



# SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



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## Spiritual Disciplines Study

Do you want more from your relationship with God? Is reading your bible difficult? Is your *quiet time* a struggle, few and far between? Do you feel guilty about the lack of time you spend in prayer? Do you think of the word “Sabbath” and laugh at the thought of a weekly day of rest?

If so, then you’re in good company. Most of us want to live in deeper relationship with God, with greater trust and intimacy, and yet we get stuck on how to make that happen. We want our relationship with God to flourish, and yet for most of us, if we’re honest, it’s dry, lonely, and last on our list of things we need to “get done”.

So how does this change? How can we grow our love for the LORD without trying harder, doing more, and feeling guilt and shame when we fall short or don’t meet expectations?

The Gospel.

**God’s love for us is the motivator in cultivating our love for Him.**

Through Jesus; His life, death, and resurrection, we are promised right relationship with our Heavenly Father. In resting in His finished work on the cross, the privilege of discipleship is no longer duty, but delight.

My hope in this study is that we find freedom and creativity for how we practice spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are ways we as Christians can connect to God and help nourish our relationship with Him. Spiritual disciplines such as bible study, prayer, worship, fasting, serving, and Sabbath are ways we grow closer to the LORD. For years, many have taken spiritual disciplines and turned them into a legalistic means of earning God’s approval or favor. Our practice of spiritual disciplines does not atone, save, redeem, or earn God’s love for us. The Gospel tells us we cannot be loved any more or any less in Christ. Spiritual disciplines don’t earn us more of God’s favor or approval, again we are made right through Jesus. Spiritual disciplines are simply a means for deepening our relationship with God, an expression of love and relationship between Father and daughter.

My prayer for this study is that we practice all of these spiritual disciplines out of an overflow of the Gospel, that we would understand God’s great love for us and His redeeming grace and let all that we do be in response to that.

Each week, we will look at scripture to learn why and how we can practice each discipline, and then we will apply it. We will hear from a panel of women, who are in different seasons of life, share how they practice the disciplines. My hope is that after these 8 weeks, we will all be equipped with new ways to connect to God and delight in Him.

	4/27	Intro	p. 4
Week 1	5/4	Bible Study	p. 7
Week 2	5/11	Prayer	p. 20
Week 3	5/18	Worship	p. 28
Week 4	5/25	Fasting	p. 37
Week 5	6/1	Thanksgiving	p. 45
Week 6	6/8	Serving & Giving	p. 53
Week 7	6/15	Sabbath & Rest	p. 61



## Intro Week

“In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. **On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.** It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” (1 Timothy 4:6-10)

Donald Whitney (who you will hear a lot from in this study) says in an article for Life Way, “No Christian coasts into Christlikeness. Godliness, according to this text, requires training. Some Bible translations render ‘train’ as ‘exercise’ (KJV) or ‘discipline’ (NASB). Thus the biblical and practical ways in daily life of living out this command to “train yourself for godliness” have often been termed “spiritual exercises” or ‘spiritual disciplines.’ What was true in Paul’s day is still true: it is by means of the spiritual disciplines found in Scripture that we are to pursue godliness.

Of course, legalism is always a danger in spirituality. Anything a Christian can count, measure, or record he can also twist into something that falsely assures by this - instead of the sufficiency of the life and death of Jesus - he is more spiritually secure or favored by God. But just because we can misuse the disciplines of godliness doesn’t mean we should neglect them. “Train yourself for godliness” is God’s command. Therefore, it must be possible to pursue obedience to it without legalism.

### **How do Christians practice gospel-centered spirituality?**

First, **practice the right disciplines** - those personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines found in the Bible. A gospel-centered spirituality is a sola scriptura spirituality. For individual practice, the most important personal spiritual disciplines are the intake of Scripture and prayer. All the others relate to these two. The interpersonal spiritual disciplines we’re to observe are primarily those biblical practices related to life together in a local church.

Second, **practice the right disciplines with the right goal** - with Jesus as the focus, pursuing intimacy with Christ and conformity (both inward and outward) to Christ. To put it more succinctly, by means of the biblical spiritual disciplines seek to be with Jesus and like Jesus.

Third, **practice the right disciplines the right way**. Emphasize the person and work of Jesus in each one. Through them, learn from, gaze upon, and enjoy who Jesus is and what He has done. Let your soul be restored through by the truths of the gospel.

Engage in the spiritual disciplines given by God in Scripture so that you are continually shown your need for Christ and the infinite supply of grace and mercy to be found by faith in Jesus Christ.”

*Whitney, Donald. “Gospel Centered Spiritual Disciplines”. LifeWay. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/gospel-centered-spiritual-disciplines-training-godliness-sanctification-holiness>*

1. Do you agree that no Christian can coast their way into Christlikeness? Why or why not?

2. Look up the word “discipline” in the dictionary. Using that definition as well as Paul’s words above to Timothy, what do you see as the benefit to practicing spiritual disciplines?

3. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus right now?

4. Are there things in your life you think will earn you God’s approval or favor?

5. Why would approaching this study out of an overflow of the Gospel be so important for us? (If the good news or Gospel of Jesus is new to you, find out more by turning to page 69.)

6. What are your hopes for this study? How are you hoping to grow?





## Week 1: Bible Study

“No other Spiritual Discipline rivals the importance of the intake of God’s Word. No other Spiritual Discipline can compensate for the lack of it. Without feasting on the food of Scripture, no one will enjoy a growing, healthy Christlike life.”

–Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

### **Day 1: Why Read the Bible?**

Of all the ways God can reveal Himself to His people, the most complete and comprehensive way He has chosen to do so is through His word. While we can experience God in many different ways, He has given us the full counsel of scripture to know Him in very specific ways.

We can learn His character, His heart for the lost, the least, the nations, the marginalized, the scandalous, the sick, the chosen, the poor and the weary by studying the scriptures. We learn His response to the humble and His response to the prideful by understanding His word. We learn how He is a loving Father, setting out guidelines for life by studying the Law, and learn His great love for us as a Redeemer by studying grace and understanding the Gospel.

A few years back, when sharing about Christ with a woman her response to me was “Of course I believe God and accept Jesus as my Savior. I just don’t believe in some book that was written 2,000 years ago.” And while many of us might gasp at such a statement, our lives aren’t too far from the same if most of our relationship with God is built on experience and feelings.

If we say we believe, and then treat the Bible as if it is somehow separate from knowing God and loving Jesus, what is it we really believe in? The God of the bible? The god we created?

Jen Wilkin says in her book *Women of the Word*, “The heart cannot love what the mind does not know.” Loving God and knowing God through His word go hand in hand. How can I really love God if I don’t know His character and His design for my life?

We read the Bible because the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Reading the Bible is the closest thing we have to actually sitting and talking with Jesus. It’s how we learn about God, commune with Him, how we are sanctified, grow, and delight in the LORD.

### **Read John 1:1-3, 14**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

1. According to these passages, what is the significance of the Word?

2. What is “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” referring to? See Philippians 2:5-11 for more insight.

Understanding “the Word became flesh” should change our perspective a bit when it comes to bible study, viewing it more as a relationship rather than a task or daily chore. In other words, spending time in the Word is spending time with Jesus.

3a. List your experiences with bible study.

3b. In what ways do you spend time in God’s word currently?

4. Do you agree with Donald Whitney’s quote regarding the spiritual discipline of bible study? Why or why not?

5. How are you hoping to grow in this discipline this semester?

## **Day 2: Why Trust the Bible?**

Have you ever asked yourself why we as Christians read the Bible? How can we know it's true? How can we trust it? How is something written thousands of years ago relevant today?

These were all questions I had when considering Christianity. I needed to determine if the Bible was all a lie and toss it aside or determine if it was all true and live accordingly. If the Bible is true, if the words written on those pages are meant for us today, then that changes things. I realized if it's reliable historically, then there is implication on my life currently.

So here are some of the facts:

**The Bible has 66 books**  
**written over a time span of 1,500 years**  
**by 40 different authors**  
**in 3 different languages**  
**on 3 different continents**  
**with 1 central message**  
**Jesus**

The unity of the message over so many years and cultures is astounding. No other book in any other realm of study has that kind of consistency.

