



# Disciple Makers

— HANDBOOK —

Dr. Eric Smith & Seth Jones



**Scan the QR code  
above to follow  
along with the video  
course or by visiting  
the website below.**

**PASTORERICSMITH.COM**

DESIGN BY CHANDAN BANGAR  
© PASTOR ERIC SMITH 2023

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
FAQ.....	2
Three Dimensions of a Disciple's Life.....	9
Launching Your Group.....	11
Typical Meeting Schedule.....	12
Beginning Your Journey.....	13

## **PART I: Knowledge**

Session 1: Known and loved by God.....	15
Session 2: The Bible.....	17
Session 3: Grace.....	19
Session 4: Sin.....	21
Session 5: Salvation (Born Again).....	23
Session 6: Justification.....	25
Session 7: God the Father.....	27
Session 8: God the Son.....	29
Session 9: God the Holy Spirit.....	31
Session 10: The Church (Set Apart).....	33

## **PART II: Identity**

Session 1: Love.....	35
Session 2: Joy.....	37
Session 3: Peace.....	39
Session 4: Patience.....	41
Session 5: Kindness.....	43
Session 6: Goodness.....	45
Session 7: Faithfulness.....	47
Session 8: Gentleness.....	49
Session 9: Self-control.....	51
Session 10: Hope.....	53

## **PART III: Action**

Session 1: Honoring: Personal Worship.....	55
Session 2: Honoring: Corporate Worship.....	57
Session 3: Growing: Bible Study.....	59
Session 4: Growing: Prayer.....	61
Session 5: Growing: Quiet Time.....	63
Session 6: Sharing: Missional.....	65
Session 7: Sharing: Witnessing.....	67
Session 8: Connection: Small Groups.....	69
Session 9: Serving.....	71
Session 10: Generosity.....	73

# Introduction

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* These challenging words from Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 have become known as the Great Commission. We are all called to become more deeply devoted disciples of Jesus and to make disciples. Jesus' command was not for professional ministers only, but for everyone who has experienced the life-changing message of Jesus.

Looking back at the early church, Christianity exploded from a small persecuted group of Jesus followers to over half of the known world in a little over three hundred years! The Jesus movement was and is the greatest movement the world has ever seen. Historian Steven McNeil made a fascinating point, *"One of the most notable elements was the anonymity of the early missionaries."* It was not pastors and ministers only, it was everyone. People from all walks of life who had experienced and been changed by the good news of Jesus made it their ambition to *"Make disciples."* Imagine what God can and will do when His people get serious about this call to make disciples. This Disciple Makers Handbook was designed to empower all believers to live out Jesus' Great Commission.

# FAQs

## What is a Disciple Maker Group?

Disciple Maker Groups are gender-specific groups that meet together every other week with the clear goal of God shaping your life to be more like Jesus. In Luke 6:12-19 we get a snapshot of the three dimensions of relationships that Jesus attended to. Up: intimacy with His Father. In: community with His disciples, and Out: influencing others through His life and ministry.

If we want our lives to be shaped more like Jesus, we need to attend to these three dimensions. Disciple Maker Groups provide a high challenge and high support environment for that pursuit. These groups function best with 4-6 people, but we encourage you to start from day one with the goal of multiplication. After you have been in a group for around one year, it is time for you to go and disciple others. The goal of the group is to create an environment of authenticity, where everyone can become the disciple God has created them to be; one who makes more disciples.

What follows is a brief explanation of the patterns that provoke life transformation in each of the three dimensions. Each area has a suggested time frame for a one-hour meeting. Each Disciple Maker Group has a Disciple Maker Guide. The Guide leads the group's communication, schedule, discussion, etc. In the end, the goal is for each participant to become a Guide and help others grow in their relationship with Jesus.

## How is a Disciple Maker Group different from a Small Group?

**Small Groups:** Are typically open groups

**Disciple Maker Groups:** Are closed groups to the 4-6 people in your group

**People in Small Groups:** Made up of both believers and non-believers

**People in Disciple Maker Groups:** Only believers

**Size of a typical Small Groups:** Varies, but usually 10-20

**Size of a Disciple Maker Groups:** 4-6 people maximum

**Small Groups:** Are co-ed or gender-specific

**Disciple Maker Groups:** Are gender-specific

**Outcome of Small Groups:** Designed to grow and multiply biblical community.

**Outcome of Disciple Maker Groups:** Designed to replicate disciple-makers.

As you can see there is a difference between Disciple Maker Groups and Small Groups, both have unique value and if your schedule allows they can both be life-giving.

