strong in the face of any and everything the world throws at you. And one day, it'll stand forever in glory.

If your life is built on ANYTHING else or not properly set on Christ and His Word, it'll be built upon a shaky foundation. No matter how good it looks from the outside, no matter how put together it seems or how much hard work and meticulous planning and building up was put into it, if the foundation is isn't right. . . eventually, whether in this life or when you breathe your last, it'll topple over.

This is of vital importance. If we're rooted in the Word of God, the Bible, Colossians 2:7 (NIV) declares that we'll be "rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as [we] were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." Through devotion to His Word, which teaches and enables us to grow closer to Jesus, to have true, intimate, personal relationship with Him, we learn to recognize His voice, to find hope, purpose, peace, and security in the gospel, and to live the full life Jesus came to give us.

**Reflect:** *What's your understanding of the Bible? How would you describe it to others?*

## Let's Talk About the Bible

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek word meaning "scroll" or "book." Here are a few facts about this book:

The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

The Bible is about 611,000 words long. It contains 66 books, more than 1,000 chapters, and was written by more than 40 authors across three continents spanning 1,500 years! Unlike a lot of the most famous books in history, the Bible was written by people from diverse backgrounds: farmers, shepherds, fishermen, kings, a tentmaker, homeless prophets, a doctor and historian, a professional scribe, vocational musicians, and pastors.

Did you know the Bible is by far the best-selling book of all time and the best-selling book of the year, every year . . . and it's not even close? In the US alone . . .

**50 Bibles are sold every minute**

**72,000 every day**

**26,000,000 every year**

The truly shocking thing about these numbers is that unlike most other books on the yearly bestseller list, the Bible is the only book available FOR FREE online and through various apps (in 3,589 languages), and yet, it still outsells everything else.

Something else you may not know is that there's not a single book, historical text, or ancient document in all of history that's been more substantiated and confirmed by archaeology than the Bible.

Today, there are over 66,000 manuscripts from the Bible with around 24,000 New Testament

manuscripts, many of which are dated less than 100 years after the events.

Why is this important? Because it shows us the Bible does in fact pass archeological and historical criteria!

Dr. Nelson Glueck, a leading archeologist said: *"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."*

The Bible can be trusted! In the next section, we'll unpack two terms that help explain the trustworthiness of the Bible.

## Two Important Terms

**Inerrant:** This means the Bible is without error, what it says is true, and it's written and constructed exactly the way it was supposed to be. It means that just as God is wholly true and trustworthy, so is His Word, that everything contained within the pages of the Bible was by God's precise design and direction. This leads us to the second term.

**Inspired:** This means God guided the entire process and creation of the Bible. God didn't physically write the words in the Bible, but He breathed into the authors, He

inspired them by the Holy Spirit, and He led and directed them to write and record the things they wrote exactly as He intended.

2 Peter 1:20–21 (NLT) says, “Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet’s own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.” And 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB) tells us, “when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of mere men, but as what it really is, the word of God.”

## Why the Bible Is So Important

The Bible is God’s self-expression and self-revelation. It’s the primary way He’s chosen to reveal Himself to us. It’s the chief vehicle He uses to tell us who He is. It’s the heart, mind, character, nature, work, and will of God revealed to us humans, expressed in human language, and put on pages for human eyes so we may KNOW Him!

It’s been said before that when you engage with Scripture, not only are you reading the Bible, but the Bible is reading you! That’s why Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) tells us, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

In Philippians 3:7–10 (NIV), the apostle Paul tells us, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ.”

In the same way that time spent and communication with a friend, loved one, or spouse is essential for you to know them, so it is with the Bible as it pertains to knowing the Lord! And the Bible is the primary way we get to know Jesus. Without devotion to the Bible, we quickly lose sight of the true, genuine gospel and of the real Jesus!

## Engaging with Scripture

It’s truly a wonderful gift from God to have the Bible so accessible and readily available to us whenever we want—a gift we constantly overlook and take for granted! How so? Well, consider that for almost all of human history, dating back to the Old Testament and through most of church history up until a few centuries ago, and even today in many places around the world, God’s people haven’t had their own personal copies of His Word.

They had to come together to hear someone read it to them. And even then, many times they didn't even have a written copy to read; instead, they recited it from their memories—rabbis, scholars, priests, and Pharisees would literally memorize the Torah, the first five books of the Bible! It really puts Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 4:13 (NIV) to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" into perspective. Because the public reading of Scripture was all most believers had since the dawn of the church!

But now, we have printed Bibles and FREE Bible apps at our disposal. In fact, many believers have several Bibles in their homes and maybe even one or two different Bible apps on their mobile devices. We have priceless access to God's living Word.

So, with all this incredible access to the Word of God, how do we practically grow in relationship with Him through it? How do we engage with Scripture? There are a few time-tested, foundational practices that have helped strengthen many believers' relationship with the Lord.

**Reflect:** *What obstacles do you see/experience when it comes to engaging with Scripture? How can you overcome these obstacles?*

## Four Important Practices for Scripture Engagement

### Practice 1: Read Through the Bible

The goal behind reading the Bible is to consume big chunks of the Bible, a few chapters at a time—for practicality, let's say three chapters per day—in order to read through the entire Bible a few times in your life. Why? Because when we do this, we're allowing the entirety of God's work of redemption to pass before our eyes, enter into our minds, and transform our hearts.

While this sounds difficult or even impossible, it's actually very doable! It only takes the average person around 70 hours to read through the entirety of the Bible. This works out to about 15 minutes per day for less than a year!

**Reflect:** *Why is it so important for you to read the entire Bible at least once in your life?*

### Practice 2: Studying the Bible

Whereas reading larger chunks of the Bible is all about experiencing the entirety of God's revelation to man, studying the Bible is all about diving into the depths of God's Word. The goal here is to slow down and study in unrushed reflection.

This practice of study is what David described in Psalm 119:15 (NLT) when he said, “I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.” The word for reflect in the Hebrew means “to behold; to consider; to regard with pleasure, favor, and care.” There’s a real meticulousness, thoughtfulness, and understanding of the preciousness of what we’re holding in this word reflect.

Studying the Bible for depth is when you take a few verses and paragraphs at a time and dissect them. It’s when you really spend time digging into what those verses are saying, what God is teaching you, and how you can apply it to your everyday life. You can start with praying and asking God to speak to you through His Word, and you can use the S.O.A.P method discussed in week two as a starting point.

**Reflect:** *Why is studying Scripture important? How does it impact you differently than just reading the Bible?*

### Practice 3: Scripture Memorization

What’s the point of memorizing Scripture? In Psalm 119:11 (NIV), David says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” The Hebrew word for hidden means “to store up as one does with treasure; to hoard, cache, or reserve.” When

you think of this word, think of squirrels, beavers, blue jays, or ravens who store up food for the winter months. The implication is of storing up something extremely valuable for the moments when a need arises.

When we memorize Scripture, we’re not just memorizing words from a book, we’re storing up what Peter called the “words of eternal life” (John 6:68 NIV) in the pantry of our hearts. Memorizing Scripture is an exercise in storing up an arsenal of weapons for the Spirit’s use. It gives the Holy Spirit fuel to recall truth in moments of need and ministry. It prepares us to fight sin (as David said), to offer counsel, and to share the gospel, but it also helps with learning to identify the voice of God in our everyday lives.

Jesus said in John 10:27 (NIV), “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Do you want to learn to recognize the voice of Jesus in your life so you can follow Him closely? Embrace Scripture memorization!

**Reflect:** *How does Bible memorization enable you to hide His Word in your heart?*

### Practice 4: Meditating on the Word

Meditation is one of the most effective means of growing in God’s grace, of understanding His purposes and plans on a deeper

level, and of walking in His power and peace in game-changing ways. That's why Joshua 1:8 (NIV) tells us, "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

Biblical meditation also happens to be one of the most misunderstood, underrated, and underutilized disciplines of the Christian life in the church today. Why? Because we often equate the term meditation with New Age spirituality, the practice of emptying one's mind to experience "mindfulness." But that's not what biblical meditation is! Instead, as Bible scholar and professor Donald Whitney explained, "Meditation is deep

thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer."

So, how do you do this? Well, as you study the Bible, as you come across a section or passage that you feel drawn towards, that you feel deeply moved by or inspired by, find some time to sit with it, to think deeply on it, to linger over it, to let it marinate in your mind and ignite your heart, and then pray over what the Lord has revealed to you. And as you do, you'll allow the Word of Christ to dwell richly in you" (Colossians 3:16).

**Reflect:** *What's different about New Age meditation and meditating on God's Word? How can you try meditating on Scripture this week?*

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# PRAYER

## memory verse:

*“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’”*

—MATTHEW 6:9–13 (NIV)

## this week’s Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**MATTHEW 6:5–13**

**1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7**

**JAMES 5:16**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week’s prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

How do you get to know someone? Through relationship! To really know someone, you must spend time with them, speak to them, hear from them, have true, deep, meaningful conversations, and spend quality time with them!

Think about a married couple. Communication is one of the pillars of a healthy marriage. There should be no one on earth who can say they know you as well and as intimately as your spouse, and vice versa. This comes through daily communication, deep trust, and an openness to share every part of your life—wants, needs, hopes and fears, dreams and doubts, triumphs and tragedies, struggles, hurts and pains, joy and celebration, funny stories, tears of joy, tears of laughter, and tears of sorrow. How amazing is that? That you can have someone whom you can be this open and real with and who's always ready to hear from you and to share with you? This is what we have with God through prayer!

**Reflect:** *In your own words, what is prayer and what is it not?*

## What Is Prayer?

In the most basic terms possible, prayer is talking to God; it's a conversation between us and God. But as one Christian author

said, "Prayer, for the Christian, is not merely talking to God, but responding to the One who has initiated toward us. He has spoken first. This is not a conversation we start, but a relationship into which we've been drawn. His voice breaks the silence."

In prayer, we're speaking to the One who has spoken to us through creation itself (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1–4), the One who has spoken grace (2 Corinthians 12:9) and peace (Psalm 46:10) and love (John 3:16) over us, the One who has spoken the words of truth (John 6:68) and life (John 10:10), and who has shown us the way (John 14:6). In light of this, prayer is thus a response, a reflex, to the grace He gives us.

Prayer is our two-way relational lifeline, a lifeline that's made available to us through the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. It's the key to the heart of God and to the health of our personal relationship with God.

**Reflect:** *How does prayer glorify God?*

## What Prayer Is Not

Another important thing to realize is what prayer ISN'T. It's not forcing our way into God's presence; He's already invited us to come in. It's not the attempt to wrestle something from a reluctant God.



We don't do it to get anything from God, but because we get God! One author shared, "It is not wrong to want God's gifts and ask for them. Most prayers in the Bible are for the gifts of God. But ultimately, every gift should be desired because it shows us and brings us more of Him."

Prayer is also not a tool to measure our holiness or to impress others. Consider Matthew 6:5–6 (NIV): "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Prayer isn't for the approval or admiration of man. To make it so is such an abuse of this indescribable gift we have. In fact, I'd go so far as to call it a sin to "pray" in such a manner. That's not prayer; it's a performance. It's akin to putting on a play or performing a skit.

Does this mean public prayer is bad? No! It's actually a wonderful gift to pray with others publicly—that we get to, alongside others, come before the throne of grace and sit and speak with our Father. But when we do, may we never think about how good, spiritual, or

holy our prayers sound, because at that point, we've made prayer all about us.

Then Jesus says, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7–8 NIV). The Greek word for babbling is defined as "long-winded, meaningless repetitions" and "empty words." It's kind of like just mindlessly uttering the same thing over and over—no thought, no effort to truly commune and communicate with God, just following a script.

Sadly, despite this exact warning by Jesus, that's exactly what the Lord's Prayer has become for millions (maybe billions) throughout the world over the last millennia—just something to repeat daily, an item on a checklist we can check off and say, "Hey, I prayed. I did my Christian chore." This is definitely not what Christ intended prayer to be.

**Reflect:** *Why is prayer so important in the life of the believer?*

*How do prayers in Scripture, such as the Lord's Prayer, help guide us in our prayer lives?*

## What Is the Purpose of Prayer?

Augustine once said that nothing happens in this universe apart from the will of God. So, if God is sovereign and knows all things from eternity to eternity, if He knows my heart, my hurts, my intentions, and requests and knew them even before the foundations of the universe were laid, that also means He knows what I'm going to pray before I pray it, right? He knows my heart better than I do; He knows my needs, my desires, my dreams, my fears, and the areas I need Him most. So, what's the point?

The purpose of our prayers is for us to experience more of God! In every request, expression, question, pleading, confession, and revelation—in everything we ask and we share—the endgame of prayer is to know on the deepest level possible the God who saves, sustains, redeems, and restores.

This is the true purpose of the spiritual discipline of prayer. It's our quality time with our heavenly Father, where we get to hang out with Him, have coffee or tea with Him, and just talk and grow closer! How beautiful is that?! That means whenever we experience hardship or answers to prayer we didn't want, the prayer has led us to be closer to God our Father who will then hold us and wrap us with His comforting and strong presence.

## A Command and an Invitation

We also pray because our sovereign God, in His holy and perfect Word, commands us to pray. Aside from being a lifeline for our relationship with Him, prayer isn't optional for Christians—it's an expectation. So, regardless of whether God knows what we're going to pray before we pray it, if He knows what we need and what we're struggling with, God commands us to pray, so we pray! But here's the thing: He doesn't just command us to pray . . .

We also pray because our merciful and loving God **INVITES** us to! God wants to hear from us. In fact, God's readier to hear from us than we are to pray! Think about that: He wants to interact with us and is always ready to lend us His ear, His shoulder, and His embrace. He desires more than a head knowledge, shallow, hypothetical relationship.

This brings us to something we must understand to get the most of our prayer life: God doesn't desire prayer from us, He desires it **FOR** us! While He's blessed by and delights in our prayers, we're the primary beneficiaries of prayer! Again, the purpose of prayer is for us to experience more of God. In consistent, biblical prayer, we're transformed and changed. In consistent, biblical prayer, our relationship with Him blossoms as we know Him more

deeply, experience His presence more clearly, and are comforted, strengthened, empowered, inspired, equipped, and sanctified by drawing near to Him. In consistent, biblical prayer, we develop intimacy with Jesus and become more like Jesus. Do you see it? Prayer is a wonderful gift from God, not a chore or a wishing well.

## The Lord's Prayer: Jesus' Template for Talking to God

Have you ever had trouble writing an e-mail or letter? What about putting together your resume? It's a common issue. That's why people make templates. A template is super helpful because it gives us a model and method for how to construct our own version of something.

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives us a template, a model, and philosophy for prayer. He doesn't say, "This, then, is what you should pray," He says,

**"This, then, is how you should pray. 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name . . .'"**

In this model prayer, we see we're allowed to address God in the most intimate of ways—by calling Him our Father. He then shows us we should always approach God with the respect, honor, and praise only He deserves.

**"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven . . ."**

Here we're shown the importance of putting God's plans and God's purpose for our lives above our own. Why? Because His will is so much better for us, so much greater than anything we could ever dream of for ourselves.

**"Give us today our daily bread . . ."**

In life, we may not always have what we want or want what we have, but we can be confident that our Lord will always provide everything we need! As we pray, we acknowledge that all we have is from Him and that we trust in Him to provide for us.

**"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors . . ."**

When we receive Jesus, all our sins are forgiven, now and forever. But just like we ask our parents for forgiveness when we mess up, knowing they'll love and forgive us, we also bring our mistakes, sins, and failures before God and ask for His forgiveness while also asking for the Christ-like ability to forgive others.

**"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one . . ."**

Before wrapping up, Jesus encouraged us to pray for God to protect us from evil and temptation. This is a request for the Lord's

protection as we encounter life in a fallen world.

**“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”**

Lastly, He shows us we should finish our prayer by glorifying God again, acknowledging His power, sovereignty, and glory above all.

This is a beautiful template Jesus provided us that will help us get the most out of our time with the Lord in prayer. To be sure, the Lord’s Prayer can still be prayed just like most prayers in the Bible can be prayed. There’s something beautiful about repeating the words of Jesus, or the words of the inspired Word of God, back to Him! It helps tune our hearts to His voice and reminds us of His words. But staying stuck in repetitive and script-like prayers will harm us just like forgetting to let Scripture be our guide will harm us.

So what does the Lord’s Prayer teach us? To praise the Lord, seek His will, bring our requests before Him, ask Him to provide, ask for His help in our struggles and temptations, actively receive His forgiveness and extend it to others, and ask for His help in our relationships.

Not all prayers need to look the same, though. Your prayer could be as simple as, “Thank You, God!” or “Lord, please help me get through today.” Or “Father, what should I do? I need Your guidance?” Or it could

be you telling the Lord about your day, your week, what’s going on, and asking Him to speak to you! As you continue to grow in your relationship and make prayer a regular part of your life, talking to God can become as natural as breathing!

**Reflect:** *What did Jesus say about prayer and how should that influence how we pray?*

*Why did Jesus give us a template for prayer?*

## According to Your Will

In Mark 11:24 (NIV), we see something interesting regarding prayer. Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Anything we ask in prayer, as long as we believe, we’ll receive it. That’s what we’re told. Isn’t that incredible? But there’s more to it than that. You see, we can’t simply rip this verse out of the greater context of Scripture and how Scripture always explains prayer.

Consider a similar verse:

**“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”**

—JOHN 14:13 (NIV)

What's this showing us? Well, the implicit message, the unspoken truth, the prerequisite key in every passage like Mark 11:24 or John 14:13 is found in 1 John 5:14 (NIV): "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

Do you see it? When we pray, we must pray for all things according to His will and good pleasure as we seek to live and walk according to His will.

The cool thing is that as we grow in relationship with God, as we seek to and live in accordance to

His will and way, He'll be faithful to reveal His will to us. And as we become more and more like Jesus, we'll start to see our hearts become more aligned with His and we'll desire to seek His will above ours. Why? Because we'll have come to know that there's never anything we could ask for according to our will that will be better or more fulfilling than what we ask for and receive according to His will.

**Reflect:** D.A. Carson wrote, "We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray." Do you have a prayer plan? What might that look like for you?

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# SILENCE & SOLITUDE

## memory verses:

*"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."*

—MARK 6:31 (NIV)

*"The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen."*

—PROVERBS 12:15 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**JOSHUA 1:8**

**PSALM 119:9–16**

**2 TIMOTHY 3:14–17**

**HEBREWS 4:12**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

—MARK 6:31 (NIV)

These words come to us from Mark’s account of Christ’s life. Specifically, they’re what Jesus commanded His disciples after sending them out on a mission to promote the coming of God’s kingdom (Mark 6:7–11).

They experienced incredible results! Unprecedented miracles were performed to authenticate their message as earth was being impacted by heavenly power. The disciples’ excitement over all they saw happening through them was off the charts (Mark 6:30). It’s easy to imagine them wanting to seize the momentum of the moment and keep advancing forward with Christ’s kingdom message, right? That’s what makes Jesus’ response all the more interesting: “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31 NIV).

“But Jesus, don’t you understand? We’ve got a lot more work to do! This is no time for pressing the pause button on all that’s happening. We can’t afford to take time out to rest alone with You.” And yet, that’s exactly what the Son of God prescribes for His disciples. When the advancing activity was at its height, He told them to restfully retreat with Him. Why? Because Jesus understood something that

isn’t immediately apparent to us: His disciples needed to spend time alone with Him. There are two important reasons why . . .

So they can **know** Him better.

So they can **serve** Him better.

You see, the disciple who knows the Lord best also serves Him best. In calling His disciples to stop and rest in His presence, Jesus was actually improving and prolonging their desire and capacity to fulfill the mission they’d been given. He was looking much farther down the road as these same men would glorify God and promote His purposes for years and even decades to come!

Quite simply, there are certain things that happen in the life of a disciple that can only happen when they’re alone with Jesus. And it’s the responsibility of every disciple to intentionally set aside time and space to allow for this. This state of being separated from the normal context of life to experience “aloneness” with the Lord is what we can refer to as solitude . . . and it’s a necessary part of our spiritual discipleship.

## In Good Company

In order to underscore this, let’s take a survey of how pivotal solitude proved to be in the lives of those God used in some profoundly impactful ways.

**Jacob.** This isn't the first person most think of as a shining example of spirituality. He's more often cited as an example of what not to do! There's an undeniable pattern in Jacob's life of scheming in order to come out on top. Even as an infant, he demonstrated this trait and earned his name, Jacob, which literally means "heel catcher."

But, there's a turning-point moment in Jacob's life as he finds himself in the proverbial corner. We read about it in Genesis 32. Here, Jacob's on the brink of facing his estranged brother, Esau (whom he tricked into giving up his birthright), who's on his way to confront him the next day. Oh and by the way, Esau was bringing about 400 armed men with him (Genesis 32:6)! Obviously, in Jacob's mind there was the very real prospect that Esau intended to get revenge, à la Cain.

And as he sat in silence and solitude that night, the Lord appeared to Jacob and breakthrough took place! Jacob, who had constantly run away from situations, wrestled with God and came to the place of submission. He was then given a new name (Israel), which literally means, "God fights." This indicated that Jacob's old way of fighting his way through life would become a thing of the past. It'd be replaced by a new reliance on God to fight on his behalf!

A new name and a new identity—one that would alter his spiritual trajectory for the rest of his life. So much so that this new work in this man's life would be the basis for an entire nation God would establish, which was all made possible by one impactful night of solitude with Him.

**Moses.** The lifespan of Moses can be broken up into three periods of 40 years. The first 40 years of Moses' life are briefly covered in the Bible as he was raised and trained as a prince of Egypt. The final 40 years are covered extensively for us in the Bible, particularly in the Book of Numbers. But there were 40 years in between where Moses lived in virtual solitude as a shepherd in the wilderness. Imagine that for a moment . . . 40 years of leading sheep. At some point, he undoubtedly thought, "My best days are definitely behind me." And yet, it was in this time of solitude, apart from the distractions of Pharaoh's courts, that something truly significant was happening beneath the surface of Moses' life.