**There have been approximately 23,000 different archaeological digs, and not ONE has ever disproved a claim from the Bible.**

**It is an account of eyewitnesses recorded during the lifetime of other eyewitnesses.** You could check what was written in the Bible with people who were still alive!

**There are over 14,000 copies of the New Testament within 40-250 years of the originals.** (The only other book that even comes close in comparison is *Homer's Iliad*, which has less than 700 copies). The historical reliability of something being written and copied in the same lifetime means you can go and check with the person writing. If something were false, it would be dealt with then and there.

While these are just a few of the facts that prove the reliability of the Bible, I think the best place to answer the question about **why** we read the Bible and why we can trust it to be reliable, is to look within the Bible itself.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

**Every word was God breathed, inspired by God for our good.** It is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

**Teaching:** shows us the path God has for us

**Reproof:** shows us when we get off of the path

**Correction:** shows us how to get back on the path

**Training in righteousness:** shows us how to stay on the path



Why? So that the man (or woman) of God may be complete and equipped for every good work. We can trust the Bible by believing God's character and Spirit when He says it is true and good.

1. In what ways do you struggle to believe that the Bible is true?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Reread 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Write out the definition for the purposes of God's word
  - teaching:
  - reproof:
  - correction:
  - training in righteousness:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How has this verse helped you understand the purpose of God's word in your life?

### **Day 3: How {Not} to Study the Bible**

I was never really taught how to study the Bible. Chances are, neither were you. So I just started doing it. I'd pick up a devotional, read through some verses, and call that "Bible study". Or I'd pick up my Bible and read quickly to get a verse that really "spoke to me". I looked at stories or passages and found a way to make them meaningful to my circumstance with life.

And you may be thinking, well what's wrong with that? Isn't the Bible meant to speak to us? Isn't it meant to apply to our lives? Well of course it is! The only problem with this type of Bible reading is that it is very me focused. I was reading the Bible to get something out of it for me, rather than to know and love God more.

In Women of the Word, Jen Wilkin lists 6 bad habits we have when it comes to reading the Bible.



6

# COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

## APPROACHES TO

# "Studying the Bible"

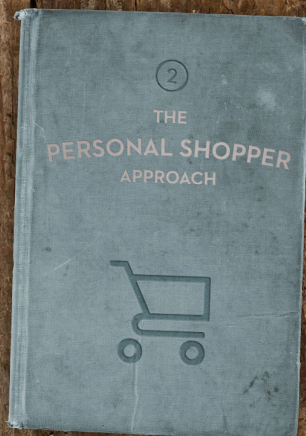


### THE METHOD

Want to know what the Bible says about a topic like self-esteem or how to be a godly woman? No problem. Just let {insert name of famous Bible teacher here} do the legwork for you. Your personal shopper will hand-select the perfect verses for you from all over the Bible.

### THE PROBLEM

While helpful to an extent, this approach doesn't help us build "ownership" of Scripture. We ricochet from passage to passage, gaining fragmentary knowledge of many books of the Bible but mastery of none. They're valuable as a supplement to—but not a substitute for—studying the Bible in its most basic sense.

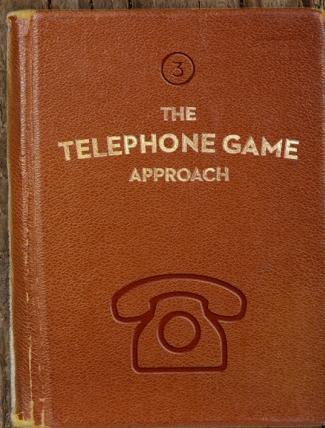


### THE METHOD

Get the answers you need to life's big questions: Should you marry Bob? How about that new job? Just use your Bible like a Magic 8 Ball. Give it a vigorous shake, open it, and place your finger on a verse. Looks like "signs point to yes."

### THE PROBLEM

This approach misconstrues the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Word, demanding that the Bible tell us *what* to do rather than *who* to be. The Bible is not magical. It does not serve our whim, and its primary function is not to offer on-demand answers to any and every question.



### THE METHOD

Instead of reading the Bible itself, use your "quiet time" to read books about the Bible. It takes less time and effort to read what someone else says about what the Bible says. And it feels safer to read someone else's conclusions than to draw our own.

### THE PROBLEM

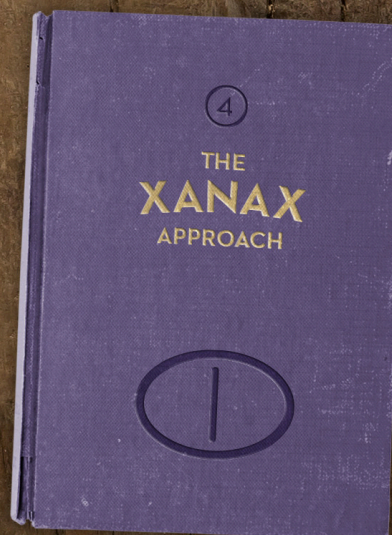
It's never good to spend more time reading a text several times removed from Scripture than we spend reading Scripture itself. It can render us more likely to quote John Piper than the apostle Paul. We're called to love the Lord our God with all of our minds, not someone else's mind.

### THE METHOD

Your Bible exists to make you feel better. Feeling anxious? Philippians 4:6 says be anxious for nothing. Feeling tired? Matthew 11:28 says Jesus will give rest to the weary. You know your "time in the Word" was successful if you can say, "Wow, that was really comforting."

### THE PROBLEM

This approach makes the Bible a book about *me*, and it guarantees that huge sections of the Bible will remain unread because they fail to deliver an immediate dose of emotional satisfaction. Instead of asking how the Bible can serve us, we should ask it how to serve the God it proclaims.

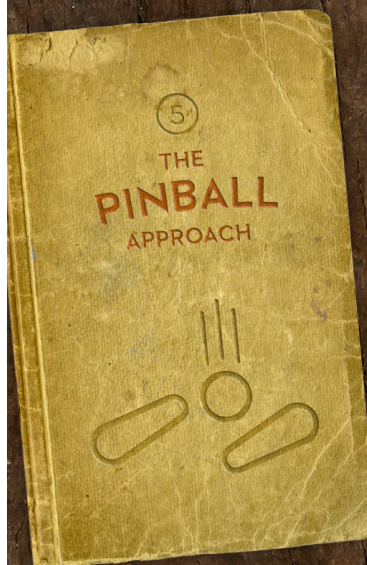


### THE METHOD

Not sure what to read? Just turn to a random passage. It's all good! Releasing the plunger of your good intentions, send the pinball of your ignorance hurtling toward whatever verse it may hit, ricocheting around to various passages "as the Spirit leads."

### THE PROBLEM

The Bible is a piece of carefully crafted literature and was not written to be read this way. This approach gives no thought to the cultural, historical, and textual background or the original intent of the passage in question—preventing us from really learning what it's about.

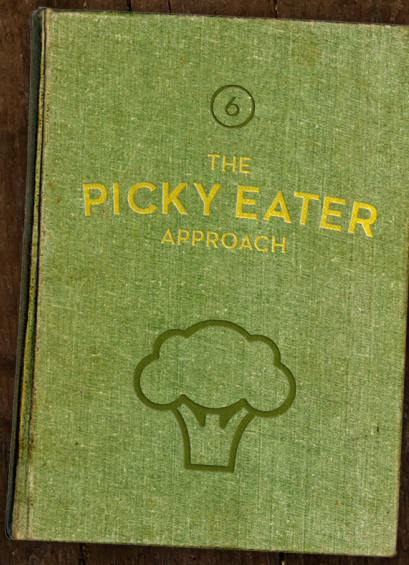


### THE METHOD

Don't worry about reading the Old Testament—it's weird. Well, maybe Esther, Ruth and Proverbs 31 because they're written for women. Other than that, just stick to the good ole New Testament... except for Revelation, of course (super weird). The important thing is to be able to identify with what you're reading, so eat what you like and leave the rest.

### THE PROBLEM

This approach ignores the fact that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. We need historical narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, law, prophecy, and parables—all showing us the character of God from different angles. And we need to see the gospel from Genesis to Revelation.





So before we learn how to study the Bible, we may need to unlearn some of these bad habits she lists above.