## **What is the role of the Disciple Maker Guide?**

Each group is made up of one Guide and three to five participants. The Guide is the person who communicates to the group, directs the conversation, and keeps the meeting to the set time of one hour. The only absolute requirement for leading a Disciple Maker Group as the group Guide is that you be intentionally pursuing Christ. You do not need to be a master teacher or have all of the answers.

As a Disciple Maker Group Guide, you set the tone for the group's culture and environment. You are not lecturing students; you are cultivating relationships with a few close friends. You can read through our Disciple Maker Group Starter Guide for a step-by-step guide to leading a Disciple Maker Group.

## **What is the role of a Participant?**

Everyone will read the Disciple Maker Handbook session for the meeting and contribute to the conversation during the meeting. The participants will have the opportunity to encourage, support, and serve the other members of the group. As a participant, it is very important to honor the Group Guide by consistently attending, participating, and listening to others who share.

## **How do I Join a Disciple Maker Group?**

Becoming a member of a Disciple Maker Group typically happens by invitation. This will often happen as you are actively engaged in the church. There are seasons when the church will strategically encourage the formation of new Disciple Maker Groups. If you desire to be discipled, our team will do everything we can to assist in connecting you.

## **How do I Start a Disciple Maker Group?**

As mentioned above, if you are a follower of Jesus, then there are others who you can invest in. So often in Christian circles, we create a culture where only someone who has been a Jesus follower for decades can disciple others, but we clearly see in the Bible that all Christians are called to make disciples, so do it. As Jesus said, go and make disciples.

## **Don't Forget to Register Your Disciple Maker Group.**

Once you start your Disciple Maker Group, don't forget to register your group to receive information, tips, and other resources to help you.



## How do I choose group members?

Jesus is our example. The first thing He did before choosing His disciples was pray (Luke 6:12-16). Ask the Lord God to reveal to you the people you should invite on the journey with you. A great tool to determine the type of people for your Disciple Maker Group should have the attributes of someone who is a F.A.T. Jesus follower.

**F.A.T.** Jesus followers are: Faithful, Available, and Teachable. A person who has already shown faithfulness in their life, they are available to make time for the Lord, and they have a teachable posture. Not everyone who attends a church meets these criteria, but it is important to allow God's spirit to lead you as you invite people on this journey with you.

After you get clarity on the individuals God would have you invite, approach him or her and ask, "Would you be interested in being in a group of a few other men/women to grow spiritually?"

## How do I multiply and send out my group members to disciple others?

Your group should meet for a little over a year, then multiply. Some groups develop a deeper connection, which results in faster growth; others take longer. Some group members will be ready and excited to leave the group and begin their own groups. Others, however, will want to remain in the existing group for another year.

It is important for the group Guide to serve those in his/her group well and help them take their best next step. If they are ready to multiply, then highly encourage them to do so. If they want to stay because they do not feel ready, then use your wisdom to help them take the best next step. Remember, the goal is for the men and the women of the group to multiply and make more disciples.

## **What if I don't know the answer to a question?**

If you don't know the answer, don't stress, or feel discouraged. Tell them that you do not know and try to direct them to the right place to find the answer. It is important to be honest because none of us have all the answers. Being a disciple maker is not about having all the answers, but it is about investing your life into others.

## **What Does a Disciple Maker Meeting Look Like? The How (Up, In, Out)**

On this journey, you will learn the reproducible rhythm of being a disciple of Jesus.

**Up** - [intimacy with God]

**In** - [living in community]

**Out** - [actively living out your faith]

## The What (Handbook Lessons)

Disciple Maker groups consist of 30 one-hour sessions that take place every other week. In each meeting, your group will use this Handbook to serve as the curriculum as you go through the following areas, which are essential in the life of the Jesus follower.