During that time, He was being systematically humbled by God. The self-sufficient prince of Egypt was being transformed into a shepherd whose meekness would be put into the service of Almighty God as He'd deliver His people from slavery to the border of the Promised Land.



But at one point, we're told Moses' authority was challenged by his own brother and sister (Numbers 12:2). In essence, they questioned why they weren't able to have the same degree of authority as their brother. "What makes him so special?" If you're a sibling, you may be able to relate! But in the very next verse, we're told what set Moses apart: "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3 NIV). Where did that come from? It didn't come when he was being groomed in Pharaoh's court. It came in his season of solitude when any sense of self-glory was being systematically stripped out of him.

At the end of his season of solitude, Moses found himself one-on-one with God, who revealed Himself in the form of a burning bush. It was there, apart from all other distractions, where the Lord spoke and commissioned Moses for how he'd spend the rest of his life (Exodus 3). Once again, we see the Lord using solitude as a means of preparation, growth, and commissioning.

**David.** We tend to view David in one of two extremes: either as the heroic shepherd boy taking down Goliath or as the mighty king of Israel whose reign would foreshadow the coming of the King of kings. From start to finish, David's life was an extraordinary one!

It's easy to forget; however, that for a significant stretch of time

between slaying Goliath and ruling over Israel, David was a refugee whose life was under constant threat. And it was during this time of his life that, for the most part, David had no one but God to go to and lean on. This is emphasized in the psalms that David penned during this period of his life. How else would he have been brought to the point of penning, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (Psalm 27:10 NIV)? This heart's cry along with many of his other psalms (especially Psalm 22) describe a state of solitude with God.

And through these experiences, though difficult and painful, David's spiritual roots were able to sink deep into the reality of who God is. They'd serve to anchor him as a godly man and leader. Jacob, Moses, and David present a pattern we see throughout God's Word. We also see times of silence and solitude playing a pivotal part in the lives of Jonah, Elijah, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, and the apostle Paul. And in each case, their spiritual legacies would've been incomplete without these seasons of solitude.

**Reflect:** *What did God teach you about Himself and His Word through the examples of Jacob, Moses, and David?*

## The Other Half

*“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen.”*

—PROVERBS 12:15 (NIV)

Now, you may have noticed at the heading of this chapter that another word appears alongside solitude . . . silence. What’s the thinking behind that? Well, for solitude to be effective there must also be silence on our part, and here’s why . . .

The Book of Proverbs is associated with wisdom more than any other book in the Bible. For 31 chapters, Solomon defines and describes wisdom for us. And as he does, there’s a recurring theme that the wisest man who ever lived connects with acquiring wisdom: listening. The word “listen” occurs no less than 16 times within the pages of the Book of Proverbs, including the verse we see above.

There’s a direct connection between listening and gaining wisdom, so much so that the very opposite of doing so is foolishness! We can never get away from the simple reality that those who intentionally listen to those who possess wisdom will become wise themselves. As Proverbs 13:20 (NIV) states, “Walk with the wise and become wise.”

What greater source of wisdom could there possibly be than God,

whom we’re told possesses all the treasures of wisdom (Colossians 2:3)? There isn’t one! This brings us to the point that listening to the Lord is an indispensable part of not just acquiring wisdom, but of our entire discipleship journey.

So, what does it take for us to listen? It requires us to be silent. We can’t speak and listen at the same time. There certainly are times when we’re called to speak up and speak out, to God as well as to others. But it’s equally true that there must be moments where we make it our purpose to be silent so we can listen to the wisdom God has for us.

This all sounds very simple, doesn’t it? But it won’t take long to discover that being silent in this day and age is a real challenge. From social media, smartphones, and endless streaming services to the hectic pace of modern life, we live in an age of overload and overstimulation. This is where being intentional about solitude comes into play. Solitude enables us to listen, to be silent in ways we otherwise wouldn’t be, and to receive what the Lord wants to share with us.

So you see, solitude and silence go hand in hand! We need silence in our solitude in order to open our hearts and minds to hear from God, and we need solitude in order to get silent before Him.

**Reflect:** *What are some of the benefits of silence and listening?*

*What's your understanding of the need for and relationship between solitude and silence? How would you describe it to others?*

## Listen to What?

Up to this point, we're probably all on the same page. We recognize the value in spending times of solitude with God, and we understand the importance of silence as we listen to what He has for us, right? But practically speaking, how are we supposed to hear from Him?

Before answering that question, let's be clear that God's able to communicate through many different means. The Bible tells us He can speak to us through nature (Romans 1:20), visions (Acts 12:1–19), dreams (Matthew 1:18), the counsel of others (2 Samuel 12:1–12), and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6). These are all valid means by which the Lord can speak and by which we can hear from Him. But notice the basis by which we can authenticate each of these: the Bible. Why do we make the Bible the “be all, end all” when it comes to what we trust as being spiritually true? Because the Bible is the primary means by which God has chosen to communicate with us. God's Word is the most reliable source we have to hear His voice.

The Bible must be a central feature in our times of solitude with and silence before the Lord. By doing so, we put ourselves in the best position to receive from Him as we simply read what's been written for us. This is important, because sometimes being alone with God and listening for His voice can drift into something very subjective and immeasurable. But the Bible gives us something objective to ground us. We can make things definite and measurable as we allow a story, a verse, or even a single word from God's Word to fill our minds and take root in our hearts.

All of this to say, don't embark on a season of solitude and silence without the Bible. Be open to Him speaking to you through other means, but always look to His Word as the primary channel of communication—allow it to serve as the authority by which you test anything else you sense the Lord may be speaking to you. The Lord will never contradict Himself, and you can always be sure that what He's revealed in His Word can be trusted as the standard for what's true.

## Objection!

Now, after reading all of this you might be thinking to yourself, “But wait a second! I remember reading somewhere in the Bible that it's not good for a man to be alone!” And you'd be right in thinking that. Not only was it

God's intention for Adam to not be alone, but He also created us to live in community with each other. This need for community is such an important part of God's plan for our lives, in fact, that we'll devote several upcoming weeks to studying and applying it. But as with most things in life, there's a balance to be struck. While we're created to be in relationship with others, we're first and foremost created to be in relationship with God. And like with any significant relationship, whether a spouse, child, close relative, or best friend, we need one-on-one alone, quality time with God! And check this out: Our solitude with God enriches and enhances every other relationship in our lives!

Sometimes Christians make the mistake of constantly being with other Christians, going from one ministry opportunity to the next. When this is all a believer does, it actually has a negative effect, because they aren't putting themselves in the position to receive anything new and fresh from God that they can share with people. Even in the busyness of His three-year ministry, Jesus always made time to get away and be with His Father. When seen from this perspective, we see that spiritual solitude is actually the best thing we can do, not just for ourselves, but also for those we're in community with and those we minister to.

But we also need to be careful to avoid the other extreme of always being in solitude. God wants us to share what He shows us and to be used to draw others to Himself! We can't do that when He's the only one we're spending time with. Like Jesus did, we need a healthy mix of both. We need silence and solitude to fill ourselves with Him, and we need community and ministry to fulfill our calling and mission.

**Reflect:** *Why is it so important for us to build a balance between being in solitude with God and being in community with others?*

*What obstacles do you see/ experience when it comes to practicing solitude? How can you overcome these obstacles?*

# SABBATH

## memory verse:

*“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”*

—EXODUS 20:11 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**GENESIS 2:1–3**

**EXODUS 16:26–30**

**HEBREWS 4:9**

**MARK 2:27**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”*

—HEBREWS 4:9 (NIV)

If you’ve been a Christian for any amount of time, you’re probably familiar with the term, “Sabbath.” Moreover, you’ve probably heard more than one view on what the Sabbath is and how it applies to the life of a Christian. And while there are a variety of views on this issue, there’s one thing everyone can agree on: The Sabbath plays an important role in God’s Word!

The word “Sabbath” appears over 130 times in the Bible, and the principle it represents, rest, is also woven throughout. It appears in the earliest passages of Genesis, frequently shows up throughout the Old Testament, becomes a critical issue during Jesus’ life, and is a point of discussion by Paul and the author of Hebrews. It’s obvious God has a lot to say about the Sabbath, and that means we have a lot to learn and know about it!

In this lesson, we’re going to take a close look at the Sabbath as presented in Scripture. By doing so, we’re going to see this subject, which can be confusing and divisive, from the panoramic perspective of God’s Word. And with this view, we can better understand what it is and how it applies to our lives.

## From Creation to Moses

To truly understand the Sabbath, we have to go back to the beginning—literally—where we’re first introduced to this foundational principle: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:1–3 NIV).

After creating the universe over the course of six days, God rested from His creative activity on the seventh day. Whenever we see God do something, it reveals an aspect of His nature. Let’s think this through: God is all-powerful and doesn’t need rest, but He chooses to rest. *Why?*

Again, God’s act of resting is an insight into His character. When you think of the opposite of rest, perhaps these words come to mind: anxiety, chaos, busyness, frustration, fatigue, exhaustion. These things are contrary to God’s nature, which reflects the restfulness of His nature. So, in order to be like God and lead a godly life, rest must become part of our life experience at some point—we’ll get to that later, but for now, it’s safe to say God’s laying some important groundwork here.

So, we can see rest is important because it's a reflection of who God is, but we also see He made this day *holy*, which means He literally separated it from the other days as something special and sacred. When you set something apart from other things, you're making a statement about how much it means to you. Maybe there's a spot you go to at pivotal points in your life because it holds a special place in your heart. Maybe you have a special cabinet for a specific collection of things that mean a lot to you or a place on your wall for pictures of your closest friends and family.

That's how we need to see God's motivation in resting on the seventh day and making it "holy." It's something special to mark on our calendars. And while the exact word "Sabbath" isn't used here, the concept is front and center. Unlike the other six days, where we create, labor, toil, and burn the midnight oil, God set apart the seventh day for the unique purpose of resting.

**Reflect:** *What has God taught you regarding Sabbath rest?*

## From Moses to Jesus

So now, let's fast forward from creation to the time when God began to create something else: the nation of Israel. As a basic backdrop, God established a special covenant with Abraham and promised to bless his life and raise up a mighty nation from him

(Genesis 12:1–2). This promise was fulfilled through Abraham's son, Isaac, through Isaac's son, Jacob (who was named Israel by God), and through Jacob's twelve sons.

These sons and their families migrated to Egypt because of a famine and entered as guests of honor. However, over the course of 400 years, they became enslaved by the Egyptians. But God, true to His promise to Abraham, raised up a man to set the Israelites free and lead them into a land of their own. That man's name was Moses.

As he led the Israelites out of Egypt and towards a homeland of their own, God gave Moses a series of laws to govern their behavior as a nation—think of it like the U.S. Constitution. These 613 laws are what the Bible refers to as the Law of Moses or simply the Law. Why is this important? Because it's here, within the Law of Moses, that we first encounter the actual term sabbath: "Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord" (Exodus 16:23 NIV). Sound familiar? Much like the reference at the time of creation, we see God commanding that a specific day be set apart for the purpose of resting. This obviously mirrors what God did on the seventh day of creation.

Now, at this point we need to understand something about the actual word sabbath. Although it embodies the principle of rest, the word itself refers to the seventh

day of the week. Moses makes this quite clear as he elaborates on God's command: "Six days you are to gather [manna], but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.' . . . The Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days" (Exodus 16:26–29 NIV).

Now, while it's true that the Sabbath was a command that was specifically between God and the Israelites, not for the rest of humanity, it also pointed towards the ongoing and universal aspect of rest. This God-given law pointed to something deeper. For centuries, the Law of Moses served to govern Israel, until the next and final stop on our journey to our understanding: the life of Jesus.

## From Jesus to Us

Would it surprise you to know the Sabbath was one of the biggest issues that caused the religious establishment to reject Jesus? But why? Why would something as simple as a day of rest cause such conflict? Partly because over the years, the religious leaders had revised what work and rest meant. As it often happens, man added to what God originally intended and wound up turning what should have been a blessing into a burden. Keeping the Sabbath had become so distant from what God wanted that Jesus, Himself, would call them out on this by saying: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27 NIV).

The Pharisees and religious leaders had totally missed the point in God giving them the Sabbath commandment. They looked past God's heart to generously provide their need for rest. They literally made rest into a chore, but Jesus restored perspective to this by violating many of their manmade additions to God's perfect Law, so much so they'd eventually conspire to have Him killed. And yet, it was in the very act of Jesus dying on the cross that the Law was fulfilled and by which God would introduce a new covenant with all people: "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16–17 NIV).

Moses introduced the Law, which had its proper time and place for the nation of Israel, but God had an agenda that extended beyond this. He sent His Son, Jesus, to usher in a new era defined by grace and not the Law. The New Testament goes on to elaborate on how Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sin on the cross fulfilled and removed the Law from being a standard over us: "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4 NIV).

This is an important point for us to understand, because the Sabbath commandment was contained in the Law, which was fulfilled through Christ. This means those who've



placed their faith in Christ are free from the requirements of the Law, including the Sabbath commandment.

**Reflect:** *What are the three distinct stages of Sabbath rest and what important features define each of them?*

## For Us, Not From Us

So, the question becomes, “Do we have to keep the Sabbath or not?!” Well, let’s consider another question first. Have you ever had someone make something just for you? Maybe someone made your favorite meal or cake for your birthday, or maybe your kid made you a special craft or drawing. Whatever it is, there’s nothing like getting a gift made just for you.

Now, while every commandment of God serves to both glorify Him and benefit us, we’re told by Jesus the Sabbath commandment in particular was a special, personal gift from God! You see, not only is the concept of Sabbath rooted in the much deeper reality that rest is part of His character (thus drawing us closer to Him and making us more like Him when we observe it), but we must also remember the all-important words of Jesus when He said, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 NLT). The NIV puts it this way: “The Sabbath was made for man.”

How so? Well, it’s often said there aren’t enough hours in a week, but is that true? Let’s consider the average American week:

That which drains:

- **Work:** 37
- **Driving:** 7
- **Cooking:** 7
- **Cleaning:** 5
- **Exercise:** 2
- **Entertainment like phone, TV, video games (research shows time in front of a screen is way more detrimental than beneficial):** 49

**TOTAL: 107 hours per week**

That which actually refreshes:

- **Sleep:** 46
- **Personal worship:** 20 MINUTES (or .33 HOURS)
- **Church or small group (for churchgoers):** 2
- **Quality time with loved ones:** 6
- **Mealtime:** 7

**TOTAL: 61 1/3 hours per week**

Do you see the disparity between the draining activities vs. life-giving ones? They’re almost twice as long—leaving us with not enough sleep and so much wasted time. Even on the weekends, we spend time cleaning, running errands, and

doing random projects that need to get done. We're our own worst enemies! If we were given more hours daily, we'd simply fill them with more activity.

On our own, we're not capable of doing what's best for us—to rest physically, mentally, and spiritually. Instead, we do what overworks, overstimulates, and overwhelms. So, God gave us a gift dressed up as a commandment—He

commands us to rest, to trust He'll sustain and provide for all our needs as He refreshes us, and to enjoy Him. So you see, Sabbath rest is both an act of faith and joy!

**Reflect:** How do you spend your time?

*Why is the institution of the Sabbath a gift from God and not just a law? What makes this one so difficult for us to honor properly?*

[illegible]

# WORSHIP

## memory verse:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”*

—ROMANS 12:1 (NIV)

## this week’s Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**PSALM 95:1–6**

**JOHN 4:21–24**

**ROMANS 12:1–2**

**HEBREWS 12:18–29**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week’s prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Every human being has the same ultimate purpose: to worship God. What's worship exactly? Some might equate worship with church attendance or singing songs about God, and although worship includes church and singing, it's much more than that. Simply defined, worship means to ascribe worth or merit to something or someone. Pastor Louie Giglio defines worship as, "Our response, both personal and corporate, to God for who He is and what He has done; expressed in and by the things we say and the way we live."

Let's look at various aspects of worship found throughout the Old and New Testaments as a guide for how we can live a life of worship to God.

**Reflect:** *What often competes for your heart's devotion (money, family, success, work, etc.)?*

## WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### Made for Worship

In Genesis, we read about God's creation of the universe and everything in it (Genesis 1–2). Everything God made—from the stars in the heavens to the creatures beneath the earth, from the fish of the sea to every human life—was made to worship Him as Creator and reveal His glory.

But man sinned against God, and as a result of the Fall, our relationship with God was severed and our worship corrupted. God made Himself known to humanity so we might worship Him. But rather than glorifying the one true God, man exchanged the truth of God for lies and worshiped created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18–25). We were made to know and enjoy fellowship with God, but because of sin, we're now tempted to elevate people and things—namely idols—to a place of value in our hearts that ultimately belong to God.

Yet, God already had a plan to redeem His creation and restore our worship to its rightful position through Jesus (Ephesians 1:4–5; 2 Timothy 1:9). But before Jesus came to earth, God gave commandments and instituted practices that would allow His people to worship and have communion with Him.

### Sacrifice of Worship

The first time the word worship is used in the Bible is in an intriguing story about sacrifice. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son and, without hesitation, Abraham obeyed. Once they arrived at Mount Moriah, he said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5 NIV). The word used for worship is the Hebrew word

*shachah*, which means “to bow down; to prostrate before someone.”

God asked Abraham to sacrifice what had captured his heart; what had become most worthy to him. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac meant he’d bow his will and desire to God. In other words, to worship God is to humble ourselves and bow in surrender to His will. It’s to desire Him more than any other person or thing and trust that His will is better than our own.

**Reflect:** *What are some of the obstacles to worshiping God and experiencing His presence more fully? What makes it hard? What are some steps you can take to overcome them?*

## Free to Worship

Centuries after Abraham’s test on the mountain, God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments. At the heart, the commandments were rules that would turn God’s people from slaves into worshipers. The first four commandments describe how to worship God properly (Exodus 20:1–11), while the remaining six describe how to live in a right relationship with others (Exodus 20:12–17).

God gave the commandments so His people would learn to love and fear Him and walk in the ways He intended, bringing them greater freedom and the ability to flourish. God wants us to trust, obey, and

desire Him over anything else, but like the Israelites, who soon after being delivered created an idol of worship (Exodus 32), we’re also prone to leave our first love to worship idols.

God’s commandments recalibrate our hearts to make God the Lord of our lives and our greatest treasure, which ultimately leads to joy and freedom. God said, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2–3 NIV). When we place God in His rightful place in our hearts and orient our lives around Him, we remain in relationship with Him and experience what we were made for: His abiding presence.

## Systems for Worship

God later gave detailed instructions for building the tabernacle and for offering sacrifices to Him. God was specific and intentional in His commandments because obedience and holiness are crucial for Him to dwell among His people. He’s holy and set apart, and in order to see Him, His people must be set apart also. The tabernacle made it possible for God’s glory to descend upon His people (Exodus 40:34) and the sacrificial system was a rhythm of daily offerings and yearly festivals that allowed God’s people to be forgiven for their sins and to give thanks for His blessings (Leviticus 1–7).

God had two requirements for the offerings: They had to be the first fruits or firstborn animals, and they had to be the best. The tabernacle and the sacrificial system were meant to generate in God's people awe and righteous, as well as fear and gratitude . . . for God is unlike any other and therefore deserves honor and glory.

God still requires His people's obedience, reverence, and holiness if His glory is to descend upon them. God desires for us to experience the fullness of His presence; therefore, worship isn't something we should take casually or do with complacency. Proper worship means we respond to Him with reverent fear and offer Him our first and best.

## Songs of Worship

The psalms are a collection of prayers and songs that teach God's people how to pray, give thanks, mourn, and sing to God. Not all psalms are songs, nor should they all be used as templates for worship music, but many do teach us how to pray and praise God. Psalm 96:1–4 (NIV) is one example: "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods."

This psalm shows us how and why we worship God—we're to sing new

songs, shout and make noise, and declare the works He's done. Why? Because He's the God above all gods and because of His wonderful deeds. Psalms of praise (e.g., Psalm 7, 34, 95, 100, 145, 150) are examples of what personal and corporate worship should be: a joyful expression of music and song where we declare the truth we know in our hearts and allow God's presence to descend upon His people. There's something powerful about music and worship songs in particular. They usher us into God's presence, well up in us overwhelming affection toward God, and preach to our hearts the truths found in Scripture in a way we can easily access and recall.

Worship songs also have significant spiritual and physical benefits. There's now evidence to support the physiological benefits of singing or praising as worship. Worshiping through music has been linked to increased brain activity in areas associated with empathy and forgiveness and also decreased activity in the areas associated with fear (Liedke, 2018). How amazing is that? Singing worship shapes our hearts and minds by turning our attention toward God through the truth we sing out loud.

## WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Worship in Spirit and Truth

When Jesus came to earth, His mission was to reveal the kingdom

of God—and that included transforming the way His people worshiped. We get a glimpse of this in His dialogue with the Samaritan woman: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24 NIV).

Jesus used the Greek word for worship, *proskuneō*, which means “to come toward, bow down, or kiss the hand of a monarch or ruler.” The sacrificial system of the Old Testament became the primary way to worship God with Jerusalem being the pinnacle center of worship. Yet now, with the arrival of the Savior, no place or location would be required.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we who were once far from God can experience a regeneration of the heart in which the truth of God’s character revealed through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is made known to us, and we respond in our innermost being.

The emphasis now is on heart authenticity, where believers gather to magnify their Creator in any place, location, culture, and language because God’s new place of residence is the heart of everyone who acknowledges Him as Lord. This means that religious rituals, singing songs, tithing,

and hearing a sermon are not in themselves worship if they’re done out of a heart that’s far from God. Worship begins in the heart as a desire to draw near to God out of a response to seeing Him for who He is. That is true worship, and those who understand this are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

But true worship must also be rooted in truth. If a religious ritual, a “worship” song, a sermon, or anything else doesn’t teach proper doctrine, if it contains false teaching, it’s false worship. This means we must use our greatest weapon against all spiritual warfare, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of truth, to inform our worship. We must ask the Spirit for discernment based on the Word to determine if what we’re consuming is true worship or if it’s teaching us false worship.