1. How did you learn to study the Bible?

2. Which of the above approaches to Bible study do you use or have you used before? How did it effect your time in God's word?

3. Do you agree that these 6 approaches to Bible study are bad habits? If so, which of these may be the most dangerous toward understanding Bible?

4. "How do some of these unhealthy approaches connect to Paul's warning in 2 Timothy 3:15-17?

#### **Day 4: How To Study the Bible**

*"Not every time you read will be a life changing moment, but God will use steady time in His Word to build spiritual vitality into your life."* —Dr. Rick Taylor

While devotional reading or Xanax reading may bring immediate comfort, it doesn't always provide lasting results when it comes to deepening our roots in Christ. One of the most important perspectives to have when we read the Bible it's to **remember we are reading to know and love God more**. It isn't to pull a verse out to put on like a Band-Aid, it isn't to find scripture to go around Bible thumping those "in sin", and it isn't to fill your head with more knowledge. It should produce a deeper understanding of God, greater love for Him, and lead us into worship.

In fact, remembering this helps me study books I may never find personal application to right away, but they help me learn God and His character, and those are the things that keep me planted in times of suffering and keep my strengthened when I'm weary.



We have to be willing to spend time in God's word, even if we don't get instant gratification and immediate application. Much like eating our vegetables, we won't see the immediate benefit. They certainly don't taste as good as a cupcakes, but in the long run they're what keep us healthy. Sometimes it's this constant drip of Living Water that keeps you satisfied. Chances are, not every verse in Leviticus will apply directly to your life. But when you see words like "male, perfect, spotless lamb" repeated over and over, you'll learn God's plan for Jesus was set way before the cross! Those connections in the text lead to a deeper understanding of God's redemption story and help us grow closer to Him.

Here are some helpful tips for studying your Bible:

### **1. Meditation**

Different from Eastern meditation, which practices emptying your mind, biblical meditation is the practice of filling your mind with God's word. It's picking a passage or a book of the Bible and reading it, rereading it, thinking about it, and pondering. It's similar to a cow chewing cud. They chew it, chew on it some more, swallow it, regurgitate it, chew on it again, and swallow it to digest it. Yes, that's disgusting, but that is how we are to approach Bible study. Chewing on it over and over until we've digested it.

Start by reading the entire book, from start to finish. Then slowly go back and read chapter 1. Read chapter 1 a few times before moving on to chapter 2, 3, 4 etc. The more you read the book, the more familiar you'll be with it and start to memorize where certain things are in the Bible.

### **2. Observation: What does it say?**

As we move from meditation, we begin to ask good questions about the text: What does it say about God? About me? About the world? Take note of things you observe in the text. Do you notice any repeating words or phrases? Commands? Promises? Who is the author speaking to? When? Where? Why?

### **3. Interpretation: What does it mean?**

Not what does the text mean to you, but what does it mean. There is only one meaning to the text, it can have a personal application for you, but it's meaning is consistent. Look up the definition to words, cross-references, etc. Find out what was happening historically and culturally at the time and how that implicates the passage. This is where you can really dig in!

### **4. Application: How does it apply to your life?**

This is where we make our Bible reading personal and reflective. How does this relate to my life? Is there an example to follow? A promise to claim? A call to action? A command to obey?

### **5. Memorization**

Find a friend to call and share your verse with. Write it out on a note card, stick it to your bathroom mirror or dashboard. Psalm 119 tells us to hide God's word in our heart so that we might not sin against him (v.9).

### **6. Prayer**

Pray before you read for God to illumine your heart. Pray after you read for what you've learned to sink deeply into your heart and mind and change you. He promises, by the power of His Spirit, to do the work!

## **7. Community**

Don't try and do this life alone. We need others to encourage us and spur us on. Find a small group, a mentor, a friend to process this with. God wired us to grow in relationship.

1. Which of the 7 tips listed above have you practiced before, or which do you practice most often?

2. Which of the 7 tips listed above are new to you? Which do you find most interesting and why?

3. Who do you have in your life to process what you're studying with? What steps are you taking to actively pursue healthy relationships and biblical community through a life group or mentor? \*If you need help finding community, please let your life group leader know.

4. What are some challenges in this process you might have? How can you overcome those challenges?

## Day 5: Practice Meditation/Observation

Psalm 119:1-16

“How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD.  
How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart.  
They also do no unrighteousness; They walk in His ways.  
You have ordained Your precepts, That we should keep them diligently.  
Oh that my ways may be established To keep Your statutes!  
Then I shall not be ashamed When I look upon all Your commandments.  
I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments.  
I shall keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly!

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.  
With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.  
Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.  
Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes.  
With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Your mouth.  
I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches.  
I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways.  
I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.”

Scripture	Psalm 119:1-16	Notes
<b>1. Meditation</b>	Read Psalm 119:1-16 at least 3 times.	Continue to think about it throughout the day.
<b>2. Observation</b> (What does it say?)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Go back through and underline what stands out to you. Circle repeating words/phrases.</li><li>Highlight the verbs (actions) in this passage.</li><li>Write at least one more cause/effect relationships you see in this passage (see example).</li></ol>	<p>Cause &amp; Effect of knowing God’s word:</p> <p>Verse <u>1</u> Cause: walk in the law of the LORD Effect: blessing, my ways will be blameless</p> <p>Verse ____ Cause: Effect:</p>

### Day 6: Practice Interpretation, Application, and Memorization

<b>Interpretation</b> (What does it mean?)	1. Look up the definitions to the words <i>law</i> , <i>statutes</i> , <i>testimonies</i> , and <i>commands</i> .  2. How are these different? Similar?	<i>Law:</i>  <i>Statutes:</i>  <i>Testimonies:</i>  <i>Commands:</i>  Differences/Similarities:
<b>Application</b> (How does it relate to your life?)	3. How has God's word helped you fight sin? Is there a specific verse you can treasure in your heart to help you withstand temptation? If so, write it out.	
<b>Memorization</b>	4. Pick a verse from Psalm 119 to memorize and write it out in the box to the right.	

5. Prayer: After reading, were there parts of this passage you need to pray into your heart? Ask God for wisdom? Ask for a desire to obey? Ask for help?

6. Community: Write the name of someone you will process with about what you studied today below.

\*Please note, I don't always do all of these steps in one day. So please don't feel overwhelmed! I put this in a 2-day period simply for you to practice and get a taste for how these Bible study methods are different. This is why I think it's best to study less scripture at a time, so you can work slowly through passages. Usually, I pick a few verses to practice this with, and may stretch out the process over a few days. We will continue to practice this method and the spiritual discipline of Bible study as we work through the other weeks and other spiritual disciplines

**Day 1: Meditation**

**Day 2: Observation**

**Day 3: Interpretation**

**Day 4: Application/Prayer**

**Day 5: Community: connect with my Life Group or mentor/friend to process.**

You may want to grab a blank journal and use initials to the left and write out answer to the right.

**S-Scripture you'll meditate on**

**O-Observation**

**I-Interpretation**

**A-Application**

**P-Prayer**

### Bible Study Methods (Cheat Sheet)

<b>Meditation</b>	What scripture will you study/meditate on this week?
<b>Observation</b>	What does the text say? Who is it written to? What are the verbs/actions? What are some cause/effect relationships? What are some repeating words/phrases?
<b>Interpretation</b>	What does the text mean? What is the historical/cultural background? Look up specific words/definitions. Ask the “why” questions
<b>Application</b>	How does this apply to my life? Are there specific commands to obey? How does this relate to my circumstance? Is there an example to follow? Is there a promise to claim?
<b>Memorization</b>	Pick a verse to memorize weekly or bi-monthly. Write it on a 3x5 card or post it. Find a friend to recite your verses with.
<b>Prayer</b>	Pray about what you read and asking God to change your heart/behavior.
<b>Community</b>	Process with others





## Week 2: Prayer

### **Day 1: LORD, Teach Us to Pray**

Someone once said if Bible study is the heart of the Christian life, then prayer is the breath. It is the very thing that gives us life, and is an expression that we are alive in Christ. Prayer is ultimately about knowing God and communicating with Him, both through *speaking* and *listening*.

I once joked I could easily write a book on prayer, it'd only be 3 words: Just do it. While that sounds simple, and really blunt, I've often found my greatest struggle really comes down to that, just praying. Being intentional and actually spending time in prayer.