1. **Knowledge about God – (Session 1 -10)**
2. **Identity in Christ – (Session 11 -20)**
3. **Action as a Disciple – (Session 21-30)**

## Video Content

The 30 lessons in this Handbook have a video session that accompanies each of the lessons. These videos will enhance the experience for you and your group. Make sure to sign up for the video content via the information below.

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO ACCESS THE  
DISCIPLE MAKERS VIDEO CONTENT.



## Three Dimensions of a Disciple's Life

The three dimensions of a disciple's life are modeled for us in the life of Jesus. Jesus attended to **Up**: intimacy with His Father, **In**: community with His disciples, and **Out**: influencing others through His life and ministry. The rhythm of the life of a disciple of Jesus should model the life of Jesus. He is our teacher; so we learn from Him. Disciple Maker Groups are designed to help us learn this rhythm of life, so we can follow His leadership.

### Up - (Intimacy with God)

**This is spending time with God and discussing what you learned. (20 minutes)**

We have developed 30 studies for you and your group to use as your handbook for your group. These 30 uniquely curated studies have been chosen to help you grow as a disciple of Jesus in every area of your life. The 30 studies in this Disciple Maker Handbook are broken into three intentional sections. The first section is devoted to some of the key things we need to **KNOW** about God. The second section is about our **IDENTITY** in Jesus and the third section is the **ACTION** we need to take to grow in our relationship with God. These 30 studies have been designed to help you go deeper and further in your relationship with the Lord.

## **In - (Living in Community)**

After discussing what you learned, this is the time to move to application with those in our lives. (20 minutes)

Use the questions at the end of each study as a launchpad for discussion about the things God is in conversation with you about.

## **Out - (Actively Living Out Our Faith)**

This is a time to discuss intentional action and then we will pray together about the next steps. (10 minutes)

### **Two Key Questions:**

1. What is God saying to you?
2. What are you going to do about it?

When you work through these two key questions in each meeting, your fellow group members may have something specific that God is calling them to do. The goal is to help each other say yes to the things God is calling us to do. It is powerful when we come alongside each other and assist each other to be obedient to the calling of God in our lives.

## **Launching Your Group (Your First Meeting)**

Your first meeting will primarily be to get to know one another and answer these two essential questions before you get into the 30 sessions in the Disciple Maker Handbook. Give your group members the following two questions a couple of days before your first meeting. Groups can meet anywhere at any time. Work with your group to determine the best place to meet and the best time to meet.

- 1. What do you hope you get out of our time together in this Disciple Maker Group?**
- 2. Share Your Story in 5 minutes with the group.**

The rest of your first meeting should highlight the typical meeting schedule shared on the following page.

# Typical Meeting Schedule

(This begins after your initial meeting)

## 1. Premeeting: Discuss the latest in sports, events, etc.

(Take time to catch up with everyone about the events in society and life.)

## 2. Highs and Lows - 10 Minutes

(Spend the first 10 minutes and have everyone share their Highs and Lows of the past two weeks.)

## 3. Up - 20 minutes

(Have each person quietly read the study or read aloud as a group, you can also watch the video content together before discussion, then discuss the first question in the lesson)

## 4. In - 20 minutes

(Reflect on the lesson and the Bible verses together. Discuss questions two and three in the lesson and other thoughts and ideas as the Lord leads.)

## 5. Out - 10 minutes

As you wrap up your time together, it always leads us to the two key questions, we ask each time we meet:

### Two Big Questions:

- What is God saying to you?
- What are you going to do about it?

## Beginning Your Journey

*"Because the Bible is God's Word, it has eternal relevance; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture... But because God chose to speak his Word through human words in history, every book in the Bible also has historic particularity; each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture it was originally written."*

-Gordon Fee

The Bible is a priceless gift. In a world that is constantly changing, God and His word remain. It is not only true, it is the ultimate source of truth. It is one unified work that ultimately leads to Jesus, who is *"The Way, the Truth, and the Life."* (John 14:6) Let's be honest, learning to read scripture well is not easy, but it is worth it. There are no prescriptions given in the Bible other than to devote ourselves to it and meditate on it. Here are a few things to consider while reading scripture. The first objective when reading scripture is to know God. Too often readers are looking for answers to questions, motivational quotes, instructions, or other similar things first. All of these things are important, but they are not the most important. Our greatest need and deepest longing, whether we realize it or not, is to know God. The more we get to know God and learn his character, the more we will be transformed.