## Worship as Whole-life Sacrifice

Jesus revolutionized the way His people would engage in worship, and His disciples likewise taught that worship is an all-encompassing way of life. Romans 12:1 (NIV) says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” The word used in this passage for worship is not *proskuneō* (used by Jesus), but the Greek word,

*latreuó*, which means to serve or to render a sacred sacrifice or offering. So Jesus institutes a new way of worship (the heart), and Paul deepens its meaning to say that worship isn't rituals or activities, but offering the entirety of our lives in surrender to God (Hebrews 9:9–14; Hebrews 12:28).

The worship God's after is a life that's fully devoted and surrendered to Him. That's an entirely new paradigm for looking at worship! Pastor John Piper says it this way: "The body offered up to God in daily obedience is an outward expression of inward worship. Worship and the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament have been transformed into worship that centers around individual and collective holiness of life, in which the valuing of the worth of God in our spirits and hearts is manifest outward into lived-out demonstrations of His value."

We live out individually and collectively a life that shows outwardly the worth and beauty of Christ that our hearts have come to treasure.

## Worship Restored

The final act of worship in Scripture is found in Revelation. Right now in the throne room of God, angels and elders are bowing before God singing about His majesty and glory (Revelation 4:2–11). Heaven's filled with

worship, and when all is fulfilled and we're finally with our Creator in heaven, we'll also bow down in worship before Him.

In heaven, our worship will finally be made perfect and whole. With sin destroyed forever, we'll see God in His fullness and the only appropriate response will be to worship. We'll enjoy His presence and be restored to union with Him. In heaven, we'll worship by bowing down before His presence (*proskuneó*) and by serving Him (*latreuó*), but a different service than the one on earth. While on earth, our charge is to offer our lives as living sacrifices, but in heaven, "service to God shall be the beholding of Him" (Charles Ellicott). What a day that will be!

## IMPLICATIONS

### Worship Is a Way of Life

As we see in Abraham and Moses' lives and the instructions of the New Testament writers, worship is a lifestyle. Worship's a foundational part of our relationship with God that's demonstrated in the way we live. To live a life of worship, we must daily choose to ponder, reflect on, and gaze with our spiritual eyes upon the treasure that's the Triune God and respond to Him obeying His commandments. This isn't a legalistic, religious ritual, but a spirit-filled and spirit-



generated passion to be with Jesus, to live as He did, and to become like Him. We give everything in our lives in surrender to God—our finances, relationships, vocation, hobbies, habits, desires, and bodies—out of love for Him (Matthew 22:37–39; Romans 6:22, 12:1–2; John 14:15; Galatians 2:20).

## Worship That's Acceptable

God's gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6–7), yet He's also holy, righteous, and just (Isaiah 5:16). God's to be greatly feared (Psalm 89:7), and so we must approach Him with the highest reverence and respect. God desires that His people be holy as part of their relationship with Him (Leviticus 19:1–2; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:10–14; 1 Peter 1:14–16). This posture impacts how we offer ourselves unto Him and how we come before Him. God's a friend, shepherd, and father, but He's also a consuming fire and to be greatly feared (Hebrews 12:28–9).

We should approach Him with great confidence, yet with utmost respect and awe. We must consider how we approach God. We don't come before Him casually or with disregard for His holiness, bringing Him down to our human level. Instead, we come in awe and wonder that we get to behold His presence (Isaiah 6:3–5).

**Reflect:** *Why is it important for believers to offer God proper worship?*

## Worship Is Both Corporate and Individual

Worship is our individual responsibility, but it's also a collective duty of God's people. We worship God individually with our lives, but we don't do this in isolation, we do it with other believers who are also living for God. We gather weekly to worship God together and declare who He is and what He's done for us (Psalm 100; 1 Corinthians 14:26). Just as God's glory descended upon His people when they gathered to worship Him in the Tabernacle, God's glory descends on us when we gather to worship Him today.

*It is in the process of being worshiped that God communicates His presence to men.*

– C.S. Lewis

Our corporate worship strengthens our relationship with God and with one another; it helps us to live out what it means to be God's chosen people (Ephesians 2:14–20; 1 Peter 2:9). Our church attendance matters to God and is part of our worship as well as how we live in community with other believers. We can't offer our lives as living sacrifices to God alone—we need one another to encourage, correct, and spur toward the faith (Acts 2:44–27; Hebrews 10:25).

**Reflect:** Why is corporate worship important?

## Worship Involves Songs

When we gather, part of what we do is sing songs of worship to God. Our songs should contain rich theology about who God is—His beauty, majesty, splendor, and holiness—as well as what He accomplished on the cross through Jesus' death and resurrection. There are countless Christian songs nowadays, but not all of them are God centered. There's nothing inherently bad about those types of songs, but they may not draw our focus towards God. We should be mindful of the songs we listen to that are only about "me" or how God's made things better in our lives. Songs that focus mainly on the self or that lack a reverence for God may not be leading you into true worship.

Songs that magnify God and recount His works bring us closer to Him and lead us into His presence (e.g., "All Hail King Jesus," "How Great Thou Art," "Thank You Jesus for the Blood," "10,000 Reasons") in ways that other songs don't. God-centered worship music can help us cultivate a greater hunger for God and increase our desire to worship Him by helping us rehearse in our minds the truths we know about God.

## Worship Is Our Destiny

Everyone worships—even nonreligious people. But in the end, we'll spend eternity where we've placed our allegiance and affection. Those who've made their object of worship anything other than God and rejected Him as Lord and Savior will spend eternity completely devoid of His presence. But those who've made Christ their heart's treasure by giving Him their allegiance will enjoy ultimate eternal satisfaction in Him. This is what we were made for; it's where God's divine story began in the garden, and it's where the story concludes—with us, His bride, united with Him forever, ruling alongside our King, serving Him, beholding His glory, and experiencing the greatest joy in His presence (Rev 22:3). That day is coming, but we can begin enjoying Him now!

**Reflect:** How can you posture your life (schedule, finances, time, relationships, career) to worship God?

## Desiring God

Many of us may struggle with worship. We may lack a hunger for God's presence or feel like the initial awe and passion we had when we first came to faith may be missing in our relationship with Him. Perhaps it's because

something else is consuming our worship or our attention is turned elsewhere. Like the Israelites, we're tempted to make idols of the good things God's given us, forgetting the One who gives us blessings.

The first step to cultivating a heart of worship is to become aware of what else fights for our affection and what we're tempted to treasure more than God. They can be good things like our family, job, finances, and success, yet deep down they've become more valuable and more desirable to us than God. Once we name them, we can confess and repent. Next, we must gaze at our Savior's beauty, until we see what He accomplished on the cross for us as far greater, more beautiful, and infinitely better than anything this world could offer. We must do this repeatedly and continually until the things of this world grow strangely dim.

*O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, 'Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.' Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.*

– A.W. Tozer

**Reflect:** How can you grow in your desire to experience God's presence?

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# LIFE TOGETHER

## memory verse:

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”*

—ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11**

**ACTS 2:42–47**

**HEBREWS 10:24–25**

**GALATIANS 6:2**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen the video of a lone lion struggling to fight off a pack of more than 20 hyenas? If you can believe it, the single lion does an admirable job of holding off the hyenas for a bit, but the lion starts getting tired and the pack begins to overtake it . . . that is until another lion shows up and the hyenas scatter. What does this show us? Well, it's an amazingly accurate and beautiful picture of what can happen in the life of a believer who is in community. It shows we truly are better together!

### Community: God's Nature and Design

To understand the why of community, we must go back to the beginning, to the sixth day of creation. By this point, God had brought the following things into being: heaven and earth, night and day, water and land, vegetation of all kinds, the sun, moon, and stars, and all types of sea and land animals. And now, on the sixth day, God creates Adam.

But look at what He says in Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV): "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.' So God created

mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them." Who is He talking to?

In the original Hebrew text, the word here for God is *Elohim* (a plural noun) which links the plural pronouns of us and our to the plural noun of God. And if we need any more convincing on this point, let's look at that last verse again: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him" (Genesis 1:27 NIV).

The text unmistakably tells us man was created in God's image alone. So, here in the very first chapter of the Bible, we see God speaking to Himself! But that leads us to another question, "Why is God doing this?" Well, because like we discovered at the beginning of this journey, God's very being is a self-contained community. The Father uniquely relates to the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Son uniquely relates to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit uniquely relates to the Father and the Son. This is why God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness."

Admittedly, we're swimming in the deep end of the theological pool here, but the essential truth we need to take away here is this: Community isn't just something God wants us to do; it's rooted in the very nature of who God is and in the nature and likeness we were created in. Community is a reflection of God, which makes

it something every follower of His should embrace and embody. Beyond this, however, also comes the next part of Genesis. You see, it didn't take long for Him to address an undeniable need that man had for community, and God met this need by making a "helper comparable to him." Why? Because "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone'" (Genesis 2:18 NIV).

So, after causing the man to settle into a deep rest, He created a woman from a rib taken from the man's side (Genesis 2:21–23). They were of the same race, yet different and distinct from each other. Now, obviously we know the Lord's purpose in doing this extended beyond the need for community. It was also the establishment of the first marriage, which is the union in which God intended for procreation to happen. Nonetheless, man needed another person to relate to. Keep in mind, we're still in the pre-sin stage of human history. We hadn't disobeyed God yet, but there was still something missing.

Man, though sinless in nature, was by himself. Sure, he was surrounded by an entire world full of animals—and the indication is they were all drawn to him (Genesis 2:19)—but no amount of animal interaction could compensate for the fact that man still had an inherent need to interact with another human being.

This need for community runs deeper than we often realize.

It's a need both physically and emotionally. Remember, it was God who recognized the need within man before it ever registered with man. And again, that need preceded the fall. It was deliberately placed there by God in keeping with His own nature. Both the need for community as well as the provision of community was by God's deliberate design.

There's a survival TV series called, "Alone." Ten people are dropped into total isolation in the Arctic or some other uninhabitable environment. The goal is to go the longest amount of time in those conditions before radioing for rescue. The winner gets rewarded with a lifestyle-altering amount of money, so there's a strong incentive to keep on going. The reasons for people "tapping out" include being unable to find any food, suffering an injury, or accidentally burning their shelter down. But by far, most people drop out because they long for companionship—they miss their spouse, children, family, and friends. Veteran viewers can often predict with a fair degree of accuracy who will drop out next by the way they talk more and more about the people in their lives they miss. The prize money can't overcome the overwhelming need for community.

God's proclamation in Genesis echoes over the ages that it's not good for us to be alone. The need for others runs deep in our DNA, which is according to God's plan for our lives.

**Reflect:** *Why is living in community such a big part of the life God designed for us to live?*

## Fellowship: We Belong Together

The terms communion and fellowship that we read in our English Bibles are varying translations of the Greek word *koinonia*. This word is defined as “partnership; participation; what is shared in common as the basis of community.” It’s a pledge of partnership where both parties contribute and benefit.

At its core, the concept of Christian fellowship is a mutual bond that Christians have with Christ, which also bonds us with one another. It’s sharing with others in the beautiful riches we experience in Christ. And within that bond, we grow together through sharing in the Word, prayer, and life experiences.

In true Christian community, the best moments in life are even better and the hardest moments become a little easier. In Christian community, we endure together, grieve together, laugh together, cry together, celebrate together, mourn together, serve together, eat together, overcome struggles together, experience breakthroughs together, and build legacies together. We challenge one another, sharpen one another, and keep one another accountable. In community, we open our hearts, minds, homes,

and lives to our faith family. We find support where we pray for each other and support each other, where we see the words of the Bible come alive, where we grow together, where we wrestle with the questions and challenges of life in safe spaces. In true Christian fellowship, we find belonging!

**Reflect:** *How has your community shaped who you are as a follower of Jesus?*

*What are some of the obstacles to having community? What makes it hard?*

*What are some steps you can take to overcome/push through them?*

## Community Is for Our Sanctification

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes,

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may*

*have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

—EPHESIANS 3:14–21 (NIV)

The Greek word for fullness is *plērōma*, which means to be filled to full capacity, like a cup that's been filled right to the brim. In the New Testament, the word refers to the body of believers being filled with the presence, power, agency, and riches of God in Christ.

What does this look like? In Colossians 1:9–12 (NIV) Paul explains what happens when we're filled with the fullness of God: We "live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so [we] may have great endurance and patience, and [give] joyful

thanks to the Father." In summary, we live like Jesus, we walk in good works, we grow in knowledge and wisdom, we have strength, endurance, and patience by the power of the Spirit, and this leads to thankfulness and joy!

This is what it looks like to be rooted and established in love; to be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. And a big part of that, an all-important, indispensable aspect of it, must be for us to experience together with all the Lord's holy people. When we do life together with the body of Christ we belong to, the Lord uses us to help sharpen each other as He transforms us both individually and collectively!

That's why it's so important for us to understand that we'll never experience the fullness of all God has for us on our own. We need to do life together with other believers, to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together" (Hebrews 10:24–25), and to grow in our faith and intimacy with Christ. When we do, God, "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20) will increase our capacity to experience His presence, power, agency, and riches in Christ Jesus!

**Reflect:** *Why is it important for believers to regularly center their community around the Word and prayer?*



## Six Benefits of Christian Community

We can all agree there's a gap between who we are today and who we want to become. We all want to grow into that better version of ourselves.

For some, this means being a better parent, growing in one's profession, or becoming a more well-rounded, informed person. For others, it's simply about developing a new skill or getting in shape. For believers, our goal should be to grow closer to the Lord and become more like Jesus. Every day, we should be seeking to know Christ more intimately, which in turn leads to us becoming more like Him.

Even the apostle Paul, one of the greatest role models of the Christian faith and writer of most of the New Testament, understood this and sought after this with all his heart. That's why in Philippians 3:12 (NIV), when speaking of knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection, he said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Did you know one of the primary places where growth occurs is within small groups like this one you're in right now? Here are a few reasons why being part of a

community of believers will help you grow as a follower of Jesus and a person.

### 1) Jesus' Way of Life Is Most Effectively Learned in Community.

(Hebrews 10:24–25)

Jesus' teachings fall into two categories: how to love God and how to love people. Neither of these can be truly learned alone. They require people who can provide insight, advice, and encouragement. A small group is a tried-and-true place to experience this and to learn how to practically live as Jesus did.

### 2) Community Builds Our Sense of Belonging.

(Romans 12:5)

We all want to feel like we belong, like we're accepted and truly loved. And God gives us the gift of each other as a way to meet our earthly needs for belonging and acceptance. In true Christian community, people accept and embrace each other as they are and grow together as they encourage and inspire one another to become more like Jesus!

Small groups provide an amazing opportunity to build deep, lasting relationships with brothers and sisters, to walk through the triumphs and tragedies of life, to support and bear one another's burdens, to

feel welcomed and valued, and to experience the joy of true friendship!

### 3) Community Cultivates Gifts and Talents.

(Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

Within the context of Christ-centered community, we're given the opportunity to discover, develop, and operate in our gifts and talents, to use them to serve the Lord, and to bless others through them. That's one of the most awesome and unexpected benefits of being part of a small group! As the body of Christ comes together to grow in Him and serve one another, our unique roles in the body can be used to glorify God to the fullest.

### 4) Mission Happens in Community.

(1 Corinthians 1:10)

If you've watched *The Lord of the Rings*, then you know the only way Frodo could've accomplished his mission was by going together with the help of his friends and the Fellowship!

One powerful way Christians grow through small groups is by working toward shared goals and common causes. A group might work together to provide housing for a homeless person, support a missionary, or make meals for foster families. They might band together to serve a group member with a serious health issue, personal struggle, or unexpected tragedy. Or they may bond over pursuing similar goals,

like developing a spiritual discipline. When a community of like-minded people unite to accomplish a meaningful mission, growth is the natural result.

### 5) Accountability, Confession, and Healing Happen in Community.

Isolation is dangerous. As we learned earlier with the hyenas and the lion, there's safety in community. If we allow ourselves to have genuine relationships, we'll have people who will speak truth into our lives, help keep us accountable, help us resist temptation, and spur us on to love and good works. And if we do find ourselves falling into sin, we're given the opportunity to get real with one another, to confess our sins in a safe space, and to break free from the things that are holding us back from experiencing all God has for us. True community requires transparency, authenticity, and confession . . . all of which can help bring us to a place of healing.

### 6) Community Helps Take Church Beyond the Four Walls.

The truth is there's only so much we can learn from a 40-minute sermon once (maybe twice) a week. Also, as interesting as this would be, we can't have dialogue with the pastor from the pulpit if we have questions on how to practically apply the teaching to our lives. But in community, we can get down into the nitty gritty of how to practically

live out Scripture in the day-to-day. People can share revelation, experiences, wisdom, and bounce ideas off of one another.

Community brings church into real life. If a person's relationship with Jesus is limited to one hour a week, it'll be difficult for them to grow. A small group leads to growth by creating more opportunities to come to know God and experience Him through relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Reflect:** Have you ever had a negative experience with Christian community? How can God's Word and the love of Jesus help you give Christian community another chance?

*How have you seen some of these benefits of Christian community in your life? What can you do to be intentional about cultivating healthy and biblical Christian community around you?*

[illegible]

# DISCIPLESHIP

## memory verse:

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

—HEBREWS 10:24-25 (ESV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**MATTHEW 28:16-20**

**2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2**

**LUKE 6:40**

**1 CORINTHIANS 11:1**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for  
adversity.”*

—PROVERBS 17:17 (ESV)

In our last lesson, we learned community is in God’s nature (being that He’s three in one), and it’s an essential part of His design (being we’re made to be in relationship with one another). We also touched on the benefits of community. So, this week we’ll dive deeper to discover what intentional discipleship looks like in community!

God could’ve chosen to make us completely self-sufficient and non relational, yet He did the exact opposite. First, He made us reliant on Him, but He also made us relational beings because He saw the beauty in making us for community. We were built for friendship. We were designed to live and thrive in community, to be formed through the relationships we’re born into and the ones we develop through the years. But these relationships aren’t just about making our lives fuller, they’re also for forming and molding us more closely into the image of His Son, Jesus.

## Discipleship Defined

There are two prominent words found in the Bible that we translate into English as disciple:

In Hebrew, the word *talmid*.  
In Greek, the word *mathetes*.  
They both mean the same thing: student, learner, pupil. So, in its simplest, most basic definition:

***A disciple is a student or apprentice of Jesus Christ.***

Look at what Bible teacher Dallas Willard says:

*I like the word apprentice because it means I’m with Jesus learning to do what He did. When you look at the first disciples, that’s what they were doing. They watched Jesus and listened to Him, and then He said, ‘Now you do it.’*

Let’s look at a few verses that—while on the surface may not seem to describe this—actually paint a picture of what a disciple’s life should look like:

*“If you abide in my word,  
you are truly my disciples.”*

—JOHN 8:31 (ESV)

*“I am the vine; you are  
the branches. Whoever  
abides in me and I in him,  
he it is that bears much  
fruit, for apart from me  
you can do nothing. If*

*anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

—JOHN 15:5–12 (ESV)

Which word did both passages have in common? ABIDE (Greek: *menō*), which means, "to sit in; to make your home; to lodge; to move in; to put down roots." It's your forever home. Think about what happens when you move to a new home. First, you pack up everything you own and load it in a truck. Next, you have to unload it all from the truck and

bring it inside the new home. But it doesn't end there, because your stuff can't just stay in the moving boxes, right? Of course not! You have to unpack everything and settle in. Maybe you hang up your TV, paint, and hang up photos of loved ones. This is what it means to settle in. That's what abiding is. It's not like a hotel or temporary living situation. Abiding in Christ means making Christ your home—living, building, and rooting your life entirely in Him. Being a disciple of Jesus is a complete and all-encompassing commitment to building your life in Him.

**Reflect:** *What is a true disciple?*

## Apprenticeship to Jesus

Consider Ephesians 5:1–2 (NLT): "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ." Most professions in the ancient world, even up to a few centuries ago, had a master and apprentice dynamic. Religious leaders, merchants, blacksmiths, tax collectors, doctors, farmers, carpenters . . . they all had them! If we claim to be disciples of Christ, that means we're His apprentices. And if we're His apprentices, then our goal must be to learn to be like Jesus!

The Gospels provide the best model for this process—it's where we see Jesus spend three very intentional, transformational, life-changing years pouring into His disciples. In those three years together, these men were taught by Jesus, led by Jesus, and given an example on how to live by Jesus. They saw Him preach, heal, and show amazing compassion toward the broken, the outcast, and the downtrodden. They saw Him stand up to hypocrisy and self-righteousness, have hard conversations with people, get in the muck and the mud of their brokenness, and serve humbly—He even washed their feet!

They traveled, ate, prayed, celebrated, cried, and had fun with Him. He taught them both practical and spiritual lessons. He empowered them, kept them accountable, and corrected them when they were wrong. Christ showed them what it meant to love God, abide in Him, and follow Him. He prepared them to go into the world and make more disciples, to replicate in the lives of others the process He had walked them through.

This is also what Paul was doing when he told the Corinthians, Philippians, and Thessalonians to follow his example as he followed the example of Jesus (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). It's what he did with men like Timothy, Silas, and Titus, to the point he

even called them his true sons in the faith. He took them under his wing and instructed and demonstrated what being a follower of Christ, ambassador of Christ, and disciple maker of Christ was all about. And just like Jesus, he then charged them with doing the same for others.

The same call applies to us! We absolutely need discipleship to grow and mature as believers, and we must then in turn do the same for others.

**Reflect:** *What is a disciple's life marked by?*

*What makes Jesus' model of discipleship so effective?*

## The Three Relationships

Every disciple needs to have three relationships . . .