Prayer is really hard. I often find my prayer place is the hardest place to find. I get distracted, I feel like I'm talking to Santa more than I'm talking to God, I use the scripture on "pray without ceasing" as an excuse to rush through prayer as I'm doing others things, and I always, always feel like I never pray enough.

So I think it's best that we just get that all out on the table and stop pretending like all of our prayer lives are thriving. Prayer is hard, prayer is a struggle, and prayer is \_\_\_\_\_.

1. How would you describe your prayer life right now? Is the discipline of prayer a struggle for you? Why or why not?

2. How do you want to grow in prayer?

"The Bible says we must pray for the glory of God, in His will, in faith, in the name of Jesus, with persistence, and more. A child of God gradually learns to pray like this in the same way that a child learns to talk. Note the ways we learn how to pray. By praying. If you've ever learned a foreign language, you know that you learn it best when you actually have to speak it. The same is true with the "foreign language" of prayer. The best way to learn how to pray is to pray." (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)

I've found it fascinating that of all of the things the disciples could've asked for Jesus to teach them about, the one thing they asked was "LORD, teach us to pray." I find great comfort in knowing that even Jesus disciples needed instruction to grow in their prayer lives!

**3. Scripture Meditation:** Read Matthew 6:7-15 and make observations.

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

“Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

‘Give us this day our daily bread.

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

‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]’

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

**4. Observations** (What do you see? Circle verbs, underline important phrases, list instructions, etc.)

**Day 2: Prayer Exalts**

In the Sermon on the Mount, notice where Jesus starts His teaching on prayer:

“Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name.” (Matt. 6:9)

Prayer should always start with proper perspective, we first focus our eyes on God, the one to whom we’re praying, and not on our circumstance. While prayer is simply talking to God, we still do so by entering into His presence with reverence and awe, a respect for who He is and yet a great intimacy knowing He will listen. Sometimes Hallowed be Your name is spoken with words, other times it’s a posture of the heart, bowing low in humility believing God is who He says He is.

1. How might a shift in your thought perspective change the way you pray?

**2. Interpretation**

Look up the word “hallowed” and write the definition below.

Hallowed:

3. Why is this important to remember when we pray?

4. Read Psalm 145. List all of the attributes of God written after the phrase “The LORD is . . .” in this Psalm

5. How do these phrases/words that define God in Psalm 145 relate to Matthew 6:9?

**Application**

6. When you pray, do you start with a posture of heart that exalts God? How can you enter into His presence in a more “Hallowed be Your Name” way?

### **Day 3: Prayer Petitions and Confesses**

Matthew 6:10-13

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

‘Give us this day our daily bread.

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

‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Jesus gives us permission to ask and instruction on how to petition God. For the most part, our prayer requests are very “me” centered “God help me get this job, help me out of this situation, etc.” Did you notice the things Jesus tells us we can petition, or ask, for?

We can ask for

- His will
- His provision
- His forgiveness
- His guidance

Jesus again teaches us to pray with a He lens rather than a me lens.

- “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” is praying for His will.
- “Give us our daily bread” is asking for His provision.
- “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” is asking for His forgiveness.
- “Lead us not into temptation” is praying for His guidance.

1. What are some of the things you are currently asking of God in prayer? How do these verses compare/contrast to your prayer life?

Paul’s prayer life is an example for us regarding prayer as well. Notice how he prays for others in

Philippians 1:9-11

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Colossians 1:9-12

“For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the LORD, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.”

2. According to these passages, what are the things Paul petitions God for?

3. How do Paul's prayers compare/contrast to you prayers?

4. Read the passages below. In a short sentence or phrase, write out how these verses also instruct us on prayer and petition.

Scripture	Instructions/Directions on Prayer
Colossians 4:2-4	
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18	
James 5:13-18	



#### Day 4: Prayer Persists, Laments, and Unifies

While we have looked at Jesus instructions on prayer as well as a few other verses on prayer, today we'll look at some different types of prayer.

#### **Persistent Prayer**

1. Read Luke 18:1-8. Write out your observations below.

2. Share about a time you have prayed, or currently are, praying with persistence.

#### **Prayer of Lament**

3. Read Psalm 13. This is a prayer of lament. Write out your observations below.

4. A prayer of lament may come after a time of mourning, longing for an unfulfilled desire, grief, brokenness, or suffering. Share about an experience in which you have prayed a prayer of lament.

#### **Prayer for Unity**

Isn't it fascinating, that one Jesus' final acts of ministry on this earth was sneaking away to pray for unity among His followers?

5. Read John 17 and write your observations below.

6. Is there a situation in your life where you need to pray for unity? Share below.

### Day 5: Practice Prayer

Take some time today to reflect on what we've learned about prayer. If you need references on the different types of prayers we studied this week, read the following passages.

Type of Prayer	Scripture	
<b>Exaltation</b>	<b>Psalms 145</b>	Do you need to write out a prayer that exalts God? Praise Him for who He is? Remember hallowed be His name?
<b>Petition</b>	<b>Matthew 6:9-15</b>	Do you need to pray a prayer of petition? Ask God for His will to be done, to provide, to forgive, or to guide in a specific area?
<b>Confession</b>	<b>Psalms 51</b>	Is there a sin in your life you need to confess? Repent of? Ask forgiveness for?
<b>Persistence</b>	<b>Luke 18:1-8</b>	Do you need to pray a prayer of persistence? For something you are enduring?
<b>Lament</b>	<b>Psalms 13</b>	Do you need to pray a prayer of lament? Is there something you're longing for that hasn't happened? Something you're grieving over? Suffering through?
<b>Unity</b>	<b>John 17</b>	Do you need to pray a prayer of unity? Is there discord in your relationships? Do you need to pray and make it right?

Pick a type of prayer and practice praying it today by writing it below.



### Week 3: Worship

“Worship—focusing on and responding to God—is the duty and privilege of all people.”

—Donald Whitney

#### Day 1: What Is Worship?

1. How would you define worship? Write your answer below.

In an article from Christianity Today, *Delesslyn A. Kennebrew* says “Worship is not the slow song that the choir sings. Worship is not the amount you place in the offering basket. Worship is not volunteering in children's church. Yes, these may be acts or expressions of worship, but they do not define what true worship really is. There are numerous definitions of the word *worship*. Yet, one in particular encapsulates the priority we should give to worship as a spiritual discipline: *Worship is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission* (Webster's Dictionary). True worship, in other words, is defined by the priority we place on *who* God is in our lives and *where* God is on our list of priorities. True worship is a matter of the heart expressed through a lifestyle of holiness.”

In other words, worship is not about action or singing, but is a posture of heart. A heart that submits to God, a heart that reveres God, and a heart that honors God.

While there are many expressions of worship (singing, dancing, praising, serving, standing in awe), worship first begins with devotion to the One True God.

#### **Read Romans 12:1-2**

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

2. According to this passage, what is worship?
3. What does it mean to be a living and holy sacrifice?
4. What does it mean to be transformed by the renewing of your mind? How can we practice this daily?

**Read John 4:23-24** “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

5. What does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth?

6. How do you currently practice the spiritual discipline of worship?

#### Day 2: What keeps us from worshipping?

We all worship something. We have set the affections of our hearts on something, devoted our lives to something. We can't talk about proper worship without also talking about false worship, or idolatry. If worship is about devotion, then idolatry is about being devoted to the wrong things that rob us of worshipping God.

Idolatry is taking a good thing, and making it an ultimate thing. It's anything that competes with God's rightful place in our lives.

#### Read Exodus 10:1-4

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments’.”

For many of us we hear the word *idol* and think of an outdated statue or old foreign god. Yet, many of us don't see there are modern day idols we have in our lives that sabotage our worship for God.

For some, we have an idol of comfort. Above revering God and submitting to His will, we desire our own comfort. For others, we idolize materialism, rather than worshipping God with our time, talent, and treasure, we seek to build our own kingdom over His kingdom. Some of us are devoted to the idol of approval. We care far too much about what others think about us, so much so that we become people pleasers over God pleasers.

All of these things may not seem like “idols”, but truly anything that rules your life more than God is an idol. The dream of a marriage, a higher paying job, a bigger house, more followers on Twitter, etc. None of those are bad in and of themselves, but they become idolatry when they begin to

consume your affections more than God.