A great starting question could be: What does the scripture we are reading reveal about God's character and nature? Second, it's important to approach God's Word as a humble learner. Isaiah 55:9 states, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We are reading the inspired Word of One who is far greater than us in every possible way. Third, think of quality over quantity. Last, it is important to read and apply scripture in context. This involves considering scripture as a whole, considering what the text meant at the particular time and place it was written, and then how those principles apply to our lives. The more we read scripture together, we learn to read and apply it better. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

**Reading:**

John 15:1-11

Psalms 17:6

Proverbs 3:5-6

James 1:22-25

Psalms 106:1-3

# Known and Loved By God

*“To be fully known and truly loved is what we need more than anything... It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.” - Tim Keller*

In the first few pages of the Bible, we learn that God created humanity in his image(Genesis 1:27), or as David wrote in Psalm 139:14, *“fearfully and wonderfully made.”* As image bearers of God, we have intrinsic worth, dignity, and purpose. Still, we are sinful and broken. The good news is that God’s love is greater than human failure. Romans 5:8 says, *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Knowing the depth of our sin and brokenness, He loves us still. It was because of His unexplainable love that Jesus came into the world, lived a perfect life, and laid His life down taking upon himself the consequences of our sin. Jesus conquered sin and death. Jesus made a way for our brokenness to be restored and for us to be adopted into His spiritual family. Embracing God’s matchless love changes us from the inside out. It empowers us to live a life that reflects His goodness, character, and love in the world.

In doing so, we are living out our purpose as his image bearers in the world. This begins with knowing and resting in God's love for us, or as Jesus put in John 15:9, "*Abide in my love.*"

**Reading:**

Genesis 1:26-27

John 15:9-11

2 Corinthians 13:14

1 John 4:7-21

**Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God and ourselves?
2. How should the fact that we are fully known and loved by God shape our identity and mindset?
3. What action steps can we take this week to live in this reality?

# The Bible

*“There is an infinite majesty about every line of Scripture, but especially about that part of Scripture in which the Lord reveals Himself and His glorious plan of saving grace in the person of His dear Son Jesus Christ.” - Charles Spurgeon*

The Bible is a library of books written over a period of about fifteen hundred years, on three continents, by over forty authors, yet perpetually speaks God’s purpose. It contains a wide variety of literary styles and was written by human authors who were all inspired by God. The Bible tells one unified story that reveals God’s character, the reality of the world we live in, and God’s plan to restore the world. The entire story points to and revolves around Jesus, in whom the fullness of God was revealed in human form (Colossians 1:19). The opportunity to know and love, and be known and loved by the all-powerful, all-wise Creator of the Universe is the greatest privilege human beings have been granted. We come to know God through His word. Hebrews 4:12 states, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.”* God’s word is “living and active” because it reveals a “living and active” God whom we can come to know.

The more we know Him, the more we love and value Him, and the more our lives will reflect his character. In a world that is constantly changing, God's word is our anchor. It is not only true, it is the ultimate source of truth. The same Holy Spirit that spoke His word dwells in us. As we stay committed to God's word it will continue to renew and empower our life.

### **Reading:**

Isaiah 55:6-13

Hebrews 4:12-13

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Deuteronomy 12:32

Psalms 18:30

### **Questions:**

1. How does the fact that God chose to reveal Himself to us through His word teach us about His character?
2. How does commitment to reading the Bible form our identity?
3. How does God's word change our everyday lives: attitude, work life, family life, decisions?

# Grace

“Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action... Grace is not just about forgiveness but about life.” - Dallas Willard

There is nothing more compelling, humbling, and inspiring than God’s grace. The word grace is used 123 times in the New Testament alone! Grace is the unmerited, undeserved favor granted to us by God. As Paul stated in Ephesians 2:8, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The gift of a restored relationship with God, a place in God’s family, a life of true purpose, and hope of eternal life is greater than anything we deserve or could ever earn. St. Augustine wrote, “For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them.” Receiving God’s grace humbles us. It confronts us with the reality of our need, that we have nothing of equal value to offer God.