**Pauls:** These are spiritual fathers, mothers, or mentors you trust. All of us need older (in the faith, not necessarily in age), wiser Christians who can guide us, pray for us, teach us, keep us accountable, and offer counsel.

In Titus 2, Paul encouraged older men and women to set an example for the younger men and women. In Titus 2:7–8 (NIV), Paul tells Titus, "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and

soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

He’s encouraging Titus, whom he calls, “my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4 NIV), to set an example for the younger men he’s teaching and discipling. But where did Titus learn to do what’s good, to teach sound doctrine, to show integrity, and to model soundness of speech that cannot be condemned? He learned it from watching Paul and following his example. Philippians 3:17 (NIV) says, “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do,” and Philippians 4:9 (NIV) says, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice.”

In the Bible, we see many examples of this. We see that God Naomi to Ruth, Jethro to Moses, Moses to Joshua, Mordecai to Esther, Elijah to Elisha, Eli to Samuel, and Jesus to the apostles. It’s a time-tested, all-important relationship God has ingrained in us through family and career. Think about it. Parents are supposed to teach, train, guide, discipline, give wisdom and counsel to, set examples for, and disciple their kids. An older brother or sister is supposed to help guide their younger siblings

and lead them well. In the work world, a new employee is usually partnered with a more seasoned employee for training, to shadow them, and to learn how to do the job.

**Silases:** These are spiritual peers who are close, ride-or-die friends. They know everything about you, yet they love you anyway. They’re also willing to correct you, bluntly if necessary! They provide accountability in areas of personal temptation. They offer a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. And they will stay up all night praying for you when you face a crisis. They serve with you in ministry and do life together with you.

Consider David and Jonathan, Joshua and Caleb, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Paul and Silas. Consider the closeness Jesus’ disciples had with one another; consider how He sent them out two-by-two. Everybody should know the benefit of Proverbs 18:24 (NIV): “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” But you can’t find faithful friends without seeking to be one first. Don’t wait for your Silas to come to you—go and find them.

**Timothys, Tituses, and Lukes:** These are the younger Christians you’re helping to grow. Jesus never told us to assemble crowds, but He did command us to make disciples. Relational



discipleship takes a lot of time and energy, but investing in others is one of the most fulfilling experiences in life. Once you've poured your life into another brother or sister and watched them mature in Christ, you'll never settle for superficial religion again. Consider again 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV): "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."



Look at all these verses we explored earlier about the Pauls in your life . . .

***"Therefore I urge you to imitate me."***

—1 CORINTHIANS 4:16 (NIV)

***"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."***

—1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 (NIV)

***"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."***

—PHILIPPIANS 3:17 (NIV)

***"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice."***

—PHILIPPIANS 4:9 (NIV)

Now, think of them from the perspective with you being Paul in this scenario. You learn from a Paul so you can become a Paul for someone else. You imitate and follow the example of your spiritual fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and mentors and leaders, so you can be imitation worthy and have someone else imitate you and follow your example.

Like Paul, we must go out and find our Timothys. We must invest in them personally. It's not about preaching to them; they want a relationship with us that's genuine. They want spiritual moms and dads who are approachable, accepting, affirming, and empowering. If we don't mentor them now, there won't be anyone running alongside us when it's time to pass our baton.

The Christian life is a vibrant, love relationship with God—but it doesn't end there. I pray you'll open your heart and invest in the people around you.

**Reflect:** Why are the three relationships we read about so important? What happens if you're missing one?

*Can you identify one or more Pauls, Silases, and Timothys in your life? How are those relationships going? How can you be more intentional with them or pray about God bringing them if you're lacking in any area?*

[illegible]

# THE CHURCH

## memory verse:

*“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

—MATTHEW 16:18 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**MATTHEW 16:13–19**

**EPHESIANS 4:17–25**

**ACTS 11:19–26**

**COLOSSIANS 1:17–20**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What am I praying for?
2. Who am I praying for?
3. What do I need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“And I tell you . . . on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

—MATTHEW 16:18 (NIV)

For most of us, the word **church** is so common to our vocabulary that we hardly think twice when we hear it used. We see “church buildings” all across our neighborhoods, we hear about a variety of “church events,” and we even have a certain sense of what it means when someone is labeled as a “church person.”

Whether this world agrees with it or not, whether it likes it or not, the church has a presence in our society that can't be denied. But that wasn't always the case. This thing we call “the church” did once have a starting point, and that point of origin can be seen above in Christ's declaration, “I will build **my church**.”

Jesus made this statement about halfway through His earthly ministry. It came at a time after He had spent several months announcing the coming of God's kingdom by teaching, preaching, and healing the multitudes that were coming to Him for a variety of reasons, most of which were self-serving. And although He hadn't officially proclaimed Himself as the promised Messiah

King of Israel yet, He had given ample evidence of who He was to those paying attention.

However, hardly anyone was connecting these dots as to His identity. When Jesus directly asked His own disciples who the masses thought He was, they answered the opinions included just about anyone except who He really was! But it's Peter, under the influence of God's Spirit, who correctly identifies Jesus: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16 NIV).

This statement is so important because it's a confession of Jesus' identity. He is the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promised deliverer and hope for not just the Jewish race but all humanity (Genesis 3:15). And He is the Son of the living God, divine in nature and possessing all of the prerogatives of God, Himself.

It's this understanding and belief of who Jesus is and what His life means that form the foundation of His promise to establish and build His church. So, understand that the church has its basis in knowing and believing who Jesus is and what His life entails.

He is God coming in the flesh to fulfill the promise to redeem and restore His creation. This is precisely what He did through His death, burial, and resurrection, which is the essence of “the

Gospel," the "good news" of what God has done for mankind (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

## The Universal Church

In essence, this is what the church is—the universal entity of all people who have ever confessed, along with Peter, that Jesus is who He revealed Himself to be, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This doesn't describe everyone, does it? Of course it doesn't. For most of us, it doesn't even describe us at a certain stage in our lives. There was a point in time when we weighed the evidence of Jesus' life and came to the conclusion that He is all He proclaimed Himself to be, and we placed our faith in Him as the Messiah and the Son of God.

At that point, we were brought out of our unbelieving state and brought into what Jesus calls, "my church." It was as though we were "called out" of an existence that we had known up to that point into something completely opposite. It was a transfer from a condition of spiritual darkness to light, from an existence of emptiness to one of fullness, and from a state of hopelessness to hopefulness.

This dynamic of being "called out" is exactly what the word "church" conveys. It's the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is a compound of the words "ek" (meaning out of) and *kaleo*

(meaning called forth). The church comprises all who've been called forth out of the life they were living, which was independent of God and His purposes. This new and improved condition can only be realized through placing one's faith in His Son, Jesus. Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus:

***"You must no longer live as the Gentiles [unbelievers] do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. . . . That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness***

*and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”*

—EPHESIANS 4:17–25 (NIV)

Notice that last expression Paul uses, “one body,” because it’s an apt way of describing what the church is. This will be explored in much greater detail in one of our coming studies. But for now, we can think of the “oneness” of a body.

A body is one in purpose and function and that’s how it remains effective in all of its activities. When a body is divided it loses its ability and productivity, which is why, when the Bible views the church in this sense, it’s always seen as a unified whole. It’s the collective body of everyone who has ever placed their faith in Jesus for who He is and what He’s done. They’re all brought into the same spiritual body because God loves unity. It’s a characteristic of His nature and a hallmark of His activity, including the building of His church—a point that Paul also makes in the Book of Ephesians:

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one*

*baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

—EPHESIANS 4:4–6 (NIV)

When we focus on this aspect of the church, it’s commonly referred to as the universal church. This is what Jesus was introducing in His first reference to His church as well as many other references to “the church” in the New Testament. But we also need to recognize that this isn’t the only form “the church” takes.

## The Local Church

Just as there’s a universal dimension to Christ’s church, there’s a local one, as well. The universal church finds local expressions that are unique and distinct from each other.

We see this development demonstrated throughout the Book of Acts. In order to follow this development, it helps to recognize that Jesus gave a specific order by which His followers, the church, were to bear witness to the truth of who He was and all He had done.

Acts 1:8 (NIV) tells us, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Notice the progression Jesus shares. His church was to start in Jerusalem, then spread outward to the adjoining regions of Judea and Samaria, and then finally to the ends of the earth. If you imagine a stone that's tossed into a pond creating a ripple effect, you're envisioning what Jesus is describing here.

For a time, all those who had placed their faith in Christ and became followers of Him were centered in the city of Jerusalem. This is where the church was essentially born. It's where Jesus died, was raised from the grave, and where the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians. At this point, the church in Jerusalem was the only church there was. The universal church was locally confined to one place.

But this wasn't what Jesus ultimately envisioned for His church. Remember, it was His desire for His church to ripple outwards to the farthest edges of the world, not to stay in one place, which is exactly what happens as the church begins to be persecuted:

***“A great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”***

—ACTS 8:1 (NIV)

The universal church takes a dramatic turn here for the better. As it's persecuted by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, it forces many followers of Christ out of the city and into the surrounding territories of Judea and Samaria.

As they're scattered outward, they share the message of the gospel, new people in those regions begin to believe, and new gatherings of followers begin to form. We start to see individual clusters of Christians in various locations. And this spiritual pattern even extends well beyond the boundaries of Judea and Samaria. In particular, we see it happen in the city of Antioch:

***“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution...traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”***

—ACTS 11:19–21 (NIV)

Something undeniable was going on in Antioch. And the leaders of the church in Jerusalem decide to send one of their own, Barnabas, to determine just what was happening there. Barnabas recognizes God was moving in Antioch just as He had previously moved in Jerusalem. So, he finds his spiritual protégé, Saul (later known as Paul), to help him handle all of the spiritual needs brought about by what God was doing:

***“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”***

—ACTS 11:25-26 (NIV)

Now notice how it refers to this spiritual work that was happening in Antioch; it's called “the church.” It will also be called, “the Church at Antioch” in Acts 13:1. By this we see the church isn't just confined to Jerusalem anymore. As God establishes this gathering of Christians in Antioch, it's identified as an individual church.

From this church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are sent to share the gospel message in places where it was previously unknown.

As they go, they also establish communities that are founded on faith in Christ. They do this in Antioch, the city of Iconium, and the city of Lystra. Watch what they do for each:

***“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”***

—ACTS 14:23 (NIV)

Again, notice that these individual communities of faith are recognized as churches. This is the pattern that prevails throughout the rest of the Book of Acts. The gospel is brought to a new place, the people there respond in faith, a Christian community is established, and that community is identified as a church on a local level. This phenomenon is further emphasized as Paul, who founded many of these local churches, writes letters of instruction and encouragement to these local churches. These letters comprise the majority of our books in the New Testament. For example, Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, as well as First and Second Thessalonians are written to churches in those locales.

It's also noteworthy that the Book of Revelation begins with Jesus



addressing seven local churches specific to their community. And each of these churches were defined by spiritual dynamics distinct from each other, demonstrating an undeniable diversity one from another. This local dynamic is so important to recognize because it enables the universal church to also maintain a flexibility that allows it to adapt to the specific needs of individual communities. Local churches can identify and address the conditions of their immediate environment. They are woven into the social fabric of where the Lord has stitched them, making them accessible agents that God can work through worldwide! Local churches also give individual Christians an environment to exercise their God-given gifts in serving others, as well as provide a place for personal relationships to form that are life giving and necessary for their spiritual, emotional, and even physical well-being (Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; James 5:16).

**Reflect.** *What are the two distinct forms of the church?*

*How do you see yourself in relationship with the church both universally and locally?*

*What are some common misconceptions with regard to the nature of the church? How can you bring a better understanding to them?*

## Big “C,” little “c”

While the church is universal in one aspect, we must also see that it has a local aspect. Collectively, every single Christian is part of the Church (big “C”) by virtue of their spiritual bond to Christ as their head and to everyone else that’s spiritually connected to Him. This is the picture Paul paints for us in his letter to the Colossians:

*“He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”*

—COLOSSIANS 1:18 (NIV)

Yet we’ve also seen that the church (small “c”) can represent a localized gathering of Christians. And it’s on this local level that individuals develop in their spiritual discipleship. It’s an environment where spiritual gifts can be exercised, where relationships of accountability are nurtured, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be shared and received. All of this happens in a local community of faith along with many other spiritual experiences essential to the Christian life.

The church is universal; it’s unified across time and space by the Lord Jesus, Himself—built by Him, sustained by Him, and

[illegible]

*What are some things that stand out to you regarding the nature of the church and God's purpose for it? How would you share these with others?*

# THE BODY OF CHRIST

## memory verse:

*“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”*

—ROMANS 12:4–5 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–12**

**ROMANS 12:3–8**

**COLOSSIANS 3:12–15**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

If you were Jesus, how would you choose to describe your church? Perhaps you'd emphasize its formidable power as an agent of change by comparing it to an army. Or maybe your approach would be to highlight it as a spiritual hospital for wounded and weary souls. You might even portray it as an unrivaled institution of heavenly learning, knowledge, and wisdom.

You'd be justified in using any of these descriptions because each does touch on an important aspect of the church of Jesus Christ. It's an army, it's a hospital, and it does serve as an institution of sorts.

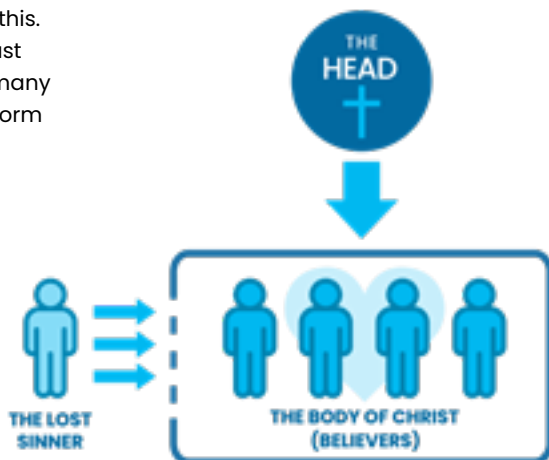
But you might be surprised to learn that the most common comparison in God's Word for those who belong to Christ, the church, is to a human body. A body? Yes, a body . . . just like the one you're inhabiting and using at this very moment to read this. It couldn't be any clearer: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV).

That's probably not the first thing that would come to mind as we think of the church. Yet, it's what He leads with in making the realities of His church known to us. But

why, of all things, does He make this equation and what sort of response should we have to it?

## Why a Body?

There's no need for us to speculate at length on why the church is likened to a body because the apostle Paul gives us a very straightforward answer in 1 Corinthians. Before we look at what he says, though, it's helpful to understand the context of his statement. Up to this point, Paul has been addressing various divisions and dysfunctions among the Corinthians. Word had gotten to Paul there was a lot of infighting and conflict at this church. One of his main objectives in writing this letter to them (which is among his most corrective in tone) is to get them all together and on the same spiritual page. As he deals with each divisive issue in Corinth, he comes to the subject of spiritual gifts, which was a real divider!



To sum it all up, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were being exercised in a manner that conflicted with each other rather than complimenting each other. It's sad but true that something as wonderful as spiritual gifts were being misused in a manner that was actually splitting the church apart!

So it's in this fractured setting that Paul writes the following words:

*“Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore, I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common*

*good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”*

—1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11 (NIV)

There's a lot to process here, but the one thing we can't afford to miss is the emphasis on both unity and diversity. Notice how deliberate Paul is in using the word “different”—which points to diversity and is used four times—and the word “same”—which points to unity and is used six times. Clearly, we're meant to see that when it comes to the spiritual operations of the church, diversity and unity are both important factors. They're realities that God, Himself, has ordained for His church, and point us to the fact that the church functions at its

healthiest when there's a blend and balance of both unity and diversity.

Now, notice once again the conclusive comparison Paul points to with all of this in mind: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV). Why a body? Because a body embodies the same duality of unity and diversity that the church requires in order to function properly. We get this, don't we? A human body is a unified whole. As a person, you have one, and only one, body! You're not bouncing around between multiple bodies. The body you were born with is the one you'll spend the entirety of your life in. And yet, your body is also an amazing demonstration of diversity! There are so many different parts and systems that make up your body, and they each have a specific function and serve a purpose that's particularly different from the other parts.

Paul seizes on this reality to elaborate on this very point:

***"Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am***

***not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable."***

**—1 CORINTHIANS 12:14–22 (NIV)**

As Paul brings his teaching on the parallel between the church and a human body, he does what every great teacher does . . . he summarizes the lesson down to its irreducible minimum so it can really stick with those being instructed: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV).

So, it's true that everyone is part of the same body: the body of Christ. That's the unity. But it's equally true

that everyone is also an individual part of the body. That's the diversity. We begin to see God's wisdom in establishing this comparison between His church and our bodies. For through the example of our natural bodies, we also see our collective connection and individual importance as Christians.

**Reflect:** *What are some things that stand out to you regarding the nature of the church? How would you share these with others?*

*What features of our natural bodies parallel with the spiritual body of the church?*

## What's Our Response?

Whenever we come across a truth in Scripture, such as this one, it's always wise to ask the question, "So what?" The spiritual realities of God's Word are meant to be personally exercised and applied in our lives. It's not just knowing something to be true, but it's living in these truths and incorporating them into the daily decisions that define our lifestyles that ultimately matter (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

As Christians, we're part of the body of Christ. So, what are we to do in response to this and how should it shape our lives? We don't need to look any further than the apostle Paul for our answer. Once again, he deliberately leans into the example of a human body to provide practical application as he writes to the Church of Rome:

*"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."*

—ROMANS 12:3-8 (NIV)

In context, Paul's writing this after unpacking all God has done by sending His Son into the world. So, after spending no less than 11 chapters focusing on all God has

done for us, he shifts to how those who've received His Son (the church) are to respond to Him. And this response involves those who form Christ's body using the spiritual gifts God gives them to serve one another. If you're a Christian, you have a responsibility to the rest of the spiritual body that you're connected to. You're responsible to put the supernatural gift God has given to you to benefit the other members of the body.

*What if I'd rather live my life as an independent Christian? Can't I just follow Jesus and stay close to Him without interacting with other followers?*

Nope! If you're a follower of Jesus, then you're part of His spiritual body, which also means your life is no longer yours. You don't exist independently any more. If you try to live like that, you're not going to grow, because you're in opposition to the spiritual principles God has determined for your development. A body part must be part of the body in order to live and grow. The same holds true for us.

*But what if I don't have a spiritual gift to contribute to the rest of the body?*

That's simply not possible, because God's Word tells us that every member of His body has been gifted in some way by

Him. We've seen this previously in Paul's instruction to the Corinthians: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good . . . he distributes them to each one" (1 Corinthians 12:7-11 NIV).

If you're a Christian, you've been blessed by the Holy Spirit with a divine gift, a supernatural ability. And you're responsible to identify, cultivate, and exercise that gift in a way that benefits the rest of the spiritual body you're a part of. Paul gets very specific here by showing us what that looks like. Some people have the gift of prophecy, which is speaking God's truth. Those people are to put this gift to use in declaring God's truth to the other members of the body. The same is true with those who've been given the gift of serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, or extending mercy.

Different members with different gifts, but all working towards the same spiritual objective: to benefit and strengthen the rest of the body. Again, the human body is a perfect parallel, especially when relating to exercise. When your feet and legs do what they're designed to do and you go out for a jog, your heart, lungs, and circulatory system are strengthened. A body that gets exercised is healthy, and the same is true as spiritual gifts are being exercised in the church.



**Reflect:** What areas in regards to your place in the church do you need to grow in?

What are some common misunderstandings about the diversities within a church body? How can you bring a better understanding to them?

## Different Seasons, Same Body

But our differences as members isn't limited to our spiritual gifts. There's also a diversity when it comes to our spiritual maturation. Every Christian begins the spiritual journey the moment they place their faith in Jesus. They all have that in common. Yet as with any journey, there's a progression and there are different points along the way. Not everyone is at the same place. In fact, we're all at different stages in our spiritual journey.

The apostle John highlights this in his first epistle by making a distinction between three spiritual groups within the church:

***"I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the***

***evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father."***

—1 JOHN 2:12-14 (NIV)

Notice the three different types of people: children, fathers and young men. Some are farther along than others (fathers); they've gained experiential wisdom in the process that can be shared with those less advanced. Others are newer in their journey (children) and possess a fresh love that can get lost over time. Their presence infuses much-needed spiritual passion into the church. In between these two ends of the spiritual spectrum (young men) are those whose faith is strong and actively growing in the things of God. Each stage of this "spiritual life cycle" is different from the other, yet each plays an important role in benefitting the same spiritual body. Once again, we see the body is healthiest when diversity and unity are functional realities.

So, just as we're to exercise our spiritual gifts for the benefit of the rest of the body, we also need to know where we're at in our spiritual journey, embrace who we are in this process, and live this out for the sake of others. If you're a child, express your newfound love for the Lord. If you're a young man, exercise your spiritual strength. And if you're a father, share the wisdom gained.

We can also see this dynamic at work when it comes to where different people are at in life, naturally. Within a healthy church body, different generations will be represented. That's one of the most beautiful things about Jesus, He's for everybody! Whether you're 8 or 88, there's a place for you in Christ's body.

And with a diversity of generations, there's an added opportunity to grow and learn from one another. Paul touches on this as he gives his protégé, Titus, instruction on how to lead the church body entrusted to his care:

***"Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men***

***to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good."***

—TITUS 2:2-7 (NIV)

The differences in the age of different members is recognized. But these differences are embraced and even leveraged to benefit the collective whole. Even in the natural course of a Christian's life, a beautiful and beneficial diversity has been woven into the fabric of the body of Christ.

In closing, there's one final aspect of Christ's body that can't be missed. It's the unifying factor that enables each member, with all of their differences, to harmoniously function as one:

***"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as***

*members of one body you  
were called to peace."*

—COLOSSIANS 3:12-15 (NIV)

The love of God, which is poured out onto each of our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that enables all of this to actually happen (Romans 5:5). With the love of God flowing through

the body's veins, nothing is beyond its ability according to the will and working of Christ who "is the head of the body, the church . . . that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18 NIV).