1. What are some of the things that consume your heart and mind on a daily basis?
2. According to the passage in Exodus, what are the things the LORD says about idol worship?
3. What are the top priorities or greatest desires of your life? Do these compete with your devotion to God?
4. In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller lists money, sex, power, and success as false gods or modern day idols. Do you resonate with any of these? Why or why not?

### Day 3: The Subtlety of False Worship

If God appeared to you in a dream and said you could ask for anything, and He would give it to you, what would you ask for?

I wonder if our answer would directly reflect what we worship?

There is no life more inspiring and more terrifying to me in the entire Bible than that of King Solomon. He is mentioned as the wisest man who ever lived, penned much of our wisdom literature, had a heart that once worshipped God like no other, and ended life very poorly.

In 1 Kings 3:6-9 it says “In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what *you wish* Me to give you.”

Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father,



according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

1. What were the things Solomon asked for?

His heart was so set on the LORD, he asks for wisdom and discernment so He can better serve God and serve the people. He could have asked for anything, yet his greatest desire seemed to be a humble expression of wanting to serve and honor God through wisdom and discernment.

Later, in 1 Kings 8:22-24, we see His heart for the LORD again as he dedicates the temple to the LORD:

“Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and *showing* lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, who have kept with Your servant, my father David, that which You have promised him; indeed, You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand as it is this day.”

2. How does Solomon exalt God in his prayer?

He could ask for anything, and he asks God for discernment. He exalts God after building his temple. His heart is wholly devoted to the LORD. Then, just a few chapters later, we read this . . .

“Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for* they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*.” (2 Kings 11:1-4)

**His heart turned away after other gods.** In just a few chapters, we see Solomon lose his humble submission and worshipful devotion to God, to follow false idols.

False worship is subtle, it starts with just one small step, one small bite, one small glance, and before you know it, you're a million miles away from where you started.

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live lost his devotion to God through false worship.

Slowly and steadily . . . he compromised. *Little steps* away from God, *little steps* toward sin, and soon, he *turned from the LORD*. Just a little compromise. Just a little doubt. Just a little fear. Just a little greed. Just a little idol worship. And he ended up a *long* way from God.

As a friend once shared with me, “if a ship gets off by even one degree on its journey, it will end up far off from its destination.” Just one **little** degree and your wholehearted devotion ends up in a place you never intended.

3. Where in your life do you compromise your devotion to God?

4. What are the areas in your life that cause you to subtly drift from God and worshipping Him alone?

5. What are the parts of Solomon's story that speak to you?

Up until this point, you may feel like we've spent a bulk of our time talking about idolatry rather than worship. That's because the LORD did the same in His word. Over and over, we see God tell us to have no other gods beside Him, and while our lips may declare “Yahweh, Yahweh”, our hearts lust after other things. Confession and repentance are just as much a part of worship as singing and serving. So before we move on to expressions of worship, take some time today to evaluate your heart and confess any idols that steer you away from devotion to the LORD.

6. Use Psalm 139:23-24 to guide your prayer time, and write out what God reveals below.

#### Day 4: Expressions of Worship

When we begin to see worship as our devotion and submission to God, we'll find the expression of worship can happen many ways; through singing, praising, dancing, serving, giving thanks, and more. Read the passages below. Pick one of the passages or verses to practice our Bible study methods with.

#### **Celebration & Dancing**

2 Samuel 6:12-15: "Now it was told King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God." David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And so it was, that when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David was dancing before the LORD with all *his* might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet.

#### **Singing**

Colossians 3:15-17: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

#### **Praise**

Psalms 150: 1-6: "Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!

#### **Humility & Adoration**

Revelation 4:8-11: "And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our LORD and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

#### Practice

**Scripture Meditation:** What verse/passage will you study?

**Observation:** What does the text say? Ask the who, what, when, where, and how questions. List instructions, verbs, and anything that stands out to you.

**Interpretation:** What does the text mean? Look up definitions, ask the "why" questions.

**Application:** How does this verse apply to your life?

**Prayer:** Ask God to help you obey, refocus your heart.

**Memorization:** Pick a verse to memorize this week.

<b>Meditation</b>	
<b>Observation</b>	
<b>Interpretation</b>	
<b>Application</b>	
<b>Prayer</b>	
<b>Memorization</b>	

Day 5: Practice Worship

Spend some time today in worship. Write about your experience below.



## Week 4: Fasting

“These hunger pangs teach us we’re waiting for a greater feast.”

-Lore Ferguson

### Day 1: What Is Fasting?

Out of curiosity, I did a little search on Pinterest regarding fasting. I found articles on fasting titled “7 tips for getting rid of cellulite”, “how to lose your double chin”, and “Get rid of back fat Fast!”. Nearly all of the articles had to do with quick tips on weight loss. I think this is the epitome of the hashtag #pinterestfail. So what is fasting? Is it simply starving yourself to lose a few pounds or chins? Is it dieting? Is it about willpower? Is it only for the spiritually elite?

#### 1. How would you define fasting?

Of all of the spiritual disciplines, fasting seems to be the one where most of the Christians I know practice the least. The majority of the women I know have confessed they have fasted more out of obligation or dieting hopes, rather than what the Bible says a fast should be.

“Fasting is a believer’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. Other types of fasting—despite the benefits they may produce for the mind and body—could not be classified as Christian fasting, and fasting by a non-Christian obtains no eternal value. It is for believers in Christ, for the Discipline must be rooted in a relationship with Christ and practiced with the desire to become more like Christ.” (Donald Whitney)

#### 2. Have you ever practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting? If so, share about your experience. If not, share why you haven’t.

#### 3. How is fasting different from dieting?

Fasting is meant to draw you closer to God, and with every hunger pang, turn to Him in prayer. It is designed to make you hunger and thirst for God and His kind of life. Perhaps that’s why Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount to make sure the motivation of our fasting is for God alone.

4. Read Matthew 6:16-18 and write your observations below.

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.”

5. Why would Jesus tell us to fast in secret?

#### Day 2: Why Do We Fast Individually?

We don't live in a country where self-denial is practiced. In fact, self-sufficiency is more of our gospel than self-denial here in America. We are very impatient, used to getting what we want, when we want, rushed, busy, and overextended, the practice of fasting and abstaining to get more of God seems so foreign to us when we can Google a podcast or buy a devotional.

So often, we don't fast because we're satisfied so easily. Why would we abstain when we live in a country of over indulgence and instant gratification?

According to scripture, here are some reasons as to why we fast:

#### **We Fast to Grow Closer to God and Seek His Will**

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.” (Matthew 4:1-2)

Jesus fasted. Jesus modeled a life submitted to God and drawing near to Him. Before He set out to do His ministry, he pulled away into the wilderness to fast and hunger for God.

#### **We Fast for the Impossible**

And He *said* to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. [But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]” (Matthew 17:20-22)



Of course we know God can do whatever He wills. We can fast and pray, yet He will determine the outcome. But oh how we of little faith neglect this call to fast in hopes that God will do the impossible.

### **We Fast to Let Go of Idols**

“But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.” (Dan 1:8)

While Daniel did not abstain from all food in this fast, he intentionally abstained from certain food to avoid his heart being lured away from complete devotion to God. Later Daniel fasts again on behalf of his people.

### **We Fast in Mourning and Grief for Our Sin**

“So I gave my attention to the LORD God to seek *Him* by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O LORD, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land.” (Daniel 9:3-6)

Much like Nehemiah, Daniel mourns for the people and repents not only for his sin, but the sin of the people.

Before he ever laid a brick to rebuild the wall, Nehemiah started his project weeping and fasting, recognizing things were not the way they should be. “They said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

We fast when things aren’t the way they should be, out of confession and mourning for the people of God.

### **We Fast in Our Suffering**

“Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David, so that he was *very* sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them.” (2 Samuel 12:15-17)

In the midst of circumstances out of our control, we can fast and pray and beg God to move.

### **We Fast in Anticipation for a Greater Feast**

“Then he *said* to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” (Revelation 19:9)

This is actually not a verse on fasting, but it’s a reminder of what is to come. We can abstain and go without and hunger on this earth, because there is going to be an abundant feast waiting for us in heaven that will satisfy us for all of eternity.