Grace humbles us, but it inspires us. The same God who spoke the Universe into existence genuinely loves and values us. Receiving God’s grace and forgiveness does NOT give us a license to live however we please.

Instead, grace inspires us to live differently. We live and work from God's grace, not to earn God's grace through how we live or work. This is the greatest news! When we truly encounter God's grace it begins to reorient our desires to God's desires. D.A. Carson refers to this as a "Grace-driven effort." Inspired by our love for God and gratitude for His unmerited favor, we are intentional about living a life that reflects his goodness.

### **Reading:**

John 1:17

Titus 2:11

Ephesians 4:7

Hebrew 4:16

2 Timothy 1:9-10

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts teach us about God's character, and ourselves?
2. What role does God's grace play in the formation of our identity?
3. How does God's grace change the way we live? What are some specific action steps we can take to live the reality of God's grace?

# Sin

*“Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.”*

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In scripture, the word *sin* means to miss the mark. It is a failure to live up to God’s standard. After God created the world and human beings in His image, Genesis 1:31 says *“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”* It was good, but humans disobeyed God. They chose their own way rejecting God’s loving rule, they sinned. Sin has consequences. The good and pure world God created, including humanity, was tarnished. The devastating, cumulative effect of sin is evident in the world around us, and even within our own hearts. In Romans 3:23 Paul famously wrote, *“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”* As Jesus-followers we know God’s way is best, but we battle with natural tendencies that pull us in different directions.

In Romans 7:18-19, Paul identified with this, *“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”* Sin can be obvious or it can be sneaky. Sin can be good things that we allow to have God-like importance in our lives



A few verses later in Romans 8:10, Paul went on to write, *“But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life.”* Sin does NOT have the final say. Jesus was perfect, then he took upon himself the consequences of sin and conquering sin and death. When we submit our lives to Jesus, the victory that He won is ours. Therefore, as Jesus-followers living by the Spirit of God, our sinful desires no longer rule. Simply put, sin is no longer worth it. Still, we are intentional about setting boundaries and creating habits and patterns that keep our hearts and minds focused on Jesus and a life that honors him.

### **Reading:**

Romans 3:10-12

Romans 3:23

Jeremiah 31:34b

Romans 7:7-8:11

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts teach us about God’s moral character, and ourselves?
2. What role does God’s grace play in the formation of our identity?
3. How can we continually redirect our focus away from sin and to the source of our strength, Jesus? What are some boundaries we can set and intentional habits we can form to avoid sin and temptation to sin?

# Salvation: Born Again

*“Salvation was bought not by Jesus’ fist, but by His nail-pierced hands; not by muscle but by love; not by vengeance but by forgiveness; not by force but by sacrifice. Jesus Christ our Lord surrendered in order that He might win; He destroyed His enemies by dying for them and conquered death by allowing death to conquer Him.” - A.W. Tozer*

From the time sin entered the world, God enacted His plan to redeem and restore, which ultimately led to Jesus.

Though He was fully God, He humbled himself, became human, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death satisfying God’s wrath for our sins, and defeated death through his resurrection. In Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul wrote, *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”* In spite of our sins and failures, there is hope. According to Romans 10:9, *“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Instead of facing the music for our sins, we can be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with the God who created and loves us.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*” To use Jesus’ language from John 3:3, it is like we are “*born again*” into a whole new life. Because of Jesus, we have a place to belong in God’s family, purpose on earth, and hope of eternal life. This is simply the greatest news ever! It is too good to keep to ourselves, we must share it with others.

### **Reading:**

Romans 6:23

John 3:16

Acts 16:31

Romans 8:31-39

### **Questions:**

1. What are some things that God’s plan of salvation reveals to us about God’s character?
2. How does the fact that we have been saved by God’s grace shape our identity?
3. How has the gift of salvation changed our everyday lives? What are some action steps we can take this week to live in this reality?

# Justification

*“Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith.” - Martin Luther*

God is perfectly just. Therefore, sin must be dealt with. Everyone loves the idea of God’s justice and how God will make all things right until we remember that we too are sinful. The story that unfolds throughout scripture clearly reveals humanity’s consistent failure to live up to God’s standard. According to Romans 3:23-24, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* Sin leads to death and separates us from our perfect and holy God. So, how can sinful people be “justified,” restored to right standing with a perfect and holy God? Jesus was sinless, but he took upon himself the consequences of our sin. Through faith in Jesus’ saving work on our behalf, we can be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with God, justified. Instead of facing the consequences of our sins, which are rightly deserved, we receive instead the reward for Jesus’ perfection.