**Reflect:** What did God teach you about the church as Christ's body?

[illegible]

# BIBLICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

## memory verse:

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”*

—JAMES 5:16 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

HEBREWS 4:13

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–27

HEBREWS 10:24–25

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”*

—ROMANS 3:19 (NIV)

The word “accountable” corresponds to the Greek word *hypodikos*, which is a combination of two root words: *hypo*, which means “under,” and *dike*, which means “judgment.” When we put this all together, we see that to be accountable is to be subject to the judgment of a higher authority. It means there’s a limit to our free agency. We’re not absolutely free to act as we want; there are parameters by which our being and behavior is to be governed.

To be accountable is to be subject to a standard beyond oneself. A coach holds their players accountable to execute the game plan drawn up during practice. A parent holds their child accountable to obey the standard of behavior that’s been established at home. An employer holds their employee accountable to embody the values of their business. Whenever there’s a relationship involving any aspect of authority, accountability plays

an important role in keeping those relationships healthy. Unless we understand this essential aspect of what accountability is, we won’t fully embrace or appreciate its place in our lives.

**Reflect:** *Why is accountability necessary?*

## Accountable to God

In the leading passage above, the context involves the relationship between God and “the whole world,” with God assuming the position of authority. He, the Creator, establishes what’s right and wrong, and we, His creation, are subject to it. This means everyone who comes into this world, whether they feel like it or not, whether they want it or not, are accountable to God. Nobody is free to just live however they choose; all are subject to a standard of judgment that God determines, and one day, we’ll be subject to His judgment as to whether it was lived in obedience or disobedience to Him.

Our understanding of accountability must begin here, because it establishes the ultimate source of authority that every person is under by virtue of being created by God. While the whole world is ultimately accountable to God, this reality is taken a step further for those who are “in Christ” and part of His spiritual body, the church. In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (NIV), Paul

says, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”

Here, Paul’s referring to the price of redemption that Christ paid on the cross. As we’ve detailed in our lesson on the gospel, Jesus offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice on our behalf. By placing our faith in Him as the sinless substitute who died on our behalf, our debt as sinners is canceled and His perfect righteousness is credited to us. Because of this, God no longer sees us as those who don’t live up to His standard of perfect holiness or righteousness. Instead, He sees us as those covered in the righteous perfection of His Son. And this entitles us to His full forgiveness and freedom to spend eternity in fellowship with Him! As Romans 5:10 (NIV) says, “For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

We’re no longer at odds with God; we’ve been reconciled back to Him through Christ’s work on the cross. But there was an incredible cost involved in this transaction, a price we can’t fully fathom. The best we can do is describe it as nothing less than the very life of God’s Son! How can you possibly put a price tag on that? Yet in a sense, a price tag has been put on it: our lives! This is what Paul is highlighting when he says that our lives are not our own and that we’ve been bought with a price.

All who’ve placed their faith in Christ are now owned by Him. This also includes all of our personal rights and entitlements. When we give our lives to Jesus, we’re telling Him who spared no expense in redeeming us, that all we are and all we have is His. We’re surrendering ourselves fully to His Lordship over our lives. This takes our understanding of accountability to an entirely new level. It means we’re accountable to live our lives in obedience to God’s will. Life is no longer about what we want; it’s now centered on what He purposes for us. That’s the meaning and goal of our lives: to live according to His will. It’s the standard every Christian is accountable to. So clearly, accountability starts with God, but as we’ll see, it doesn’t end with Him.

**Reflect:** *Why is it important to see one’s accountability with God as preceding their accountability with others?*

## Accountable to Others

So, what does it mean to live according to God’s will? How does a Christian’s life conform to His desire for them? The answer, in large part, is accountability. And not just with Him, but with others—specifically, our fellow Christians. You see, to be a Christian is to be joined to Christ. It also means being joined to everyone else who is joined to Him as part of His church. He’s the head of His church and everyone joined to

Him comprises the body of His church. We see these truths and terms taught with unmistakable clarity in various places in the New Testament. For example . . .

***“And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”***

—COLOSSIANS 1:18 (NIV)

***“Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”***

—EPHESIANS 5:23 (NIV)

But here’s what we need to consider at this point: While a body is composed of many members, each member of that body is ultimately connected to each other and benefits each other. This is the case for Christians! Paul uses the example of our natural bodies to illustrate this spiritual reality for Christ’s followers:

***“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the***

***one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’”***

—1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–21 (NIV)

Why did God choose to connect His people this way? As you’ve probably guessed, the benefit wasn’t for Him, but for us! And this is where the principle of accountability comes in. By being connected to each other in one body, the principle and power

of accountability is embodied in us, literally! As we understand our connectedness before God, we prioritize living in community with those we're spiritually connected to. This can occur through connecting with Christian friends, Bible study groups, worship events, prayer meetings, or any other gathering that's Christ-centered.

But as beneficial as these can be, spiritual community is to primarily happen within the context of the local church, which is an essential experience for every Christian's spiritual growth. The writer of Hebrews gives a strong warning against not gathering in this way: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV).

Take note of the phrase "one another." It highlights the fact the Christian life isn't an isolated or independent existence, but one of connection where we're joined to each other and, as a result, accountable to each other. Being accountable to God means being accountable to other Christians, too. The reality is Christians who live in community have a refining influence on one another as they live in consideration of one another. There are at least 59 commands threaded throughout the New Testament to fulfill a

specific function towards "one another." Here are a few specific examples:

***"Love one another."***

—JOHN 13:34 (NIV)

***"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."***

—ROMANS 12:10 (NIV)

***"Live in harmony with one another."***

—ROMANS 12:16 (NIV)

***"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you."***

—ROMANS 15:7 (NIV)

***"Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."***

—2 CORINTHIANS 13:11 (NIV)

***"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."***

—EPHESIANS 4:32 (NIV)



***“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”***

—EPHESIANS 5:21 (NIV)

***“Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.”***

—JAMES 5:9 (NIV)

Again, these are just a handful of the “one another” commands given to the church. But notice how they all serve to establish a spiritual standard of love, encouragement, harmony, forgiveness, etc. And when this standard is upheld because we understand the concept of accountability, it serves to strengthen the entire body of Christ. We live, not for ourselves, but in consideration of others we’re joined to in Christ. Remember, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.”

**Reflect:** *What are some things that stand out to you about the dynamics of accountability, in general, and specifically in the life of a Christian? How might you share these truths with others?*

## Smaller Circles

Having examined the meaning and purpose of accountability in the Christian life, we need to address one final aspect as it relates to its application in our

lives. There are some forms of accountability that aren’t intended for everyone.

In particular, the exhortation for us to confess our sins to each other (James 5:16). When it comes to confessing sin or other personal aspects of life, it’s important to establish smaller circles of accountability.

If you haven’t already, prayerfully invite a select group of trusted friends in whom you can confide more personal matters and struggles—hopefully you see this group as brothers or sisters you can walk in openness and accountability with!

It’s wise for Christian men to confide in other Christian men and for Christian women to confide in other Christian women. The reason for this is because confessing something deeply personal or an area of struggle to someone of the opposite sex that isn’t related to you can create uncomfortable dynamics and put you in an unnecessarily vulnerable position, particularly if you’re dating, engaged, or married. Even with a pastor/elder, for a woman, certain areas of struggle should include a female leader in the conversation for both you and for that pastor/elder’s accountability as well.

Choose those who you know to be grounded in God’s Word and devoted to prayer. Make sure they’re running in the same



# WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY: FINANCES

## memory verse:

*“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”*

—2 CORINTHIANS 9:6 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

MARK 12:41–44

MARK 14:3–9

LUKE 10:30–37

PROVERBS 11:25

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been asked to watch something that belonged to someone else? Maybe a friend or relative has asked you to babysit their child or take care of their pet. Maybe you've been asked to house sit or drive someone's car from one place to another.

When someone trusts us with something that's important to them, they expect we'll give special attention to its safe keeping. But with our own personal belongings, we often have a little more leeway. When it's someone else's special item, though, we're much more careful. Why? Because if something bad happens, we'll feel terrible. We might have to pay for repairs or buy them a replacement.

In the same way, if your daughter or son falls in the park and scrapes their knee, it's probably not as big of a deal as delivering the news to another parent that their kid broke his or her ankle on your watch. This is the difference between being an owner and a steward. A steward is one who is entrusted to watch over and care for something. Stewards don't own it, but they're accountable to the owner for its safekeeping. And when something of value is entrusted to you, it comes with a real sense of expectation.

Have you ever considered that everything we have belongs to God? He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of all things, and He's entrusted us with these things.

**Reflect:** *What's the difference between an owner and a steward?*

## Stewards, Not Owners

We're not owners, we're stewards. Everything on earth, and everything that belongs to us, is actually God's! When we shift our mindset from owner to steward, it becomes a lot easier to be obedient to the Lord in the area of generosity. Why? Because it's not our resource, it's His.

It's not our money, it's His money. It's not our talent or ability, it's His talent and ability. And as owner, God can dictate how His things gets used. And as stewards, we'll answer to the Lord regarding the manner in which we handled what was entrusted to us. If your boss gives you their debit card and a list of items to purchase, do you go and buy whatever you want because the card is now yours? No! At best, you'd get yourself in trouble, at worst, you'd be fired and possibly even jailed!

Here's the reality of the matter: God's the boss, and the things He entrusts to us—our relationships, time, talents, and treasures—are His debit card. And the Bible is very clear about how God wants us to use them. If we don't honor the

Lord's instructions for His talents and treasures, we won't experience the rewards He promises, we won't reap the benefits, and we'll be missing out on experiencing the fullness of the vibrant, growing, transformational relationship with Christ we were created for and redeemed for. And to put it bluntly, what we've been entrusted with may be taken from us if we aren't responsible and effective with it (Matthew 25:28).

**Reflect:** *What difference does the steward vs. owner mindset make regarding your finances, in your time management, and with other talents?*

*What do you think of when you hear people talking about money in church? What has shaped your way of thinking regarding this topic?*

## Biblical Stewardship: A Definition

*“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”*

—ROMANS 14:12 (NIV)

What exactly is a biblical steward? A person who wisely and joyfully manages the Lord's resources—their availability, gifts, and finances—so the Lord will be pleased, others will be blessed, and they'll be ready to give an account one day before God. Consider this truth: You can be generous without

being a biblical steward, but you can't be a biblical steward without being generous.

There are plenty of people in this world that are generous without even being a Christian. What exactly is generosity? A willingness to give freely without expecting anything in return. What does it mean to be generous as a biblical steward? To willingly and freely give of what God has blessed you with, without expecting anything in return, because your ultimate goal and hope is to love and obey God by loving and caring for people.

**Reflect:** *Explain what biblical stewardship and generosity are in your own words.*

## Biblical Imperatives

In considering the way of a godly steward, these truths are unavoidable and require our attention and action:

### 1. God Is the **CREATOR** and **OWNER** of All Things.

As we acknowledge God in His rightful place as Creator, Owner, and Sustainer of all things, we submit to His higher spiritual authority through the tithe (Genesis 14:18–20). In Hebrew, the word tithe literally translates to “tenth.” So, in recognition of our stewardship (but not ownership) of all the Lord has given to us, we bring to Him our first and best—a tenth of all of our increases.

## 2. God Gives Us the Ability to **WORK** and **PRODUCE WEALTH**.

Because God's the maker of all things, we understand that our very lives are held together by His sovereign, supernatural hand (Acts 17:28). Only by His activity in waking us up every day and giving us breath are we able to work and earn money. So, everything we'll ever create or earn, God owns now and forever! In this first of three lessons on whole-life generosity, we'll explore biblical stewardship as it pertains to our finances. The following two weeks, we'll look at time and talent.

## 3. God Entrusts and Empowers Us to **MANAGE HIS RESOURCES** Wisely.

Much like a banker or financial advisor, God has placed us in the role of a guardian to the money and possessions He's allowed us to acquire. We're to act in such a way that we serve His best interests, and those interests and instructions will lead us to seek the benefit of others through our generosity and care.

## 4. God Leverages Our Stewardship for His **PURPOSE** and **MISSION**.

Another great example of stewardship can be found in Luke 10. Because the Good Samaritan had been a faithful manager of what God had given him, he had the physical and financial

resources to meet the need of the beaten man immediately. Had the Samaritan been a poor steward, he wouldn't have been very effective in helping the most vulnerable as Jesus calls us to do. Oftentimes, the opportunity to bless someone pops up without any real notice, and being a good steward allows us to join in those opportunities to further the kingdom of God!

## 5. God Evaluates Our Stewardship for His **GLORY** and Our **GOOD**.

In the book *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn said, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead." It's easy to forget the earthly blessing that awaits us in stewarding well, and it's even easier to forget we'll one day give an account for our actions. Remembering this should inspire us to be and do our very best in this life so we'll be fully prepared for what awaits us in heaven.

## A Matter of the Heart

We've found that one of the easiest ways to offend, upset, and make people cringe in church is to bring up the topic of money. For so long, people have seemed genuinely upset when churches talk about giving, tithes, or anything of that sort. Why? Well, perhaps it's because there have been far too many stories about church funds being misappropriated, misused, and

mishandled. Perhaps it's because too many churches are vague, unclear, and secretive about the way they use their tithes, offerings, and gifts. Or perhaps it's because of other thoughts that pop into our heads and linger in our hearts when this subject comes up.

"This is my money. I work hard to have nice things. Why does God need my money? How will I pay rent without it? How will I buy food? I don't have enough. God understands that I need to take care of myself and my family. Let the rich give!"

When it comes right down to it, the truth is we think of our money as ours. Whether we're willing to admit it or not, deep in our hearts we don't see God as the owner and giver of our resources. So, to part with our hard-earned money and not immediately get something tangible out of it—like a pizza, or a shiny car, or a new piece of tech—is a hard pill to swallow.

But here's the thing: Giving is much more about how we give rather than how much we give. It's an indicator of the condition of our hearts and the practicality of our faith. And when we remember that a) it's all His and not ours, and b) He promises to take care of us when we're obedient and faithful, we can gain an entirely different perspective on giving.

Consider the example in Luke 21 and Mark 12. Here, Jesus is watching as rich people drop their gifts in the tithe box, but then sees a poor widow who "dropped in two small coins" (Luke 21:1–2 NLT). Seeing this, Jesus called His disciples over (Mark 12:43) to teach them a valuable lesson: "This poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has" (Luke 21:3–4 NLT).

In this instance, we see it's not about quantity but quality—the quality of our devotion and obedience to God and our faith in Him. In both examples of the rich and the poor widow, we see this revealed. The rich gave a small percentage of their wealth. This implies they gave what they had to spare. And while it may seem like a large gift to the untrained eye, it was merely their leftovers. The widow gave all she had. She held nothing back from God because she knew it was His to begin with, and she had faith He'd keep His promise and provide her with everything she needed.

Consider the story of Cain and Abel found in Genesis 4:1–16. You see, what God wants is the first fruit of our hearts; He wants our best, because He gave us His best! He held nothing back when He created a good and perfect world for us to inhabit and enjoy. He gives us everything we have

and everything we need, and He blesses us beyond what we deserve. And most importantly, He gave us His only begotten Son, who is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15 NIV). In light of this, how can we not see, believe, and embrace the truth that God Almighty deserves our best and our all?!

Both Abel and the widow gave their best, no matter how big or little it seemed in the eyes of man.

**Reflect:** *What does God care about most when it comes to giving? Why is He worthy to be trusted with our generosity?*

## To Tithe or Not to Tithe?

If you were to look up the word “tithe” in the dictionary, this is what you’d find: “A tenth part of something paid as a voluntary contribution or as a tax, especially for the support of a religious establishment.” Tithing was commonplace in the Old Testament; it was required of the people of Israel. You may be thinking, “That was then. The world is different now. We’re not Israelites under the law. Does this even still really apply to us?”

The short answer is yes; we’re still expected to give. While the principle of the tithe (a tenth) may be an Old Testament

concept not mentioned in the New Testament, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:2 (NLT), “On the first day of each week, you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned.” According to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, “This passage brings out four points: We should give 1. individually, 2. regularly, 3. methodically, and 4. proportionately.”

Another type of giving is an offering, which is when you give generously above and beyond your tithe to meet a specific need or simply out of gratitude for the Lord’s goodness. As an individual or a family, we hope you’ll prayerfully consider how God’s inviting you to get into the story through your giving.

One thing that’s clear, though, is that giving to God shouldn’t feel like a burden. It’s a privilege to give back to God the first fruits from what He’s blessed us with, to show Him the honor, obedience, and trust He deserves, and to be able to participate in His work. It shouldn’t feel like a responsibility, but a response of love and faith to the Lord and a deep desire in us to see His kingdom work advance in, through, and around us! Giving often comes down to the condition of our heart, alignment—or realignment—of our perspective, and our level of devotion, maturity, and faith. Your offering at your church is between you and God. He knows



your financial situation and He sees your heart in it.

But how much do we give? The New Testament doesn't specify. However, many Christians still use the Old Testament one-tenth method as a helpful standard. Why? Once again we refer to the wise words of Billy Graham, who said, "We have found in our own home, as have thousands of others, that God's blessing upon the nine-tenths, when we tithe, helps it to go farther than ten-tenths without His blessing."

As to questions about whether to give from your net income or gross income, weekly or monthly, how to handle things like bonuses, whether you should give it all to your church or to include other ministries, these kinds of details should be based on prayer and the leading of the Spirit.

If you've never given before, read over Malachi 3:10–12. God's inviting you to put Him to the test. He's inviting you to receive an outpouring of provision and blessing, just ensure you're giving your first fruit and not your leftovers. Prioritize giving; make it the first thing you determine in your weekly or monthly budget, and let everything else fall into place because the Lord's promise in Malachi 3 is as true today as it was then. And always remember to see it as a joy and privilege, not an obligation that must be fulfilled. So, tithe cheerfully with a

heart after God's heart, knowing your generous tithes are a sweet aroma to God!

**Reflect:** *What do you think keeps people from being obedient and faithful in the area of giving? How are these objections overcome?*

## The Why of Giving

As we wrap up this breakdown on stewardship of our finances, resources, and treasure, we want to leave you with this final thought: We give in response to all He's done and is doing, to everything He gives us and all He pours into our lives, and we consider it a joy and privilege to show generosity toward others!

To give of our finances toward the mission and work God's doing through His church . . .

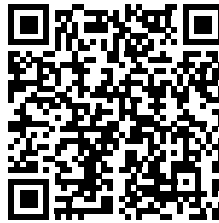
To give of our time to advocate for and be intentional with people . . .

To give of our talents and gifts to change someone's story . . .

We believe as we follow Jesus' example and honor His instruction, our generosity will be used to reach our community and change our world. In the end, every dollar, hour, and relationship we invest in isn't lost but gained, because it multiplies itself over and over again into people's lives for the gospel.

**Reflect:** How has this chapter changed your perspective on being generous with your finances, resources, and treasure?

### BUDGET SHEET:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, similar to standard notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY: AVAILABILITY

## memory verse:

*“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*

—PSALM 90:12 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**MATTHEW 6:25–34**

**MATTHEW 25:14–30**

**EPHESIANS 5:15–17**

**2 PETER 3:8–14**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we're starting with a riddle . . .

This thing all things devours; birds, beasts, trees, flowers; gnaws iron, bites steel; grinds hard stones to meal; slays kings, ruins towns, and beats mountains down.

What do you think the answer is?  
Wait for it . . . the answer is . . . TIME!

This iconic riddle from *The Hobbit* so eloquently describes the reality of time. Think about it: Picture in your mind the person you consider to be the greatest pro athlete ever. Maybe it's Michael Jordan or Michael Phelps. Maybe it's Serena Williams or Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Tom Brady, Kobe Bryant, or Ken Griffey Jr. Do you know what they all have in common? Every single one of these prolific athletes has retired. Why? Because, as many have pointed out, "Father Time is undefeated."

The truth is there are very few things in this world as precious as time. Why? Because you only get one chance at every second. Once it's gone, you can't get it back. There's no rewind button on life. There's not even a pause button! It just keeps going and going . . . until it doesn't.

## How Do You Spend Your Time?

Time is so unique, so vastly different from other resources in this world. It's one of the most

important and valuable gifts, but it's also the easiest to waste. In general, people waste a lot of time. According to a recent study, 87% of students procrastinate on school assignments, 95% of adults procrastinate on work and home tasks, and more than 20% of people are considered chronic procrastinators.

Another study concluded that the average American spends their 24-hour day like this:

- **About 4.5 hours on their phone with just over 2.5 of those hours on social media**
- **Almost 3 hours per day watching TV**
- **420 minutes are spent working daily (7 hours over 5 days)**
- **Less than 420 minutes sleeping (less than the recommended 7 hours)**
- **Around 68 minutes eating**
- **Close to 45 minutes in the bathroom**

Despite the amount of time spent on activities like social media and watching TV, 48% of Americans say they don't have enough time. That number is substantially higher among working Americans and people with children under 18.

Here's why this topic is so important: God has given each of us a set amount of time. We can do nothing to add to it or earn more of it. While we can always earn more money, we can't buy more time. So, what should we do about this? As

believers, we should commit to making the best use of our time (Ephesians 5:16). We should ask the Lord to “teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12 ESV). Consider yourself a steward of the precious time God has given you—a time manager if you will.

**Reflect:** *Why do you think it has become so easy to spend time on unimportant or distracting things?*

## The Parable of the Talents

This parable found in Matthew 25:14–30 is a great reminder of what it means to be a steward. In this powerful story, three servants are given talents—or units of money. The master gives one servant five talents, another two talents, and the last is given one. The first two take what their master gave them, work hard, and multiply the talents. They're rewarded and reap the benefits of their honorable and productive stewardship. But the third servant does nothing with his talent, and so it's taken away from him. In fact, the master calls him wicked and lazy for this (Matthew 25:26).