1. Which of the above reasons for fasting resonated with you and why?
2. Have you considered abstaining from food or something else to grow closer to God? What are the reasons keeping you from doing so?
3. Following Daniel's example, is there something in your life that steals your affection from Christ that you need to fast from? Share what it is and how it competes with your devotion to God.

### Day 3: Why We Fast Together

While Jesus teaches us to fast in secret, in order to be seen by God and not men, there is also a call in scripture to fast corporately, or together, as the body of believers.

#### **We Fast to Seek God and His Will**

"While they were ministering to the LORD and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3)

While the church was beginning to spread, the early church fathers were fasting for God's wisdom and direction with what to do next. The spirit leads us in our hunger to obey His will.

#### **We Fast to Intercede for Others**

"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

Esther was being brave and bold to step up and attempt to save the Jews, her people. But, she wouldn't go alone. She called on her people to pray and fast along with her, and the LORD saved an entire generation."

#### **A Corporate Confession of Sin**

"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and

stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. (Nehemiah 9:1-3)

### **A Corporate Fast to Seek Help From the LORD**

“Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, “A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi).” Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.” (2 Chronicles 20:1-4)

### **A Corporate Fast to Seek Refuge in the LORD**

“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.” So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.” (Ezra 8:21-23)

1. What was a common theme or reason in all of these passages for corporate fasting?
2. There is much that the LORD wants to accomplish through you, through us. Have you considered praying and fasting with others to see what His purposes are for your life? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways you can incorporate fasting into your life, individually or with others?

Day 4: The Fast That the LORD Desires

1. Read and meditate on Isaiah 58:1-12.
2. **Observation:** What were the differences listed between how the religious people were fasting (v.2-5) versus how God wanted them to fast (v.6-12)

Religious Fast (v.2-5)

Fast That Honors God (v.6-12)

3. **Interpretation:** Why are the different fasts listed? How is this significant for us as believers today?

4. **Application:** Is there an area of your life where you claim to do something for God, but it's really about being seen by others?

5. **Prayer:** Pray for the part of this passage that God has impressed upon your heart. If you don't desire to fast as He has declared, pray for Him to change your heart.

6. **Memorization:** Write out the verse you desire to hide in your heart from Isaiah 58.

#### Day 5: Practice Fasting

Practice fasting. Abstain from food for 24 hours. If you can't abstain from food for medical purposes, try abstaining from something like television or social media for 24 hours, or reducing the amount of food (one meal), practice silence or solitude for 24 hours, etc.

Share about your experience below. How did you feel physically? Emotionally? Spiritually? How much was it on your mind? Did that push you to God and dependence upon Him?



## Week 5: Thanksgiving

### Day 1: What Is Thanksgiving

Of all the books I've read on spiritual disciplines, not one has listed giving thanks as a discipline. But, if you look closely to each of the disciplines, you'll see gratitude and thanksgiving a part of almost every discipline we'll practice this semester.

In her New York Times Bestselling book *1000 Gifts*, author Ann Voskamp refers to Thanksgiving as the way to fully live. In fact, she even proposes that the very first sin we see committed in the Bible, in which Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, is a sin of ingratitude. It is the belief that God is holding out on us, it is a turn of the head from all that He has given us and being thankful, to craving the one thing He has withheld and living with lust, pride, and ingratitude.

“From all of our beginnings, we keep reliving the Garden story. Satan, he wanted more. More power, more glory. Ultimately, in his essence, Satan is an ingrate. And he sinks his venom into the heart of Eden. Satan's sin becomes the first sin of all humanity: the sin of ingratitude. Adam and Eve are, simply, painfully, ungrateful for what God gave. Our fall was, has always been, and always will be, that we aren't satisfied in God and what He gives. We hunger for something more, something other.

Standing before that tree, laden with fruit withheld, we listened to Evil's murmur, “In the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened . . .” (Genesis 3:5). But in the beginning, our eyes were already open. Our sight was perfect. Our vision let us see a world spilling with goodness. Our eyes fell on nothing but the glory of God. We saw God as He truly is: good. But we were lured by the deception that there was more to a full life, there was more to see. And, true, there was more to see: the ugliness we hadn't beheld, the sinfulness we hadn't witnessed, the loss we hadn't known.” (Ann Voskamp, *1000 Gifts*)

Eating the fruit was a sin of pride and a sin of ingratitude. It was the result of Adam and Eve's perspective shift off of God and on to their own thinking, and their circumstances. When we listen to the lie of the enemy, when we take the bite of temptation, we fall prey to losing sight of God and His goodness.

Thanksgiving is the remedy to our loss of sight. It refocuses our heart and mind on God and His truth.

1. Read Genesis 3:1-24. Write out your observations below.

2. Look up the word *thanksgiving* and write the definition below.

**Thanksgiving:**

3. Do you agree with Ann Voskamp's insight from Genesis 3? Do you agree that ingratitude was the original sin? Why or why not?

4. How do you struggle with ingratitude?

5. How do you want to grow in the discipline of thanksgiving?

Day 2: Why We Give Thanks

Thanksgiving should be the language we become fluent in as believers. It is a posture of heart, a mindset, a result of being filled with the Spirit, and a response to all that God has done for us. We give thanks out of a response to the Gospel. When we really understand the Good News of what Jesus did for us on the cross, through His life, death, and resurrection, our only proper response should be living a life of gratitude! That should be what marks us as Christians. Gratitude is what compels us to serve, compels us to walk in obedience, compels us to love, and compels us to worship.



### **Gratitude Is the Christian Language**

Colossians 3:15-17 “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

1. What things listed in this passage are we to let rule and dwell in our hearts?
2. What are the results of letting peace and the word of Christ dwell in our hearts?

### **We Give Thanks Because it Is a Result of Being Filled with the Spirit**

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the LORD is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the LORD; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20)

3. According to this passage, what are the results of not being drunk on wine, but being filled with the Spirit?

### **We Give Thanks Because It Is God’s Will for Us**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

4. List the 3 things believers are to do in Christ Jesus.

5a. In what situations or circumstances are we to give thanks?

5b. Is this true of your life? Do you give thanks “in everything”? Why or why not?

6. What does thanksgiving look like in your life? Do you regularly give thanks?

### Day 3: How Thanksgiving Shifts Our Perspective

#### **Gratitude Increases Our Joy and Helps with Our Anxiety**

“Rejoice in the LORD always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The LORD is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

1. According to verse 6, we are to be anxious for \_\_\_\_\_, but in \_\_\_\_\_ by prayer and supplication with \_\_\_\_\_ let our requests be made known to God.

2a. What is the relationship between anxiety, thanksgiving, and prayer?

2b. According to verse 7, what is the result of praying with thanksgiving during your anxious thoughts?

### **Gratitude Fights Discontentment**

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. But I rejoiced in the LORD greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” (Philippians 4:8-11)

3. How can we “learn to be content” in any circumstance?

4a. Are there areas of your life you are discontent?

4b. How can you fight discontentment with gratitude?

### **Gratitude Exalts God**

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually. Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done. . . O give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.” (1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 34)

“I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” (Psalm 9:1)

5. How does thanksgiving lead to worshipping God?

#### Day 4: Eucharisteo

“When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.’ And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood’.” (Luke 22:14-20)

Just before Jesus darkest hour, He shares a meal with His disciples, breaks bread, and gives thanks. Ann Voskamp says in an article posted on *The High Calling* “The root word of Eucharisteo is charis, meaning “grace.” Jesus took the bread and saw it as grace and gave thanks. He took the bread and knew it to be gift and gave thanks. Eucharisteo, thanksgiving, envelopes the Greek word for grace, charis. But it also holds its derivative, the Greek word chara, meaning “joy.” Charis. Grace. Eucharisteo. Thanksgiving. Chara. Joy.

Deep chara joy is found only at the table of the euCHARisteo; the table of thanksgiving. The holy grail of joy, God set it in the very center of Christianity. The Eucharist is the central symbol of Christianity. The continual repetition of beginning our week at the table of the Eucharist clearly place the whole of our lives into the context of thanksgiving?

One of Christ’s very last directives He offers to His disciples is to take the bread, the wine, and to remember. Do this in remembrance of Me. Remember and give thanks.