In other words, Jesus' righteousness is transferred to us. David captured the burden-releasing, empowering joy of justification in Psalm 32:1-2, "*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them*"

### **Reading:**

Romans 3:21-31

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 5:2

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God's character?
2. Because of our acceptance and trust in Jesus, we are restored to right standing with God! How does this change our mindset and identity?
3. How does the fact that we have been justified by faith through grace give us the courage and boldness to live differently? What are some action steps we can take this week to live in this reality?

# God The Father

*“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God the Father.” - J.I. Packer*

Scripture reveals that God is one, but exists in three persons. This is referred to as the Trinity. According to the Athanasian Creed, *“The divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”* Same essence, complete unity, but three persons. There is an element of mystery around God’s nature that our human minds cannot fully comprehend, but God has made Himself known to us through His Word. The next three discussions explore the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The first person of the Trinity is God, the Father. One of the most powerful images in all of scripture is God as a perfect, loving Father.

In fact, family language is used throughout scripture. As a Father, God loves perfectly and unconditionally. In Galatians 4:5, Paul describes putting our faith in God, as adoption into His family. God loves us where we are, but loves us too much to leave us where we are. As any good human father, God calls us higher. He sees beyond what we are and calls us to what we could be. According to Hebrews 12:6, “The Lord disciplines the one he loves.” Sometimes that involves challenges, or even hardship. James 1:2-4, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” God loves, corrects, and challenges us to be what he designed us to be for a purpose that is far greater than ourselves.

### **Reading:**

1 Timothy 2:5

Hebrews 7:27-28

Ephesians 2:17-18

John 1:1-5, 9-14

John 8:58-59

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God’s nature?
2. How does the fact that we are beloved sons and daughters of God form our identity?
3. How does the fact that God is our Father affect how we live? What are some specific action steps we can take this week?

# God The Son

*“The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.”*

- Wayne Grudem

The second person of the Trinity is God, the Son. Throughout the Old Testament, through different stories, events, characters, and poems God’s character is being unveiled. Then, in Jesus, it all comes together. As Paul put it in Colossians 1:19, *“In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”* Though Jesus was fully God, the second person of the Trinity, he humbled himself and became human (Philippians 2:6-8). We believe that Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, and was raised from the dead conquering sin and death. Jesus’ death was sacrificial because He absorbed God’s wrath for the sin of the world in our place. According to Isaiah 53:5, *“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.”* It is through Jesus’ victory that God’s plan to restore the world and people’s lives was accomplished.



In Philippians 2:10-11 Paul wrote, *“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

### **Reading:**

1 Timothy 2:5

Ephesians 2:17-18

John 8:58-59

Hebrews 7:27-28

John 1:1-5, 9-14

### **Questions:**

What do these texts reveal to us about God’s nature and ourselves?

How does the fact that Jesus humbled himself and laid down his life for us form our identity?

What difference does this make in our everyday lives? What are some specific action steps we can take this week?

# God The Holy Spirit

*“The presence of the Spirit of God is the principal expression of God’s life-giving activity at the creation of the world and is further accentuated by the assertion that the continued sustaining of life also demands the continuing divine presence.” - Wolfgang Vondey*

The third person of the Trinity is God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present and active throughout scripture. The word for spirit used in both the Old and New Testaments means breath or wind. It is associated with life and vitality. The Holy Spirit testifies to and exalts Jesus. Jesus told his followers in John 16:17, *“It is for your good that I am going away.”* He promised His followers that the Holy Spirit would come upon them in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28, *“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”* In Ephesians 1:13, Paul stated, *“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”* The Holy Spirit is God’s active presence empowering, purifying, unifying, and bringing life to His people and His church. In Galatians 5:16 Paul emphatically stated, *“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* The Holy Spirit is at work in us and around us. The more aware we are of His constant presence, power, and love the more sensitive we will be to the Holy Spirit’s loving guidance.