The lesson here is clear: Make the most of what you've been given! Don't waste it or leave it idle. When you steward what's been given to you wisely, you'll reap the rewards. When you don't, you'll miss out big time.

When it comes to your time, are you being wise and generous or wasteful? Remember, you can't be generous with your time if you aren't managing your time. Time management isn't only an extremely valuable life skill that can help you lead a balanced and healthy life, but it's also biblical. Now, it's time to take inventory of your time and evaluate how you're doing. Fill out the time management sheet below and bring it with you throughout the day.

### TIME MANAGEMENT SHEET:



**Reflect:** *What did you discover about your time management? Where are your priorities and treasure?*

## Time with God

When you think about the Parable of the Talents in real-world terms, your desire as a believer should be to make the most of the time you've been given and to seek the greatest return on your investment for your Master. But how do you know you're getting the most out of your time, even after creating a well-balanced schedule?

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus addresses this very issue. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges His disciples to stop worrying about their future needs because “your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:32 NKJV). So, He tells us to stop seeking the things the world tells us are necessary and instead “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 NKJV). From this passage, we can see that the best use of our time is to spend time with the Lord, seeking His kingdom and His righteousness.

Sadly, seeking God is usually not at the top of our list. Oh, we may say that our relationship with the Lord is the most important thing in the world to us, but often our lives tell a different story. Remember the average breakdown of a 24-hour day we saw above? Did you notice what’s missing? Studies show the average American spends less than 20 minutes praying per day and 15 minutes reading the Bible per day. But those are just averages, because only about 1% of Americans read the Bible every day with about 45% reading it around three times per week.

These stats aren’t meant to shame or guilt anyone. Truthfully, almost every Christian surveyed indicated they want to spend more time with God. The problem is we try to “fit” prayer, worship,

time in the Word, church attendance, and other spiritual disciplines into our schedules. We can’t expect to “squeeze” God into our busy schedules and still experience spiritual growth and transformation. We must build our schedules around God! If our favorite celebrity or the President wanted to spend time with us, for example, we’d probably make that happen and schedule our day around that. Why don’t we treat God that way? He’s the creator of the universe! And He desperately wants us to spend time with Him!

Earlier in this journey, we spent about seven weeks diving into spiritual disciplines. Why? Because they’re vital to our growth as believers and the health of our relationship with Jesus. Now it’s time to take a look at your time management sheet again. This time, identify and highlight how you spend time with the Lord through spiritual disciplines. Specifically look at the following: engaging with Scripture and prayer on a daily basis as well as your weekly church attendance and time in community, silence and solitude, and worship. Don’t forget to block out one day per week for Sabbath rest. Keep this in mind for the new time sheet you’ll fill in after reading this chapter.

In Matthew 6:21 (NIV), Jesus finishes talking about seeking first the kingdom of God by saying,

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What does this tell us? Where we spend our time will be a reflection and an overflow of our hearts! Let’s check our hearts together and seek first the kingdom with our time.

**Reflect:** *Where are you struggling to fit some of the spiritual disciplines in?*

*What can you do differently to build your schedule around God instead of fitting Him into your schedule?*

## Give Time If You Want to Get Time

As we’ve established so far in this lesson, time’s a valuable commodity because it’s all about how and where we choose to be available. Greek philosopher Theophrastus wrote, “Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend.” But here’s something to consider that we often overlook: If time is valuable to us, then it’s equally valuable to everyone else. Our time is extremely valuable to us; in the same way, our neighbor’s time is extremely valuable to them, as is our coworker’s time, our friends’ time, our family’s time, and everyone else’s time.

Part of living generously like Jesus is being generous to others with our time and availability. As you’ve gone through the process

of evaluating the way you spend your time, how much space have you made for relationships? How much margin did you give yourself to have quality time with your loved ones?

If you’re married, does your schedule contain any intentional date nights, coffee breaks, walks, dinner and a movie, or catch-up sessions with your spouse? If you have kids, does your calendar contain any significant time for fun with your kids, hide-and-go-seek or freeze tag breaks, game nights, homework sessions, family dinner time, family prayer and devotional time, or outings to the park or mall? Does it include blocking out time for their games, recitals, plays, concerts, or competitions? What about time with your parents, siblings, friends, small group, mentor, or any discipleship relationships?

If a true time investment isn’t being made into these important relationships, we may see some of our relationships fizzle or end. We’ll almost certainly experience some sort of strain on them. When it comes to our relationships, if we’re not investing in them, we’ll miss out on one of the things God created us for: deep, meaningful connection. So, are you showing the people in your life how much you value them? Or are you simply telling them you value them without actually showing them?

Remember, actions speak louder than words, and the people in our lives notice when they're not a priority. Lost time is gone forever. For a parent, if you get to be a part of your child's life every day for the first 18 years of their life, then you're looking at about 6,574 days, or 936 weeks, before they're considered adults, before they go off to college or enter the workforce.

This isn't meant to scare you with the uncertainty of your time on earth. Instead, it's meant to shake you up a bit and remind you of what, and who, is truly worthy of your time. Even if you've missed out on valuable seasons and times in the life of someone else, you can still be intentional to prioritize them in the here and now, walking in the love and wisdom of Jesus, which often leads to reconciliation and healing. In the end, everything else will fade away—money, job, physique, etc.—but relationships are forever treasures.

Fill out another time management sheet. Consider how you can be more generous and purposely available with your time for relationships. Maybe that means no phones at dinner time or 30 minutes less in front of the TV so you can take a 30-minute walk with your spouse, child, parent, or go visit a grandparent or close friend.

With this sheet, fill it out in this order.

- **Time with God**
- **Time with the important relationships in your life**
- **Everything else**
- **Defeating distractions**

One of C.S. Lewis' greatest works is a book titled *The Screwtape Letters*. It's the story of an elder demon named Screwtape who counsels a junior demon, his nephew Wormwood. In the story, the nephew had just become a tempter. His job? To get new Christians to not grow, to stay stagnant, and to become ineffective Christians.

The following excerpt is from *The Screwtape Letters*:

*You can make him waste his time not only in conversation he enjoys with people whom he likes, but in conversations with those he cares nothing about on subjects that bore him. You can make him do nothing at all for long periods. You can keep him up late at night, not roistering, but staring at a dead fire in a cold room. All the healthy and outgoing activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited and nothing given in return, so that at last he may say, as one of my own patients said on his arrival down here, 'I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked' . . . Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal*



*away a man's best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why.*

Distraction has seemingly become the greatest weapon in the utility belt of the enemy. Distractions are what Jesus was referring to in Luke 8:7 (NIV), when He said, "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants." When we become inundated by everything and anything, we become ineffective and unfruitful as disciples. Whether it's busyness, idleness, amusement, or pleasures, the outcome will be the same: a wasted life.

What are the biggest distractions in your life? What non-essential things keep you from accomplishing all God has for you? List your biggest distractions and time drainers. For brevity's sake, stick to the five biggest. Then try to estimate how much time you spend on each one throughout the week. Add up all five and write down your grand total.

### **Total Amount of Time Wasted:**

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How many distractions did you list on your time management sheet? How much time are you using on these five that can be used in other areas? What's the time comparison between these five things and your time spent

with God, engaging in spiritual disciplines, and your intentional relationship time?

**Reflect:** Share with your group and ask each other how you can encourage and keep one another accountable to your new time management sheets.

## **Leaving Room for the Spirit**

As disciples, it should be our desire and mission to be used by God, to be the vessels through which He accomplishes His plan and carries out His great work. What does that mean? It means being open to His work; it means making ourselves available to be used by Him. If we're distracted and busy, we can't hear the Spirit moving and guiding. If we're preoccupied, we won't be attuned to His leading. If we're always on the go, we won't know to stop and respond to God's call. We may not even hear the call.

Consider this: Jesus regularly stopped what He was doing to accomplish His Father's will, to help people in need, and to change people's lives. To the outsider, these "interruptions" might have seemed like inconvenient compassion, but to God, they were divine appointments. Remember the story of the woman at the well in John 4? Normally, Jews would avoid Samara, but Jesus decided to take the direct route because He knew God had a divine appointment for Him. In Mark

Here's something to ponder today: When was the last time someone's need interrupted your plans? How did you respond? Did you respond like Jesus or did you see it as an inconvenient interruption? In contrast, have you ever interrupted others with your needs? How did they respond and make you feel?

We need margin and availability. Often, we wonder why God isn't using us, but we never stop to consider that we aren't making ourselves available for Him to work. Being generous with our time means leaving room in our schedules for the Spirit to work, to move us to action, and to direct us to fulfill His purpose.

**Reflect:** Do you have room in your schedule for rest and divine interruptions? What's the last thing you can do to make time to hear from the Spirit and let Him lead you?

[illegible]

# WHOLE-LIFE GENEROSITY: GIFTS

## memory verse:

*“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

—EPHESIANS 2:10 (NIV)

## this week’s Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**ROMANS 12:4–8**

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–11**

**EPHESIANS 4:11–13**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week’s prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine a potter throwing clay on his potter's wheel. His hands are immersed in the messy clay, guiding it, and using tools to shape it into the vessel he envisions it will become. Once completed, he uses the finished vessel for his intended purpose—perhaps a pitcher for holding water, a bowl for food, or a vase to house flowers. Each one of his creations first began as an idea in his mind and was designed for both beauty and functionality.

In several areas, the Bible calls God the potter and us the clay vessels, created and intricately designed by Him to accomplish His purposes. He's made each of us uniquely and created us with gifts and talents. He intends to be developed and used for His glory. To be a disciple of Jesus means we live out our purpose for His kingdom, using our God-given gifts to partner with Him in His redemption of the world.

### God the Giver

To better understand how we should use our gifts, we must first begin with our Lord. God is the grand author of all creation, the One who carefully thought out and fashioned everything that exists, seen and unseen, for His glory (Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16). This means before we were born, we'd already been thought of and desired by God. He already knew who we would be—from the place and family we'd be born

into to our personality, strengths, and weaknesses. All of it was His intentional plan for us, that we might use every part of our lives to bring Him glory (Ephesians 2:10).

The parable of the talents makes this notion clear. In Matthew 25:14–15 (NLT) we read, "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip." The talents given to the servants weren't their own; they belonged to the master. The servants didn't choose what they received; the master did. We often think our gifts are meant to serve us and bring us success and happiness in this life, forgetting we didn't choose much of the hand we'd been dealt. So to be good stewards of our gifts, we must first understand that our gifts are not our own; they're ultimately God's.

### Servants and Stewards

Going back to the passage in Matthew 25, we read the man leaves his treasure with his servants. The word servant in this passage is the Greek word *doulos*, which can be translated as slave or bondservant. This means the servants in the story had given up their will in order to serve their master. Likewise, we who call

ourselves disciples of Jesus no longer seek to do our will, but His. As God's servants, we have the opportunity, out of love for Him, to use the gifts He's placed under our stewardship to fulfill His purposes. That means everything in our lives—our bodies, thoughts, finances, careers, families, abilities, time, relationships, spiritual gifts, natural skills, and everything in between—has been entrusted to us by Jesus until He returns—and what we do with these things matters greatly to Him. We've all been given a task to expand Christ's kingdom here on earth until His return and to use every resource given to us to make Him known.

**Reflect:** *How does viewing God as the Master and us as His servants impact the way we view and use our gifts?*

## WHAT ARE GIFTS AND TALENTS?

Now, let's unpack what gifts and talents are. In the parable of the talents, the talents given to the three servants were measurements of either gold or silver. Scholars believe one talent was equivalent to roughly 600 denarii, which would have taken approximately 20 years to accrue. According to D.A. Carson, if the talents were measured in silver, then one talent would have been worth slightly more than half a million dollars today! To calculate it then, one servant received

approximately half a million dollars, another 1 million, and another 2.5 million dollars.

God's been generous toward us and entrusted us with gifts of incredible worth! Two of the servants in the story understood this, but do we understand it today? The weight of money (talents) in the passage can be applied to the sum of gifts we've received from God, and they are of immense value to Him. But do we see their value? If we're honest, we often look at what others have and compare ourselves to one another rather than appreciating and developing what God's given us to steward. Pastor Craig Groeschell said, "When we compare ourselves, we either see ourselves as superior or inferior, and neither honors God." The gifts God has given us were intentional, and just as God has been generous in giving us gifts, we're invited to be generous in how we multiply them.

## Natural Gifts

When we think of our talents, what often comes to mind are our natural gifts and abilities. These are typically aptitudes we were born with and have developed over the years—like being intellectually gifted, artistic, athletic, musical, extroverted/introverted, good with numbers/facts, socially adept, analytical, a problem solver, or charismatic and influential. Life and our circumstances shape these gifts,

influencing how we develop them or whether or not we recognize them as gifts. But one thing is true: We were made to worship our Creator with our gifts. In the 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire*, Scottish sprinter Eric Liddell makes a powerful statement about our natural talents:

*I believe God made me for a purpose—but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.*

Many of us may have jobs where we use one or many of our natural gifts (and it's wonderful when our jobs align with our giftings), but that's not always the case. Don't think your calling from God's restricted only to your job or career—it's much bigger than that. God's vision for you and your gifts is grander than you can imagine because it involves grafting you into His mission to heal the world and point others to Him.

We're all uniquely made (Psalm 139:13–14); the sum of our personality, gifts, and life experiences makes each one of us uniquely crafted by God, which means there's a contribution only you can make to this world and people only you can reach because of the sum of all the gifts and experiences you've been given and walked through. This means there's no disposable or worthless gift. Everything you have and every person is essential. Isn't that beautiful? You're essential to God's mission, and as we each step into that reality and set out to do the things He's called us to do in the places and seasons He's called us to,

as a body of believers, we not only build one another up, but we expand His kingdom here on earth!

## Spiritual Gifts

Not only has God made each one of us with unique gifts and abilities, but when we're born again, we receive the Holy Spirit and are given spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are different from natural gifts in that only Christ followers receive spiritual gifts. This is a promise from Jesus to His disciples that we'd receive power to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8) and that we'd do even greater things than He did during His time on earth (John 14:12).

Spiritual gifts come supernaturally and are a Spirit-given ability to do God's will and work. You often know you have a spiritual gift when you feel a Spirit-generated joy when you do it, or you feel a greater sense of God's presence and power working through you when you're being used in that gift.

For example, we're all called to evangelize, but those with the gift of evangelism feel a spirit-led prompting and energy to share the gospel—and it's more clear and effective than a believer who evangelizes and doesn't have that gift. We're all called to practice and do God's work (to exercise faith, to love and care for one another, to give, to speak words of life, etc.), and as we do these things, we may realize we have one or more spiritual gifts or a spirit-empowered ability to do some things with more clarity

and effectiveness by God's power at work in us. We don't choose these gifts, but rather the Holy Spirit distributes them as He wills for specific seasons or specific works for the building up of the church (1 Corinthians 12:11).

The following list breaks down spiritual gifts.

### SPIRITUAL GIFTS CHART:



**Reflect:** List your top five natural gifts and top three spiritual gifts. How do you think the combination of these gifts, both natural and spiritual, can be used in your season of life and places of influence (home, workplace, church, family, and friendship circles)?

Which of the spiritual gifts do you least understand? How can you ask God for help in learning more about this gift?

## The Difference Between Ministerial and Manifestational Gifts

Did you know not all gifts of the Holy Spirit operate the same way? As it pertains to these lists of spiritual

gifts, they can be divided into two key categories: ministerial (some call them "motivational" or "office" gifts) and manifestational (also known as "charismatic" or "power" gifts).

Ministerial gifts are gifts that shape a person's calling, role, or function in the body of Christ. They often define someone's long-term ministry orientation or God-given wiring. Examples of this include gifts like prophecy, teaching, exhortation (encouragement), giving, leadership, mercy, evangelism, shepherding, apostleship (often seen in church planters, missionaries, or spiritual pioneers who are sent out by a church body to establish and oversee new works or operate in a fatherly role over multiple churches).

The purpose of ministerial gifts is to build up the church, equip the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:12), and reflect how God's uniquely designed each believer. The key traits of these gifts is they're often connected to someone's natural gifts and ministry calling, can be recognized and developed over time, and are more about who someone is and how they function consistently.

It's also very important for us to understand that just because we're more naturally inclined toward one or two ministerial gifts doesn't mean we shouldn't be seeking to grow in all of them! We absolutely should! A person who's gifted in prophecy, teaching, and shepherding should always be seeking to grow in giving, leadership,

evangelism, mercy, exhortation, and apostleship. While this person may not serve in a long-term capacity in these areas of ministry, growing in these other gifts that aren't their natural strengths will make them a better prophet, teacher, and shepherd!

What about manifestational gifts? These gifts are spontaneous empowerments of the Holy Spirit given for a particular moment or situation to reveal God's presence and power, to carry out a specific work God desires to be done, and accomplish a specific purpose God wills.

These gifts include . . .

- **Word of wisdom**
- **Word of knowledge**
- **Faith**
- **Gifts of healing**
- **Working of miracles**
- **Prophecy (it appears in both)**
- **Discerning of spirits**
- **Tongues**
- **Interpretation of tongues**

The purpose behind these gifts and why they're different is that they manifest in a moment by the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), they meet immediate needs (often in a supernatural way), and they bear witness to the reality of God's power and presence. The key traits we see in these gifts are 1) they're momentary and

situational, not tied to someone's permanent role, 2) they're distributed as the Spirit wills (1 Corinthians 12:11), and 3) they're NOT a reflection of spiritual maturity, but of God's grace and power.

## Manifestational Gifts: Not Superpowers, But Spirit-Empowered Moments

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NASB) says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." This passage is of vital importance in our understanding of the manifestational gifts. You see, unlike natural gifts or ministerial gifts, these gifts are not about permanent possession. Instead, they're about the Spirit showing up through a person in a moment of need, for the benefit of someone else, for the demonstration of God's power, and for the glory of Christ. Think flashlight, not lightbulb—the power turns on when needed; it's not always on.

A person can't say, "I'm a healer. I have the spiritual gift of healing, so I can cure anyone, anytime." Instead, what this gift could look like is a moment when they're praying for someone at the hospital with a serious disease, and in that moment, the Spirit prompts them with boldness and compassion to pray specifically and powerfully—and they're



healed. That doesn't mean they can now go room to room and heal everyone. Why? Because the gift isn't something they control. It's something the Spirit gives in the moment, according to God's will.

A person can't say, "I can perform miracles. I can call down fire, part water, or multiply Chick-fil-A sandwiches whenever I want." Instead, some ways God can manifest this gift could look like a person being on a mission trip where resources are short and miraculously there's just enough or a spiritual breakthrough happens in the life of someone they've been praying for in a way that feels unexplainable apart from God's power. They didn't command it; they participated in it.

The manifestational gifts of the Spirit aren't us becoming Christian Avengers with superpowers. They're ways the Spirit moves through us when He wants, how He wants, and for whom He wants. Our role is to stay available, humble, and ready, not to act like we've mastered the controls.

## Implications

As Christ followers, we all take part in Christ's ministry to serve others and build up His body. We've all received gifts from God, both natural and spiritual, and He invites us to partner with Him by using the very gifts He's given us to expand His kingdom and reveal His glory. Furthermore, as we've seen in

previous lessons, we all make up one body, which needs to be built up and strengthened. This means you have a role in God's mission and your gifts are essential. Don't hide your gifts or bury them like the servant in the parable. Instead, find opportunities in the body of Christ to use and multiply them as a good steward.

Finally, it's important to note that in the middle of two passages about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12 and 14), Paul interjects a passage about love. All our gifts, naturally and spiritually endowed, must be exercised out of love for God and His people. We must use our gifts out of love to edify one another; anything short of this is a misuse of the gifts and renders our service futile (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

**Reflect:** *Why do you think Paul includes a passage on love in the middle of an exhortation on spiritual gifts?*

## Putting It All Into Practice

Here are five thoughts to consider in light of the Parable of the Talents.

### We're not our own

We must understand we're God's servants like the servants in the story. God's our Master; to belong to Him means we work for Him. To miss this truth means that, like the servant with one talent, we don't recognize our place in the story. If

we choose to “opt out” of serving our Master, it means we’ve missed the gospel—the truth that we were slaves to sin, but because Jesus bought us with a price and redeemed us by His blood (1 Corinthians 6:20), we’ve become slaves (or servants) to God (Romans 6:20–22).

### We serve in light of eternity

The parable makes it clear that the Master was gone for a very long time. Yet the two servants worked diligently to multiply their Master’s treasure and received a reward for their effort. Yet, many of us get side-tracked and caught up in the things of this world, putting aside serving God in order to gain treasures here, like financial wealth, career success, and earthly possessions. We use the gifts God has given us to serve ourselves, forgetting we work for Him and neglecting to invest in eternal things. We must remember our great and final reward isn’t here on earth, but in eternity, and if we remain faithful with the small things here, we’ll receive even greater treasure in heaven.

### We set out to multiply His treasure

Just like the servants, we’ve been given the task to multiply our Master’s treasure. This means we use everything God’s given us for His purposes. We can and should work diligently to maximize our gifts and offer them back to God. We use our natural gifts and skills to glorify God and point others to Him. This isn’t just for church staff or those in ministry; it’s for the businessperson, the trade

worker, the stay-at-home parent, those retired, and everyone who claims to be a disciple of Jesus. Our daily work and lives are anything but ordinary; they become sacred work because they become His work.

### We build up the body

We not only use our natural talents and skills to serve God, but we also allow the Holy Spirit to use us through the spiritual gifts He’s given us. We multiply God’s gifts when 1) we’re intentional with others and invest in their spiritual growth, 2) we look for opportunities to serve our church in the ways we’ve been equipped by God and teach others how to serve in those gifts as well, 3) we strive to live a life of holiness so we can be attuned to the Holy Spirit’s voice, 4) we listen for the Spirit’s prompting and obey His voice, and 5) we learn to use our gifts in community with others and with humility and grace as we practice listening to the Spirit.