This is the crux of Christianity: to remember and give thanks, Eucharisteo.

Why? Why is remembering and giving thanks the core of the Christ-faith? Because remembering with thanks is what causes us to trust; to really believe. Re-membering, giving thanks, is what makes us a member again of the body of Christ. Re-membering, giving thanks is what puts us back together again in this hurried, broken, fragmented world.”

Eucharisteo, this is the very essence of the Christian life. Joy, giving thanks, and recognizing God’s gifts in the good and in the hard.

1. Reread Luke 22:14-20 and make observations below.

2. In context of what is about to happen, why is Eucharisteo so significant at this point in Jesus’ life?

3. Do you regularly practice Eucharisteo, giving thanks, with joy, in the midst of hard circumstances? Why or why not?

Day 5: Practice

Spend some time today thanking God for who He is and what He has done for you. Begin your list of 1000 gifts. Capture moments of your children playing together, and thank Him. Find beauty in nature, and thank Him. Look for peace that comes when you should be stressed, and recognize His gifts to you.

Begin looking for the gifts God has given you, and help your perspective shift from all that is missing or wrong in your life, to all that He has given.



## Week 6: Serving/Giving

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”  
-Matthew 20:28

### Day 1: Serving & Giving: Commanded and Modeled by God

Both serving and giving are not only commanded by the LORD, but modeled. God showed us His very heart in serving and giving as an example for us, so that we would do the same.

### He Humbled Himself as a Servant

“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:1-7)

1. List all of the ways these verses tell us to serve others and put others' interests above our own.

### He Washed His Disciples Feet

“Then He \*poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So He \*came to Simon Peter. He \*said to Him, “LORD, do You wash my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.” Peter \*said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter \*said to Him, “LORD, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” Jesus \*said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*.” For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and LORD; and you are right, for *so* I am. If I then, the LORD and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” (John 13:5-15)

2. Why would Peter exclaim “Never shall You wash my feet!”? Why would Peter be so shocked Jesus was doing this?

3. What is the significance of verse 13? What is Jesus modeling here?

### **He Gave His Only Son**

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“Because our God served and gave on our behalf, we should be moved to do the same. We serve others and give away our lives because that is what God has done for us. “A believer does not look upon serving God as a burden, but as a privilege. I can understand why the person who serves God in an attempt to earn his way to heaven doesn’t serve with gladness. But the Christian who gratefully acknowledges what God has done for him or her for eternity should be able to serve God cheerfully and with joy.” (Donald Whitney)

If we’re honest, most of us serve more out of obligation or guilt rather than as a response to God’s great grace. We serve as a way to earn His approval and love, rather than extend our hands out of the fact that He has already approved of us through Christ, and loved us with more than we can imagine.

Donald Whitney so rightly says “The people of God do not serve Him in order to be forgiven but because we are forgiven.”

4a. What are some of the ways you serve others?

4b. What are some of the motivations/reasons for you serving and giving others?



## Day 2: Serving and Giving: Time, Talent, Treasures

“Every believer in Christ is gifted to serve, with the goal of being more like Jesus by means of humbly serving others. If we don’t discipline ourselves to serve for the sake of Christ and His kingdom, we’ll serve only occasionally or when it’s convenient or self-serving.” -Donald Whitney

God has called us to be stewards of all that He has given us. For most of us, when we think of giving, we think solely of our finances. While that is part of what we are called to steward and give, we are also called to give in other ways.

We can give of our time, talent and treasure.

In fact, the woman of valor in Proverbs 31 was known for using her time, her talent, and her treasure to help serve her family and give to those in need.

1. Read Proverbs 31:10-31. List the ways she served and gave of her time, talent, and treasure.

Time	Talent	Treasure

We are all made and gifted uniquely. Some people love to serve others through cooking and baking, others love to serve through helping in a time of need, some are so good at reading people and can sense the slightest bit of suffering, and there are those who are gifted creatively and express their talents through art. I am often intimidated by people who are gifted differently than me, and by growing insecure I lose sight of how God has uniquely gifted me and purposed me to use those gifts to serve others.

It is tempting to look at others and compare and grow insecure. But the LORD has made each of us with unique gifts to help others flourish. So, looking to the LORD and looking within, answer the questions below.

2. List some of the ways God has uniquely gifted you. If you’re not sure of what talents or gifts you may have, you can read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 for references. Ask others to speak into your life to help you answer this.

3. We have all been gifted with the same amount of time each day, though some of us have more flexibility/opportunity to serve and give. We've all been given spiritual gifts, and we all have treasures in our lives we can give or serve with. How can you serve and give of your time, talent, and treasure? Fill in the chart below.

Time	Talent	Treasure

Now pray for God to open a door and give you an opportunity to serve and give. Look for those opportunities in your home, your neighborhood, your workplace, your family, your city and beyond.

#### Day 3: Serving & Giving in God's Economy: Reaping and Sowing

“Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written,

“He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.”

Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.” (2 Corinthians 9:6-12)

God's economy works differently from our economy. He is in the business of reaping and sowing, being generous for the sake of others. As with all of these disciplines, God cares about heart attitude while we are serving and giving.

1. According to verse 7, how should we give?
  
2. What are the results of a cheerful giver in verses 10-11?
  
3. Read the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-29. How do these verses relate to the verses above from 2 Corinthians 9:6-12?
  
4. When you reflect on all that you've been given, do you sow bountifully? Do you willingly serve others and steward your gifts? Why or why not?
  
5. What are the things that keep you from serving and giving bountifully?

Pray and confess those areas of your life that you are not sowing bountifully or being generous with your time, talent, and treasure. Pray for a heart that is eager and willing to serve.

#### Day 4: Serving the Least of These

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘LORD, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘LORD, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:34-46)

In this passage Jesus lists ways of serving others that I don’t know many of us would sign up for; showing hospitality to strangers, clothing the naked, visiting prisoners, feeding the hungry, and caring for the sick. It’s much easier to serve in ways we prefer, ways that are convenient, or ways we can check off of a list. Here Jesus reminds us that His very heart for coming to earth was to dwell among the lowly, to rescue the sinners, to seek and save the lost, to serve the least of these. He shows us that serving is more than a one-time act of charity, but a heart willing to serve those in need. Every single person on this earth should be offered dignity, because every person on this earth reflects Imago Dei, the image of God.

When we recognize we as sinners were among the least of these, in need of the Most High God and His grace, our perspective of serving others in great need should change. The hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned, the stranger, the poor, the least of these. What we do for the least of these, we do for Him. The way we serve others who have absolutely nothing to offer us in return is serving Him.

1. What are some ways you can or have served “the least of these”?
2. What are the things that keep you from serving the least of these?
3. What is a next step for you to take regarding serving “the least of these”?

### Day 5: Serving and Giving in Secret

In just a few weeks, as the Body of Christ, we will serve together in a loud and big way. We will pray about how you and your group will join Serve Fresno with others to make an impact in our city.

In the meantime, I want to pray about how we each can serve in secret. Again, tucked away in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shares these words with us:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

We are commanded to give not to be seen and for self-righteousness, but to give out of a cheerful heart in response to what God has given to us. God is telling us to practice giving in secret, for an audience of One, to serve in His name and for His fame alone.

Spend today praying about and actually serving someone in secret. How can you be an intentional blessing to someone in secret today, or this week? Record your experience below.

**Week 7: Sabbath**

“The world aches for the generosity of a well-rested people.” –Wayne Muller

### Day 1: Finding Rest Through Sabbath

Sabbath is such a foreign concept for many of us. Most of us keep our lives full, busy, running around on the weekends catching up on all of the stuff we didn't get done during the week. Sabbath is not a regular practice in our culture.

While we were in Israel, we shared a Sabbath meal. We ate slowly, around the table. Our Israeli tour guides brought out the wine, shared stories and laughter, prayed for us, and showed us the value of slowing down our crazy lives to be present.

While Jesus was harsh with the religious people who took Sabbath and made it about restrictions and rules, we see the very heart of Sabbath as something God put in place for our good from the very beginning.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Genesis 2:1-3)

God at the very beginning showed us how to live in rhythm between work and rest. Build, create, plan, cultivate, work and then on the seventh day, rest.