**Reading:**

John 15:26-7

John 14:16-17, 23, 26

John 16:7-15

Romans 8:2-6

**Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God's nature and ourselves?
2. How does the fact that the Holy Spirit has breathed new life into us and empowers us, form our identity?
3. What difference does this make in our everyday lives? What are some specific action steps we can take this week to "*walk by the Spirit?*" (Galatians 5:16)

# The Church Set Apart

*“Only if you are part of a community of believers seeking to resemble, serve, and love Jesus will you ever get to know him and grow into his likeness.” - Tim Keller*

God is a relational being. As His image-bearers, the same is true of each one of us. We were designed for relationships, both with God and others. Jesus cast a vision for his people, the church, as family. In Mar 3:35 Jesus said, *“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”* When we devoted our lives to Jesus we became a part of a family. As beautiful and special as a family is, we all know that it is also messy and imperfect. Church is no different. Charles Spurgeon made a powerful statement, *“If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all!... If I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it... The Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by grace... who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow believers.”* Imperfect as we are, we are better together. There is wisdom, healing, strength, and safety when we are living in family-like community.

Together we can accomplish more. In Corinthians 12, Paul compares the church to a human body. The body is made up of different parts with different functions, but each unique part works together in unity. Similarly, when we bring our unique passions and gifts to the table united by our commitment to God and His cause there is no limit to what God can and will do! It is always God's will for His children to be a part of a church community learning, serving, praying, giving, and making a difference together.

### **Reading:**

Titus 2:11-14

Thessalonians 5:23-24

1 Timothy 6:11

2 Timothy 2:22

Acts 20:32

### **Questions:**

1. What does the fact that God created us in and for a relationship with Him and others reveal about God's character?
2. How important is Christian community in shaping our minds and hearts as Jesus followers?
3. What difference does Christian community, or as Jesus put it "family," make in the way we live? What is an action step we can take to move forward into "family," and use our gifts to serve?

# Love

*“Love—and the unity it attests to—is the Mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this Mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father.” - Francis Schaeffer*

Among all of God’s attributes, love rises to the top. So much so that 1 John 4:16 states, “*God is love.*” When we hear the word love many different ideas and emotions come to mind. In scripture, love is much more than an emotional feeling, it is tied to commitment and sacrifice. It was God’s steadfast, loyal love in the Old Testament that caused Him to stay faithful to His people time and time again, even when His people were unfaithful to Him. It was love that led God to send His Son into the world to suffer the consequences of sin so that our relationship with Him could be restored (Romans 5:8). As image-bearers of God designed to reflect His goodness in the world, we are to love.

Jesus was once asked directly, what is the greatest commandment? In Matthew 22:36-37, in what has become known as “The Great Commandment,” Jesus spelled it out clearly, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*”

And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” We are to love God with our whole self, and our love for God leads to a genuine love for one another. Love is not acceptance of the world or the things of the world, but love is demonstrated through us when we sacrificially share His message with others. According to 1 Corinthians 13:2, *“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”* As Jesus' followers, we are to do everything with a spirit of genuine love.

### **Reading:**

Galatians 5:22-23

Matthew 22:36-40

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1 John 4:7-21

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God's character, and how He sees us?
2. How does the fact that God genuinely loves and values us shape the way that we view ourselves?
3. How does God's loving character inspire us to love our neighbor as ourselves? What is an action step you can take this week to reflect God's love for those around you?

# Joy

*“Happiness leaves. It has a brief shelf-life; it comes and goes rapidly. Joy is far different. It doesn’t fluctuate according to its surface surroundings. In fact, it can actually flourish in the midst of pain and suffering.” - Leonard Sweet*

The words used for joy, both in the Old and New Testaments, describe positive feelings like happiness, but also an action that people can engage in regardless of how they may feel. Joy is deep-seated. Unlike happiness, it is not fleeting or dependent on favorable circumstances. As Henri Nouwen stated, *“Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away.”* Paul, who suffered greatly for Christ’s cause, stated in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”* Paul was not in denial of the extreme challenges he faced, but his joy was anchored in a hope that was far greater.