### We’re empowered to serve in love

We get to serve God, who is love (1 John 4:8), which means as we serve Him with our gifts, we do so by emulating His character. And as we practice living as Christ lived, we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us into His likeness. We serve out of love for God and are shaped into love. But what does that look like practically?

**We stop comparing ourselves to others, envying their gifts and skills while neglecting our own.**

**We stop boasting about what we have and do and acknowledge everything we have is God's.**

**We serve in humility, not for our recognition or glory.**

**We serve out of a desire to please God, not man.**

**We extend grace to our brothers and sisters as they learn to use their gifts, just as we're shown grace in return.**

**We love people more than ministry work and spiritual gifts.**

**We value God and His presence more than the work we get to do for Him.**

We're God's workmanship, His vessels, which He has intentionally and uniquely crafted for His purpose and pleasure. God's given us abilities and gifts to bring Him glory and make Him known to this world.

Do you know what your natural and spiritual gifts are? Have you buried them out of fear or in disregard for them? Are you using

the gifts He's given you for His glory or yours?

You're invited by the Master to steward and multiply the great treasure He's entrusted to you and make His glory known in the places of influence He's placed you in. Every believer has received something from God, which means everyone's encouraged to participate in His work, and in the end, everyone will give account to Him for what they've chosen to do with His talents. This is a sobering truth that should change the way we view ourselves, our talents, and ultimately, how we live our lives. Don't miss out—join in and watch what God will do through you!

**Reflect:** *How are you using your gifts? Are there gifts you've been burying or neglecting to use? If so, why?*

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS TEST:**



# SERVING

## memory verse:

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

—MARK 10:45 (NIV)

*“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”*

—GALATIANS 5:13 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**JOHN 13:3–15**

**COLOSSIANS 3:23–24**

**REVELATION 22:1–3**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

—MARK 10:45 (NIV)

Serving begins with Jesus, because it's founded in both who He is and what He's done. We get a powerful proclamation of this from Jesus, Himself, in the passage above. It's here where He defines His life's purpose, which was to be a servant—and to do so by giving His very life as a ransom (the price of redemption).

By now, we understand that Jesus ultimately fulfilled this purpose by offering Himself as our sin sacrifice on the cross. His innocent life offered on our behalf covered the cost of our sinful guilt before God. Through this work of redemption, full forgiveness and reconciliation with our Creator is now possible.

This new relationship with God also means a new way of life is now possible for us, one in which we're no longer driven to serve ourselves, but to follow in Christ's example of serving others. And we're given some specific examples of how we're to live out this lifestyle of service.

Now as we explore this essential aspect of Christian discipleship

(serving), it's essential to recognize that it all flows from Jesus. It's in Him that we witness what a servant's life looks like; and it's in Him that we receive the ability to follow in His example of serving others.

Serving is such a part of Christ's nature that it's hard to choose specific highlights of serving from His life. However, there's one we'd be remiss not to mention, and it comes to us towards the very end of His earthly ministry.

To set the scene, it's the night before He'd be crucified—the same night He'd privately share Passover with His disciples, reveal the elements of communion and their significance, and eventually be arrested, beaten, and taken from them.

Of all the points in His lifetime, you'd think this was a moment where He'd ask for His closest confidants to serve Him. But as He often does, Jesus flips the script. He seizes this intimate moment to serve His disciples in a way that still makes us shake our heads in wonder nearly two thousand years later: “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel

that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand'" (John 13:3-7 NIV).

Jesus does something so servile in nature, it grabbed the attention of every disciple that was present. It must have been incredibly awkward to see Jesus do this after He exercised authority over the raging sea, incalculable demons, every imaginable sickness, and any situation life could throw. He strips Himself of everything except a towel and assumes the role of the lowest possible position a servant could occupy . . . a foot washer!

This is most the humbling, and we might even use the word "degrading," thing another person would have to do—to kneel down and physically touch the most unclean and unpleasant part of someone's body. Keep in mind, in that ancient and agrarian culture, feet were routinely exposed to grime, garbage, and anything an animal could produce. There's no telling what these twelve sets of feet had going on as Jesus bent down to wash them.

It was so shocking and contrary to the honor due to Jesus that Peter tried to put a stop to it by essentially saying, "Surely, this can't be right. There must be some other way of doing what You want to do here!" But Jesus insisted and

promised that in time this would all make sense.

For now, there's no denying the servant status of Jesus. He went where nobody would go in the depth of serving these men. But He doesn't stop there. He uses His identity as a servant to give them a sense of purpose and even destiny for their own lives: "When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you'" (John 13:12-15 NIV).

The example of serving others we see in Jesus wasn't to end with Him. It was to be lived out by each of those who felt the Lord's hands take and cleanse their filthy feet. They were, in turn, to replicate what He had done to them—and the rest of the New Testament goes on to show us how they did exactly that.

And their example doesn't end with them because the New Testament also goes on to give us directions on how we're to live out our lives in serving others. And we can see this broken down in how we're to serve in life, in church, and even in heaven.

**Reflect:** *What are some common misconceptions when it comes to serving? How can you help to correct these misconceptions?*

## In Life

***“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”***

—MATTHEW 6:24 (NIV)

You may have gotten this far and thought, “Yeah, I’m not into the whole serving others thing. I think I’ll pass!” But according to Jesus in the Scripture above, nobody really has a choice in the matter. All of us are wired to serve something. It’s in our very nature. It’s as basic as breathing. At some point, when we peel back the layers of image and identity, we’ll find each person is devoted to serving.

It might be another person or an idealized fantasy of what life should be, but rest assured, something is commanding devotion. In the passage above, Jesus refers to “money” and the lust for it as a master that many people spend their life serving. But it’s just as true that a person can only really serve one master at a time. We’re either going to spend our lives obeying this voice of authority or that one,

but we can’t have it both ways. We can’t actively serve different masters. We’ll be forced into serving one or the other.

Up to this point, it sounds like we don’t really have much control over our lives, does it? We’re destined to serve, and we’re only able to serve one thing at a time. But what Jesus is showing us here is that we actually do have a choice, not in that we’ll serve but in who and what we’ll serve. We get to choose who and what we serve in life! And without question, the best choice we can ever make is to spend our lives serving God. This is basically what Jesus devoted His life to demonstrating. There’s no more fulfilling life of service than the one that’s serving the God of the Bible.

When we understand we’re all serving in some way, it transforms our attitude towards serving. It goes from being something we punch in and out of doing, to being something that defines our very existence. How long or often do we serve? As long as we’re alive, because that’s the very DNA of a life that’s been brought into relationship with the servant master, Jesus Christ!

Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV) tells us, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you

are serving.” Notice the word “whatever” in this passage. It reminds us that as servants of God in this life, we never really stop serving. Everything we set our body, soul, and spirit to is all coming from a servant’s heart.

Whether that’s the way we watch our neighbor’s mail for them, the way we parent a child, the way we honor our employer or employees, or care for the needs of those who are vulnerable, we’re ultimately serving the One who gave His life so we could know what it means to be His servant in life.

**Reflect:** *How does this understanding of serving and masters change the way you view your work, your home life, and tasks?*

## In Church

***“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”***

— GALATIANS 5:13 (NIV)

As true as the last point was, we need to explore serving in a more spiritually specific way. Yes, it’s important to be a servant in every aspect of our lives, but God puts a very special emphasis on how serving is to operate

among those who comprise His church. When Paul uses the expression, “my brothers and sisters” in the verse above, he’s referring to Christians within their own local church community. A local church is a spiritual family, consisting of spiritual siblings who are called to “serve one another humbly in love.”

We’ve already seen how the church has been constructed and gifted by God and how it’s been made to function and grow as an expression of Him to this world. But a major factor in the church’s existence is an emphasis on how its members are to use their gifts in serving one another. Paul puts this in no uncertain terms here in his letter to the Corinthian Church: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6 NIV).

What do we see here when it comes to serving within the church? We see God’s Spirit has given different spiritual gifts to different people. Each person is to exercise those different gifts in different forms of serving other members in the church. And God’s the one who is presiding over all these different acts of spiritual service. He’s like a conductor who’s orchestrating



a mass of musicians to make sure everything is in tune and on time.

Again, we've already seen each of these gifts described and detailed in a previous lesson. But our focus here is to see that these gifts, to be exercised in church, aren't to be self-serving but to be used in the service of others! There's only one spiritual gift that primarily edifies the individual exercising it, but the rest are intended to edify the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 14:4).

How long are we called to serve others through the spiritual gifts God gives to us? For as long as we're part of His church! Practical factors may require us to adjust the scope of our service in the church, but regardless of natural limitations, as servants of God, we'll always have something of spiritual substance to offer His people.

In fact, the longer we walk with the Lord, the more we have to offer others as His servants. And it's no mistake that at the end of a long and distinguished life, which lasted 120 years, Moses is identified as, "the servant of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 34:5 NIV). What a powerful reminder and motivator for us to spend our lives as Moses did! And we do so by being faithful stewards who use the gifts God has given us in serving His people within His church.

**Reflect:** *How do you see yourself in regards to biblical servanthood?*

## In Heaven

We've seen how serving is central to our entire existence here on earth. But did you know it's also something we'll all be doing even after we leave this life? It's true! In the very last chapter of the Book of Revelation, which reveals what our eternal state in heaven will be like, we're given the following glimpse of our future: "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:1-3 NIV).

Our serving never ends. Even in eternity as we're gathered around the One who came to serve and give His life as our ransom, it says we'll serve Him. It's as if God's reminding us there's no higher level to attain or go beyond than serving, even in eternity. Is there any better way of summarizing things? Could there be any more fitting way to describe the exalted honor of serving God and His purposes? May we do so with the entirety of our existence . . . starting now!

**Reflect:** What did God teach you about the fundamental nature of service?

*What are some things that stand out to you regarding the nature of servanthood and God's purpose for it? How would you share these with others?*

[illegible]

# EVANGELISM & MISSIONS

## memory verse:

*“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”*

—MATTHEW 28:18–20 (ESV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**ROMANS 10:13–15**

**PSALM 96:1–3**

**2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–21**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Early on in our journey, we learned, despite the media and news, good news actually does travel faster than bad news! When was the last time you had some good news? Do you have an example of some good news you've heard or had? What was the first thing you wanted to do when you found this out? Why?

Probably because when you have good news or something awesome happens, the first thing you want to do is share it with people! You send a group text, you tell your classmates or coworkers, you post about it on social media. Think about it, even when you find a new restaurant you love, read a great book, or watch an incredible movie, everyone needs to know! The reason we do this is because we want others to share in our joy and experience it for themselves!

As believers, we have the most amazing, life-changing news to share: the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's both our great and glorious privilege and our mission to share this good news. This was the mission given to us by Jesus before He ascended into heaven. In Matthew 28:19 (NIV), we're told, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is our call to share the good news!

**Reflect:** What do you think of when you hear the word "evangelism"?

## Evangelism Defined

As we established when we broke down what the gospel is, the Greek word for gospel is *euangelion*, which literally means "God's good news." Thus, evangelism is the act of sharing God's good news.

This is a topic that flat out makes people uncomfortable. It's a touchy subject for both believers and nonbelievers. For some, it brings up feelings of fear and anxiety. For others, it's unwelcomed, narrow-minded, and annoying. In fact, for many Christians, evangelism is the most difficult part of their faith. The idea of stepping up and sharing the gospel with a stranger, a classmate or coworker, or even worse, with a close friend or family member, has a lot of Christians shaking in their boots.

Different studies show that somewhere between 70 and 90% of Christians have never shared the gospel with someone, which means only two out of every 10 people who consider themselves Christians ever share the good news of Christ. If we're being honest, it's no easy task, but there's no way around it! The command to go and make disciples intrinsically involves evangelism because how will people know if they don't hear it from someone? Evangelism is absolutely vital to the Christian life, and in this chapter, we'll discover why.

**Reflect:** Why do you think evangelism is vital to the Christian life?

## Evangelism Is Not Optional; It's Our Identity

If you've been saved by Jesus, you've been sent by Jesus. Evangelism isn't just for pastors or missionaries—it's for all believers. Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19) and to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Paul said people can't believe if they've never heard. And they can't hear without someone preaching to them (Romans 10:14).

**Reflect:** *What do these Scriptures show you about God's heart for evangelism?*

## Evangelism Is a Lifestyle, Not a Script

Jesus didn't just preach the gospel—He lived it. He served, loved, forgave, and walked humbly. In the same way, evangelism must be both word and witness. People aren't just listening to what we say—they're watching how we live.

Titus 2 reminds us that our lives should "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive." Our integrity, compassion, and humility either validate or contradict our message.

**Reflect:** *How have you or someone else been a living witness to the gospel?*

## Evangelism Is a Matter of Life and Death

People without Christ are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2). That's not a metaphor—it's the reality. Hell is real, and so is eternity. Evangelism isn't a guilt trip—it's a rescue mission. We have the antidote for sin. How can we stay silent?

**Reflect:** *What makes sharing the gospel hard for you? What helps you push past that?*

## Evangelism Is a Privilege

God could've sent angels to proclaim the gospel, but He chose us. Why? Because He wants us to experience the joy of His work. Like a parent letting their child "help" decorate the Christmas tree, God invites us into the mission—not because He needs us, but because He loves us.

Luke 15 says heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents. We get to be part of that party. Evangelism isn't something we have to do—it's something we get to do.

## Evangelism Takes Practice

Evangelism doesn't become natural overnight. It takes intentional practice. Just like any skill, the more you do it, the more comfortable and effective you'll become. Look at daily moments—errands,

conversations, inconveniences—as divine appointments.

1 Peter 3:15 says we must be ready to give a reason for our hope with gentleness and respect. That means being confident in our story and familiar with the gospel message.

## Evangelism and Missions

Evangelism and missions aren't two separate ideas—they're two expressions of the same calling. Evangelism is the everyday lifestyle of sharing Jesus right where we are. Missions is the broader call to take that same message across cultures, cities, and continents. Whether we're speaking with a neighbor across the street or a stranger across the ocean, the message is the same: Jesus saves. The Great Commission isn't just a call to go far . . . it's a call to live sent. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples they'll be His witnesses in Jerusalem (local), Judea and Samaria (regional), and to the ends of the earth (global). This isn't a step-by-step process—it's a simultaneous call to live missionally wherever we are and wherever we're sent.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING MISSIONS

### Starting With the End in Mind

To understand the importance of missions, we have to start with the

big picture. The story of Scripture follows a four-part arc: creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration. God created humanity to fill the earth with His glory. And in the end, that purpose is fulfilled when every tribe, tongue, and nation worships before His throne (Revelation 7:9). Missions exists because worship doesn't . . . yet.

## The Missional God

From the very beginning, God had a plan to redeem the world through His Son (Revelation 13:8). His mission isn't just to save souls from hell, but to reconcile sinners to Himself so they can live out their true purpose: to know and glorify God. Missions isn't just what we do—it's who God is.

## A Missional Family

God called Abraham to be a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1–3), then He formed Israel to live set apart, reflecting His character to the world (Exodus 19:5–6). Through them, God's salvation would reach the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6). From one man to one nation to all nations, this has always been God's redemptive trajectory.

## Jesus: The Mission Made Flesh

Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's missional love (John 3:16). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), to bring prodigals home, and to call His followers to be salt

and light. He didn't just come to rescue us—He sent us (John 20:21). In Him, we see both the message and the model of God's mission.

## The Church: God's New Missionary Nation

Before ascending, Jesus gave His disciples a final command: to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). Empowered by the Spirit (Acts 1:8), the early church spread the gospel across hostile territory, forming a new nation—the church—made up of every tribe and tongue (Ephesians 2:14–20).

That same commission still applies today. We're citizens of heaven, sent to proclaim the gospel in every space we enter—locally and globally—until the whole earth is filled with the glory of the Lord (Habakkuk 2:14).

**Reflect:** *How do these principles impact the way you view missions and your role in it?*

## LIVING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION

The mission has always been to know God and reveal His glory. So, how do we do this? We take Jesus at His word.

### We Go

To live “missionally” for God and fulfill the Great Commission requires action. We can't stay put or stay

quiet, we must go (Matthew 28:19a). The Greek word for go is *poreuomai*, which means “to transport something from one port to another; to pursue the journey on which one has entered; to continue one's journey.”

To go out with the gospel message means we carry the truth of what Christ has done from one person to the next. It's a journey we enter when we choose to follow Jesus; one we set out on continually.

## We Rely on His Power

This lifelong journey isn't one we can complete in our own strength—we need God's power working in and through us. Jesus promised we'd receive *dunamis*—explosive power from the Holy Spirit—for this mission. God hasn't left us unequipped; He's given us everything we need to carry out the Great Commission. The pressure isn't on us to convert anyone—that's the Holy Spirit's role (John 16:8–11). Our job is simply to be willing vessels who share the message with those ready to listen. Just like the early disciples, who received the Spirit and boldly preached Christ, we, too, can be used by God when we lay down our fears and trust the Spirit to work through us (Acts 2:14–41, 4:1–4, 8:4–13).

**Reflect:** *What are practical ways to rely on the Holy Spirit in order to share the gospel?*

## We Live as Witnesses

Jesus told His disciples the Holy Spirit would empower them to be witnesses—people who testify to what they’ve seen and heard. In a courtroom, a witness confirms or refutes claims. In the same way, we’re empowered by the Spirit to testify to Jesus’ death, resurrection, and redemptive work in our lives.

In *The Chosen*, when asked how she was healed, Mary Magdalene replies, “I was one way, and now I’m completely different. And the thing that happened in between was Him.” We each have a story of how Jesus brought us from darkness to light—and that story matters.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus calls His followers to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The mission starts locally and spreads globally. Just as the disciples began in Jerusalem and carried the gospel to unfamiliar places, we begin where we are and trust God to lead us where He wants us next.

This may mean serving in a local outreach, going on a mission trip, supporting a missionary, or even becoming a full-time missionary. Not everyone is called to move overseas, but every believer is called to live sent—to carry Jesus’ message wherever He places them: at home, school, work, the gym, the grocery store, or

in conversation with a neighbor or friend.

**Reflect:** *Do you have a hard time telling others about Jesus? Why or why not?*

## We Make Disciples

Jesus’ commission wasn’t just to tell others about Him—it was to make disciples. There’s a big difference. Sharing the gospel is essential, but so is walking with others in their spiritual growth. Leading someone in a prayer is just the beginning. We’re called to help one another grow into maturity (Hebrews 10:19–25). Jesus commands His followers to produce other followers.

Making disciples moves us beyond impersonal evangelism—saying “Jesus loves you” to strangers—and into real relationships where we invest spiritually. God’s relational; He desires relationship with us, and His method of discipleship reflects that.

Jesus modeled this with His twelve disciples, with Zacchaeus (Luke 19), the Samaritan woman (John 4), and friends like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (Luke 10:38–42). If we want to spread the gospel effectively, we must adopt the same approach. What if we intentionally engaged with our neighbors, baristas, coworkers, and classmates—not just in conversation, but in discipleship?



What if we committed to mentoring a new believer in our church? If each of us made just one disciple who then made another, we'd begin to see ripple effects in our church, city, and world. Christ's light would shine brighter, pushing back darkness and filling the earth with His glory.

**Reflect:** *What barriers often keep us from being disciple-makers? How can we overcome them?*

## We Baptize and Teach Others

Just as Jesus was baptized, He calls His followers to be baptized, too. Baptism means to be dipped or immersed in water, symbolizing the washing away of our sins and our old life and rising into the new life we receive through the Holy Spirit. It's a powerful picture of dying to self and being born again in Christ. Baptism also represents being immersed in God's presence—saturated with His love and power until it overflows from us.

We help others deepen their relationship with Jesus by teaching them the significance of baptism and encouraging them to pursue it. We also urge them to seek God's presence daily and grow a hunger for Him. But baptism is only part of the Great Commission. Jesus also calls us to teach others to obey His commands (Matthew 28:20), which means passing on the truths of our faith with grace and clarity (2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:1).

We don't need to be scholars—we just need to know, live, and share what Jesus taught. When God's Word is hidden in our hearts and lived out in our lives, we're equipped to help others do the same.

## We Serve Those In Need

Jesus lived a life of service to others (Mark 10:45). He healed the sick, fed the hungry, delivered the tormented and oppressed, and showed compassion to the outcast. Part of our mission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth means we not only preach His words and share our testimonies, but we also do the deeds He did. Jesus is clear about this in the parable of the Sheep and Goats: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40 ESV). James, Jesus' brother, takes this teaching further by saying that our service to others proves the genuineness of our faith (James 2:14-17). This means that living on mission to bring the gospel to others requires serving those in need. We must meet their spiritual and physical needs, just as Jesus did to those He served.

## Living as Ready Ambassadors

A life on mission with God to reach the lost requires us to be ready to share the gospel at all times and serve others as we're led by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 2:4). We're

called to be willing vessels whom the Lord can use anywhere we go. So as ready ambassadors, any place we step into where the gospel needs to be shared becomes our missionary field.

Like the famous shoemaker, D.L. Moody, who started Sunday schools in the impoverished areas of Chicago to reach children with the gospel, which eventually became the Illinois Street Church, God used a willing servant who used his business skills to leverage the gospel message and spark a revival in his city. Similarly, the young missionary Amy Carmichael founded the Dohnavur Fellowship in 1901, a safe haven for girls who were being exploited and abused in the Indian temples. The Dohnavur Fellowship rescued nearly 1,000 girls and boys out of prostitution and exploitation during Amy's lifetime, and to this day, the organization is still devoted to rescuing children and providing them with a safe home, education, and health, rooted in the love of Christ.

We don't have to travel far to bring the gospel to others. We can start right where we are by looking to the needs of our neighborhoods and communities and daring to ask the Holy Spirit how He might want to use us to bring redemption to those places. Any given moment in our day can become a holy opportunity for God to use us to minister to someone with the gospel

message when we make ourselves attuned and available to Him.