1. How well do you live in rhythm between work and rest?

2. What impact does this have on the rest of your life?

Sabbath is rest, it is a time to connect to God and enjoy all the gifts He has given. Wayne Muller says in his book *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* that “Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is not just a day off, when we catch up on television or errands. It is the presence of something that arises when we consecrate a period of time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, or true. It is time consecrated with our attention, our mindfulness, honoring those quiet forces of grace or spirit that sustain and heal us.

Sabbath does not require us to leave home, change jobs, go on retreat, or leave the world of ordinary life. We do not have to change clothes or purchase any expensive spiritual equipment. We only need to remember.”

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

3. Do you remember the Sabbath in your home? Are there things you do regularly to pause and

rest?

4. While Sabbath is not meant to be kept in a legalistic way, it is intended to be kept in a way that we would enjoy God and be refreshed. How can you practice Sabbath (as a day or a set aside time) to rest in the LORD?

#### Day 2: Finding Rest in Silence, Solitude, and Selah

Just as God modeled a servant's attitude and a giving heart, He also models for us the spiritual discipline of finding rest in solitude. So many times throughout the scriptures we see Jesus retreat to be alone. His life is a beautiful balance of serving and ministering to people, and then retreating to be alone and find rest through prayer and solitude. He practiced pouring out and filling up.

"After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone." (Matthew 14:23)

Many of us don't spend time alone out of fear, a fear of feeling alone. Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* explains the difference of loneliness and solitude beautifully: "Jesus calls us from loneliness to solitude. We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times."

1. Do you spend time in silence or solitude regularly? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. Is being alone difficult for you? Why or why not?

3. What impact might spending time regularly in silence or solitude have in your life?



Moms of young kids, you may be thinking “Silence and solitude won’t be happening in my house for years!”. Chuck Swindoll shared in a message once how he remembered his mother locking herself in the bathroom, and putting a sign on the door that let her children know she was spending time alone with Jesus. She modeled putting time with Jesus above her kids by sitting in the bathtub! So yes, you may have to get creative.

Often, when I’m driving I don’t put on the radio or talk on the phone, when I exercise, I don’t always listen to music, the TV doesn’t go on until after dinner, etc. I try to find little moments I can sneak silence into my day.

Throughout the Psalms and in the book of Habakkuk, you’ll find the words *Selah*.

“Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. **Selah.**” (Psalm 62:8)

“All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name.” **Selah.**” (Psalm 66:4)

“Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness And guide the nations on the earth. **Selah.**” (Psalm 67:4)

“I stretch out my hands to You; My soul longs for You, as a parched land. **Selah.**” (Psalm 143:6)

Some scholars disagree on exactly what the word means, but it’s most often defined in musical terms to take a breath, or to take a moment to pause and praise. What a beautiful picture of practicing the presence of God throughout our day/week. To pause and take a breath, to refresh in the LORD.

4. Find ways to selah today. Practice silence, solitude, or pausing to take a breath. Share about your experience below.

Sabbath is more than just silence and solitude. Sabbath is an act of trust, it's entering into a time of rest and nourishment in the LORD, to reset and refill, to find moments of silence, stillness, solitude, and delight. For many, that means slowing down and living against the busyness of our day-to-day life, but slowing down doesn't always have to be in solitude.

Sadly, over the years, in the Jewish tradition Sabbath has shifted from God's provision and enjoying Him, to God's restriction and legalism. While in Israel, we saw poles at the end of people's property that marked exactly how far they could walk before it was considered "work". In his book *Sabbath*, Wayne Muller says, "Over time, as with all ecclesiastical precepts, Sabbath laws became overly legalistic. The Jewish Sabbath could be so restrictive and morose, that for some, it became a day of lethargy and depression rather than sensuality and delight."

The heart of Sabbath was never meant to be about restriction, but about connection; connection to God through rest and delight, and connection to others in relationship. Sabbath in the Jewish culture, Shabbat is centered around family and a slow meal. It's slowing down from work, taking a day off as an act of trust that the LORD will provide, and enjoying the many blessings God has brought into your life.

1. Why is this so difficult in our culture?

2. Why can our busyness and lack of practicing Sabbath actually be distrust in the LORD?

"Traditionally, Sabbath is honored by lighting candles, gathering in worship and prayer, blessing children, singing songs, keeping silence, walking, reading scripture, making love, sharing a meal." (Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*).

While many have taken Sabbath and made it about restriction, we see Sabbath was traditionally about enjoyment; enjoying God, enjoying being slow, enjoying your spouse, enjoying good food, enjoying family and friends.

3. Read James 1:17. Who gives us good gifts? Does Sabbath seem more like a restriction or a gift?

4. What do meals around the table look like in your home? How can you incorporate slow meals with others into your week to enjoy God and others?

5. Hebrews 4:9-11 says “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.”

Notice this verse says we are to be diligent to enter that rest, it is an act of obedience. In what ways can you be diligent and intentional to remember the Sabbath?

#### Day 4: Finding Rest for Your Weary Soul

##### **1. Scripture Meditation:**

Read Matthew 11:28-30, both in the NASB and The Message translation.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (NASB)

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (The Message)

##### **2. Observation**

List the instructions Jesus is giving us here.

##### **3. Interpretation**

3a. Why is this significant in light of our study on Sabbath?

3b. Look up the word *yoke* and write the definition below.

Yoke:

3c. Why is this imagery of a yoke important in relation to work and rest?

**4. Application:** When you are weary and overwhelmed, what do you turn to in order to find rest and renewal? Do you go to Jesus or something else?

**5. Prayer:** Pray that you would begin to learn the unforced rhythms of grace, pray that you would find rest in Jesus and confess what keeps you from doing so.

**6. Memorize:** Hide Matthew 11:28 in your heart this week: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

Day 5: Practice Sabbath

Rest. In whatever way fills you, rest. Take some time today to unplug, practice silence, solitude, have a slow meal with loved ones, whatever it may be that helps you step out of the ordinary chaos of life, into a pause, a rest, a Selah. Write about your experience below.

## Final Reflections

1. What was most impactful for you in this study?
2. Which discipline did you enjoy practicing the most and why?
3. Which discipline was difficult for you and why?
4. How will you live differently in light of what you've learned these past 8 weeks?
5. How has your understanding of the Gospel deepened through studying spiritual disciplines?
6. How have your affections for Jesus been stirred throughout this study?
7. Write out any thoughts or insights you had regarding spiritual disciplines.



## What Is the Gospel?

*by R.C. Sproul*

There is no greater message to be heard than that which we call the Gospel. But as important as that is, it is often given to massive distortions or over simplifications. People think they're preaching the Gospel to you when they tell you, 'you can have a purpose to your life', or that 'you can have meaning to your life', or that 'you can have a personal relationship with Jesus.' All of those things are true, and they're all important, but they don't get to the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel is called the 'good news' because it addresses the most serious problem that you and I have as human beings, and that problem is simply this: God is holy and He is just, and I'm not. And at the end of my life, I'm going to stand before a just and holy God, and I'll be judged. And I'll be judged either on the basis of my own righteousness – or lack of it – or the righteousness of another. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, of perfect obedience to God, not for His own well being but for His people. He has done for me what I couldn't possibly do for myself. But not only has He lived that life of perfect obedience, He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to satisfy the justice and the righteousness of God.

The great misconception in our day is this: that God isn't concerned to protect His own integrity. He's a kind of wishy-washy deity, who just waves a wand of forgiveness over everybody. No. For God to forgive you is a very costly matter. It cost the sacrifice of His own Son. So valuable was that sacrifice that God pronounced it valuable by raising Him from the dead – so that Christ died for us, He was raised for our justification. So the Gospel is something objective. It is the message of who Jesus is and what He did. And it also has a subjective dimension. How are the benefits of Jesus subjectively appropriated to us? How do I get it? The Bible makes it clear that we are justified not by our works, not by our efforts, not by our deeds, but by faith – and by faith alone. The only way you can receive the benefit of Christ's life and death is by putting your trust in Him – and in Him alone. You do that, you're declared just by God, you're adopted into His family, you're forgiven of all of your sins, and you have begun your pilgrimage for eternity.

### ***1 Corinthians 15:1-8***

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.*

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*

*Notes*