God's on a mission to restore the world and all His creation to Himself. Those who haven't received His offer of salvation by confessing Jesus as their Lord and Savior remain dead in their sins and are destined to eternal separation from God. God wants to partner with us to share with others the good news of His love and redemption. Our lives are the witness to this good news and God's glorified when we boldly declare who He is and what He's done.

One day, God's mission will be complete and those who received His offer of salvation through His son will dwell with Him because the earth will finally be restored! In the new heavens and earth there will be no more sin or sorrow and the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. While we await that glorious day, we've been charged with the greatest assignment: leading others to Jesus through our words and deeds.

**Reflect:** *Why are both local and global missions necessary?*

# PURPOSE, MISSION, & BEING IN THE WORLD

## memory verse:

*"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

—MATTHEW 5:16 (NIV)

## this week's Bible reading

Spend at least three days this week reading through the following passages and reflect on the questions below in your time in the Word.

**TITUS 2:11–14**

**PSALM 138:8**

**MATTHEW 28:19–20**

1. What stuck out to you? What did you observe?
2. How did this section of Scripture change your view of God, yourself, and the world?
3. How can you apply this section of Scripture to your life right now?

## this week's prayer time

As you pray this week, here are a few things to consider and talk to God about:

1. What are you praying for?
2. Who are you praying for?
3. What do you need to confess?
4. What am I thankful for?

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard the expression “I’m always on my mind”? It’s a clever play on words to express the idea that we are, by nature, self-absorbed and self-centered beings.

Whether we want to admit it or not, by nature most of us live as though the entire universe revolves around us; we live with tunnel vision that rarely looks beyond our own lives and circumstances to the lives of others. Even as believers, this is a difficult hurdle to overcome because it’s so deeply embedded within our sinful nature, and it requires serious intentionality and daily surrendering to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you may be wondering, “What does this have to do with my purpose, my individual chief end in life?” Well . . . just that! More often than not, each of us think so individually about things like calling and purpose.

What’s **MY** purpose? What’s **MY** calling? What’s **MY** life about?

Perhaps it’s partially a byproduct of Western culture, which is obsessed with individuality. Perhaps it’s simply that pesky human nature. Regardless, we tend to make things like our purpose so immensely individualistic, and we worry so intensely about whether or not we’re fulfilling our purpose, calling, and getting the most out of life. And even worse, we tie things like vocation, marriage, and children—among

other things—to our barometer of success or failure.

We believe things like, “If I’m not happy in my job then I must not be living out my true purpose and I’m missing out on my calling,” or, “If I’m not married with kids by 35, then I’m missing out,” or even worse, “This marriage isn’t fulfilling, I feel like I’m being held back; they’re not meeting my expectations, so I’m getting a divorce.” If you’ve ever felt anything like this or if you’re currently feeling anything like this, know that 1) you’re not alone and 2) none of these things are true!

**Reflect:** *What thoughts about your purpose do you struggle with?*

## Your Purpose Isn’t That Personal

Wait, so your career doesn’t define your purpose? No. It doesn’t matter if you work as a food server, a CEO, a social worker, a pro athlete, a teacher, a missionary in Iran, a customer service rep, or an electrician? No. It doesn’t matter how much social influence you have or how many followers you have? No. You don’t have to change jobs or get married or have three kids, a dog, and a white picket fence to fulfill your purpose? No. You can accomplish your calling, live out your purpose, and find meaning and fulfillment in any situation? Yes!

Now, please don’t misunderstand, if you’re miserable at your job and dread it every day, it’s perfectly okay

to pray about a career change. But please don't expect to switch jobs and suddenly find that everything in life will magically fall into place if you're not actually living out your TRUE PURPOSE . . . a purpose that isn't all that unique, individual, or personally crafted . . . a purpose you can accomplish at any job, in any neighborhood, city, or country, married or single, with kids or without, rich or poor. So, what is it?

## The Chief End of Man

Consider the timeless words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which so beautifully sums up our purpose: "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."

Now, while this phrase isn't a direct quote from the Word, the wisdom behind it absolutely is. Over and over again, with vivid clarity, the Bible tells us that human beings were created to bring glory to God, to exalt and enjoy relationship with Him. We were made to know Him and be known by Him and called to make Him known! There's no higher calling, no other true purpose. And this purpose can be fulfilled regardless of who you are, where you come from, where you are, or what you do.

In John 1:3–4 (NIV), we're told, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In

him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind," and Romans 11:36 (NIV) says, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." Do you see it? Life is all about Jesus. He is life, He is light. His light in your life brings life and purpose and meaning to everything you do, regardless of the career you find yourself in, the city you're in, or season of life.

Now, consider Colossians 3:17 (ESV), "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Are you working in a job you don't find fulfilling? Find your fulfillment in Christ Jesus and view your workplace as 1) your mission field and 2) a place to glorify the name of the Lord Jesus. The truth is that until you find your fulfillment and satisfaction in your relationship with Jesus, no dream job or relationship, no amount of money or pleasures will ever truly satisfy (John 4:1–42, 6:22–51).

Finally, consider Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV), "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God's prepared good works for you in Christ Jesus. Do you think these can't be worked in if you're in the

“wrong” job or place? Of course He can—He’s in control; all things are worked together by Him for good to accomplish His purposes. So, trust in the Lord and walk in the good works He has prepared for you!

**Reflect:** *How does this truth about your God-given purpose and mission in this world impact what you think and how you live?*

## Your Mission Is Individual and Corporate

Did you know 41.8% of the global population still remains unreached by the gospel (JoshuaProject.net)? This means 41.8% of the world doesn’t have easy access to hear the gospel or Christians living close enough to witness to them. Now, consider the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 10:14–15 (NLT):

“But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, ‘How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!’”

According to Barna research in 2018, only 64% of Christians believe it’s their responsibility to share their faith. A 2019 Lifeway study shows that 55% of Christians surveyed had

not shared their faith with anyone in the last six months. Can you imagine going six months without talking about the most important thing in your life? Can parents go six months without telling someone about their kids? Can you go six months without talking about your job, your favorite show or movie, politics, etc.? Probably not. How then can more than half of people who call themselves Christians go six months without telling someone about their life in Christ?

Friend, if you’re in Christ, if you’re His disciple, you’ve been sent. It’s not just a call for 45% of Christians or the job of a select group of super Christians or pastors. It’s our collective mission, but it’s also your individual mission. Bible college training isn’t required to do this. Like the blind man in John 9:25 (NIV), you don’t need to know everything, because he said, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” And here’s something amazing to remember: You’re not alone in the mission.

Jesus said, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20 NIV). He also said the Father will give us an advocate to help us and be with us forever (John 14:26). We have the Father, Son, and Spirit, and we have one another, the body of Christ, the church, our brothers and sisters. As the famous Disney song says, “We’re all in this together!” We get to do this together!

**Reflect:** *How do you see the mission of God for your life as both individual and corporate? Why is this important?*

## Unashamed of the Gospel, No Matter What

Have you ever been ashamed of something? Doubtless, you've seen situations where people who support a certain worldview, lifestyle, politician, company, or group lie about it or remain silent because they're afraid of negative consequences. In today's era of cancel culture, culture wars, and social media feuds, it's easy to see why.

Even true, Bible-believing, Jesus-professing Christians aren't immune to this. Often, we're ashamed and afraid to share the gospel because the world is increasingly hostile toward believers. But look at what Paul says in Romans 1:16 (NIV): "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." Listen to why Paul says we should NEVER feel shame about the gospel: "Because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." We never have to wonder whether or not we misplaced our confidence because this "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our

hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5 NIV).

In the verses that precede Romans 1:16, Paul talks about coming to Rome to preach to Greeks and non-Greeks, wise and foolish, and anyone he's given the opportunity to speak to. It didn't matter who he stood before, he wasn't ashamed to share the gospel. And that's saying something, because Paul stood before a lot of people who considered him their enemy and didn't agree with him. Why? Because the gospel is the power of God to save and transform! In the same way the gospel doesn't discriminate based on a person's lifestyle, culture, ethnicity, class, or background, and instead calls all to repentance and salvation, we need to be people whose hearts overflow with compassion for those who don't yet know Jesus.

**Reflect:** *What hinders you from being unashamed and bold about the gospel?*

*How can you grow a heart for those who are different from you to know the gospel too?*

## Effective Missional Living

What would it take for the people around us to really think well of Christians? A recent Lifeway study conducted showed, of the several thousand people interviewed,

"72% said they think the church is full of hypocrites," and "44 percent said Christians get on my nerves." Here are some other statements that were made about believers:

- 1. The church is an organized religion with a political agenda.**
- 2. The church is judgmental and negative.**
- 3. The church is dominated by males and oppresses females.**
- 4. The church is homophobic.**
- 5. The church is arrogant and claims everyone else is wrong.**

Christian author and pastor Ed Stetzer had this to say:

*There will always be the stumbling block of the cross. Yet our study shows that many are tripping over the church before they hear the message of the cross.*

**Reflect:** *What would it take for the people around us to think well of Christians?*

The answer to this question, in a nutshell, is the question the short, three-chapter Book of Titus seeks to answer. It shows us the way we live matters! Titus is a complete blueprint for disciples to

follow and live by in every arena; from church life, to home life, to public life.

In this book, the apostle Paul challenged Titus to appoint Christian leaders in the church whose lives were above reproach, people who had their heart and house in order, who conducted themselves with integrity and made the gospel attractive by their lifestyle! Look at Titus 3:1-2 (NIV), "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone." And then in verse 8, he says: "I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good." When Paul wrote this, he was dealing with Emperor Nero, the man who launched a centuries-long campaign of persecution against Christians, who set Christians on fire to light his gardens, and who beheaded and crucified Christians.

It's safe to say Paul didn't like Nero or agree with Nero's decisions, but there is a way to not agree with the governing authorities, certain laws and regulations, and even other people around us while still showing integrity and respect, treating people with kindness, and being tangible expressions of peace and gentleness. When we



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**WEEK 25: PURPOSE, MISSION, & BEING IN THE WORLD**

WEEK 26

# YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE MISSION FIELD

As we come to a close of this discipleship curriculum and journey, let's take a moment to remember the final words of Jesus Himself.

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

—MATTHEW 28:18-20 (NIV)

Jesus gives us **four ALL's** that give us clear and encouraging promises!

**AUTHORITY** – Because Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, there's no excuse for us not to listen and obey. This is straight from the commander and chief of our faith!

**NATIONS** – Jesus has sent us to all the nations, to all groups of people, because there's no exclusivity with his gospel! We should actively seek to engage those who don't know who Jesus is.

**COMMANDS** – Making disciples comes with the expectation that we teach and train others on how to be one! Everything Jesus has commanded us should be passed down, just like this curriculum seeks to do.

**PRESENCE** – The best part of all of this, of being a disciple of Christ, is that He promises His continual and faithful presence to us! We have no reason to fear and all the more reason to go into the world boldly and joyfully.

This is the heart behind our discipleship study; that we'd truly learn to be disciples because then we can also make them. May you walk forward with a sense of confidence in who God saved you to be, what He's called you to do, and the abundant and eternal life He promises you!

## Where We've Been

For the past 25 weeks, you've committed to a journey—a path of growth, transformation, and discipleship. Along the way, you've explored the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, immersed yourself in spiritual disciplines, learned how to walk in community, and discovered what it means to live life on mission. You've spent time in God's Word, wrestled with truth, grown in grace, and been challenged to live like Jesus. This wasn't just about learning information—it was about heart transformation, forming habits of holiness, and living a life that glorifies God.

We began with the basics: what it means to follow Jesus, how to hear His voice through Scripture, how to pray and seek Him daily. We walked through the gospel, baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit, worship, and the importance of spiritual disciplines like solitude, Sabbath, and community. We examined our lives through the lens of Scripture and sought to become more like Christ in every area—our thoughts, speech, relationships, habits, and purpose.

And now, as we reach the final week, we don't arrive at an ending . . . we stand at a beginning. The next chapter isn't written in this guide as a lesson to discuss; it's the journey God takes you on from

here, written in your heart. The next chapter is your mission field!

## Head. Heart. Hands.

Over these months, we've aligned our:

*Head* with the truth of God's Word, learning who He is and what He's done through unpacking essential doctrines.

*Heart* with His character by cultivating love for Jesus, compassion for others, and holy surrender through essential disciplines of the Christian life.

*Hands* with His mission, learning to live out our faith in obedience, service, evangelism, and discipleship through the understanding of essential practices of Christian service.

When all three are in alignment, we become whole disciples . . . people who not only believe the gospel, but embody it in how we live, love, and lead.

## A Life of Impact

Discipleship isn't a one-time program or checklist that ends today; it's a lifelong pursuit of Jesus. It's long obedience in the same direction. And the best part is that it multiplies. Every truth you've learned, every spiritual habit you've developed, every

moment you've experienced with God is now something you can pass on. God has uniquely placed you to influence others.

"You are now entering the mission field." It's a sign that hangs near exits at Calvary Chapel. But it's more than a slogan or a theory; it's a reality we get to live every day.

For you, that mission field will likely be your home, your school, your workplace, your neighborhood, or even a call to the nations. Wherever it is, go with confidence knowing that "the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood" will "equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen" (Hebrews 13:20–21 NLT).

## Reflecting on the Journey

Take time this week to sit with these questions, journal your thoughts, and pray through them:

***What's one truth about God that has become more real to you through this journey?***

***How has your understanding of the gospel deepened or shifted?***

***In what specific ways have you grown spiritually—through habits, mindset, or relationships?***

***What spiritual disciplines have become part of your regular life?***

***What did God convict you of during this time, and how did you respond?***

***What was the most challenging part of this journey?***

***What was the most transformative or memorable part of this journey?***

***Who in your life do you feel called to disciple now?***

***What's your next step in obedience to Jesus?***

***How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus—in a word or sentence?***

## **Commissioning and Blessing**

You're a disciple of Jesus Christ. You've been called, taught,

shaped, and sent. As Jesus said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16 NIV).

Today, you're commissioned, not as a formal ceremony, but as a sacred moment between you and God. This is your sending! You're being released into the mission field—not alone, not ill-equipped, but as an empowered ambassador of Christ who is part of a global family, who has built real, deep, lasting relationships over the last 25 weeks.

You've been entrusted with the gospel, and now you're a carrier of that good news. You've been disciplined, and now you're called to make disciples. You're not perfect, but you're willing. You may feel unqualified, but the Spirit qualifies the called. So . . .

**Go with clarity of purpose to love God, love people, and make disciples.**

**Go with conviction of truth, anchored in the Word and filled with the Spirit.**

**Go with courage in weakness, knowing His power is made perfect in your surrender.**

**Go with a compassionate heart, seeing others as Jesus does.**

**Go with kingdom eyes to see your everyday world as sacred ground for your mission.**

**You're a light in the darkness.**

**You're salt in a world that needs preserving.**

**You're a minister of reconciliation.**

**You're a *disciple* who makes disciples.**

May your hands be ready, your heart be steadfast, your mind be renewed, and your feet be willing to go wherever Jesus leads.

## **A Prayer Over You**

And now, just as the apostle Paul would pray over the churches he ministered to and wrote his epistles to, we pray this over you...

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You with overflowing joy for each soul who has walked this path of discipleship. We praise You for the work You've begun in them—the seeds planted, the truths revealed, the hearts softened, the lives transformed by Your*

*grace. We remember them in our prayers with gratitude and delight because of their partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. We're confident that You who began a good work in them will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*Lord, we ask that their love would abound more and more in knowledge and in depth of insight. Fill them with the knowledge of Your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Each and every day, enlighten the eyes of their hearts more and more so they may know the hope to which You've called them—the riches of Your grace.*

*Strengthen them with everything they need to accomplish the purposes and plans You've set before them. May they be filled with Your Spirit and produce every good fruit to the praise of Your Name.*

*We ask, Lord, that You'd protect them from the enemy's attacks, anchor them in truth, and establish them in love. May their faith stand strong, their joy remain full, and their light shine brightly.*

*Grant them courage to obey You in all things. Surround them with godly community. Let their witness be bold, their service be humble, their hearts remain tender, and their lives proclaim the beauty of the gospel.*

*May they grow in grace, live worthy of the calling they have received, and bring glory to You in every season of life.*

*We send them now into the mission field—into schools and homes, workplaces and neighborhoods, churches and nations—with the peace of Christ ruling in their hearts, the Word of Christ dwelling richly within them, and the Spirit of Christ empowering them day by day. In the strong, wonderful, mighty, and matchless Name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

## **Now What?**

This curriculum may be done, but your walk isn't. Here are a few ideas for what's next:

Begin leading a group through the same journey you just finished.

Commit to discipling one or two people intentionally.

Revisit the topics you struggled with most and keep growing.

Stay in community.

Don't walk alone.

Stay in Scripture. Stay in prayer. Stay on mission.

**Jesus is with you always.**

**The mission continues.**

**You are now entering the mission field.**

# KEY MEMORY VERSES



## God

GENESIS 1:1  
JOHN 4:24  
ROMANS 1:20

## Jesus Christ

JOHN 1:1, 14  
JOHN 8:58  
COLOSSIANS 1:16

## God's Nature & Power

PSALM 90:2  
ISAIAH 46:9–10  
1 JOHN 4:8

## The Bible

2 TIMOTHY 3:16  
MATTHEW 4:4  
JOHN 17:17

## Kingdom of God

DANIEL 7:27  
MATTHEW 6:33  
1 CORINTHIANS 15:50

## The Gospel

MARK 1:14–15  
MATTHEW 24:14  
GALATIANS 1:8–9

## Sin

ISAIAH 59:2  
ROMANS 6:23  
1 JOHN 3:4

## 10 Commandments

MATTHEW 5:17–19  
ROMANS 7:12  
1 JOHN 5:3

## The Sabbath

GENESIS 2:2–3  
EZEKIEL 20:20  
MARK 2:27–28

## God's Holy Days

LEVITICUS 23:2  
ZECHARIAH 14:16  
1 CORINTHIANS 5:7–8

## God's Love

DEUTERONOMY 7:9  
JOHN 3:16  
1 JOHN 4:8

## Death

ECCLESIASTES 9:5, 10  
JOHN 3:13  
HEBREWS 9:27

## Resurrections

JOHN 5:28–29  
1 CORINTHIANS 15:51–52  
REVELATION 20:4–6

## The Church

MATTHEW 16:18  
1 CORINTHIANS 14:33  
COLOSSIANS 1:18

## Faith

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7  
HEBREWS 11:1, 6  
JAMES 2:17

## God's Plan

HEBREWS 2:10  
1 TIMOTHY 2:4  
2 PETER 3:9

## Prayer

PSALM 55:17  
MATTHEW 6:6  
JAMES 5:16

## Healing

EXODUS 15:26  
ISAIAH 53:5  
JAMES 5:14

## Christian Living

ROMANS 8:9–10  
GALATIANS 2:20  
JAMES 1:27

## False Christianity

MARK 7:7  
LUKE 6:46  
1 JOHN 2:4

## Return of Christ

1 THESSALONIANS 4:16  
HEBREWS 9:28  
REVELATION 19:11–12

## Baptism

ACTS 2:38  
ROMANS 6:4  
COLOSSIANS 2:12–13

## Repentance

MATTHEW 3:8  
ACTS 3:19  
ROMANS 2:4

# SPIRITUAL GIFTS

## Motivation

### 1. Prophecy

- PROCLAIM TRUTH
- EXPOSE SIN

Old Testament prophets predicted judgment for the sins of God's people. Today, the motivation of a prophet is to use Scripture to reveal unrighteous motives and actions.

### 2. Serving

- MEET NEEDS
- FREE OTHERS

The mature motivation of a server is to minister to Christ by meeting the needs of fellow believers.

### 3. Teaching

- CLARIFY TRUTH
- VALIDATE INFORMATION

The motivation of a teacher is to make sure the facts are accurate so the decisions which are based upon them can also be correct.

### 4. Exhorting

- STIMULATE FAITH
- PROMOTE GROWTH

The motivation of an exhorter is to see Christians grow in faith and maturity so unbelievers will be attracted to the gospel by their lives.

## Ministry

### 1. Apostles

- SENT FORTH
- MISSIONARY

In New Testament days, "the apostles" referred to the Twelve. The meaning of the Greek word for apostle is "one sent forth." Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles and was sent forth from Antioch along with Barnabas and later Silas. The Latin word for apostle is translated "missionary."

### 2. Prophets

- PROCLAIMERS
- CONFRONT CHRISTIANS

A pastor who proclaims God's truth in the pulpit is fulfilling the ministry of a prophet.

### 3. Teachers

- INSTRUCTORS
- CERTIFY MESSAGE

The ministry of a pastor will also involve teaching. In fact, a qualification for an elder is that he be "apt to teach." All parents are to be teachers of their children, and older women are to be teachers of younger women.

### 4. Miracles

- SUPERNATURAL DEEDS
- ACTIVE FAITH

This ministry gift grows out of believing prayer. As we exercise faith in prayer, God's able to accomplish natural or supernatural events with precise timing in order to bring glory to Himself.

## Manifestation

### 1. Word of Wisdom

- SEEING LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

As a Christian exercises his gift, one of the results that's developed is a fear of the Lord, which is the "beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7).

### 2. Word of Knowledge

- COMPREHENDING CHRIST AND HIS WORD

Knowledge comes as the Holy Spirit opens one's understanding, because things of God are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

### 3. Faith

- VISUALIZING WHAT GOD WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH

Faith is the result of hearing the Word of God as it's proclaimed and taught (Romans 10:17).

### 4. Healings

- REMOVING DISEASES FROM THE SPIRIT, SOUL, OR BODY

The diseases of the spirit are bitterness, greed, and guilt. The diseases of the soul are discouragement, worry, jealousy, and other destructive attitudes. (See Psalm 103:1-3).