The Psalms are filled with honest expressions of suffering and challenge but with a tangible sense of hope and even joy knowing that God is present and at work in the midst of it. For the Jesus-follower, joy can be an ever-present reality and over time becomes a part of our identity. This joy gives us the strength to endure every season of life with a sense of true purpose. As the prophet stated in Nehemiah 8:10, “The joy of the Lord is our strength.”

### **Reading:**

Galatians 5:22-23

John 15:11

Psalms 100:1

Psalms 16:11

Jeremiah 15:16

Proverbs 12:25

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts about joy reveal to us about God’s character and his design for us?
2. Because joy is now a part of who we are in Christ, how can we cultivate that in our lives?
3. What is an action step you can take this week to live with a greater sense of joy?

# Peace

*“Peace doesn’t come from finding a lake with no storms. It comes from having Jesus in the boat.” - John Ortberg*

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (John 14:27) Jesus spoke these words to His disciples during the Last Supper knowing the brutal end that awaited Him, and the trials that His disciples would soon endure. As Jesus' followers, there is a tangible sense of comfort and calmness that settles deep in our hearts when we are awakened to the sovereignty and love of God. This peace, *“which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:7).

Through the most thrilling victories or crushing defeats, God is on the throne and his love for us has not and will never fade. The forgiveness of sin, the promise of purpose, and the security of our future bring peace in the midst of every kind of challenge. The word used for peace throughout the Old Testament was *“Shalom,”* which is Godly peace, wholeness, and flourishing. As Gabe Lyons stated shalom is, *“God’s dream for the world.”* As Jesus' followers, not only are we to live with Godly peace, but we are to be agents of God’s peace in a world that desperately needs it.

**Reading:**

Galatians 5:22-23

Philippians 4:6-7

Romans 12:18

Isaiah 26:3

Acts 10:36

John 14:27

**Questions:**

1. What do these texts about peace reveal to us about God's plan for us and the world we live in?
2. How does a deeper understanding of Godly peace shape our identity and the way we see the world around us?
3. What gifts and passions have God given you, and how can you use those to be an agent of Godly peace?

# Patience

*“There is nothing which so certifies the genuineness of a man's faith as his patience and his patient endurance, his keeping on steadily in spite of everything.”*

- Martin Lloyd-Jones

The reality is that we live in a busy, hurried world where immediate results are what matters most. The virtue of patience seems to be valued less and less. However, the New Testament writers mention patience twenty times alongside things like humility, love, faith, joy, and peace. Patience involves perseverance, self-control, and enduring challenges with grace. Patience is the ability to remain steady and confident that God is with us and for us. Our patience is connected to our level of trust in the sovereignty, presence, and goodness of God.

If we truly believe that God is good and that he is present with us, then we will be able to trust that *“in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28) Growth in our commitment to Jesus is not immediate, it is a relationship that develops over time. Eugene Peterson described the Christian life as, *“A way of living in which we gradually, over a lifetime, learn to live with God personally and believingly.”*

In a rushed, hurried world that comes with every kind of pressure and burden, we can breathe, rest, be at peace, and trust that God is sovereign, not us. Romans 12:12, “*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer*”

### **Reading:**

Titus 2:11-13

James 1:19

Ephesians 4:2

Psalm 37:7

Psalm 27:14

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts about patience reveal to us about God and what He values?
2. What are some obstacles that keep you from living with this Godly patience?
3. What are some intentional habits we can form to take a step toward Godly patience and a deeper sense of trust in His timing?

# Kindness

*“Kind words produce their own image in men's souls; and a beautiful image it is. They soothe and quiet and comfort the hearer.”* - Blaise Pascal

We can all think of a person whose presence alone brings the good news of Jesus to life through their kindness. Kindness, which is listed as one of the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5, is mentioned over 50 times in the New Testament alone. It means to be gentle, warm-hearted, and empathetic, which is rooted in genuine love and concern for others. Unlike flattery, which is shallow and manipulative, kindness is honest. Kindness speaks truth but does so with genuine love and concern. In Romans 2:4 Paul writes, *“God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.”* God tells us the truth about sin and its consequences, but He shows kindness by making a way for us to be forgiven and restored.

According to Proverbs 12:25, *“Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”* It's easy to underestimate the everyday impact that our presence and words can have on other people. Does our attitude, presence, and words reflect the goodness and love of God that has so radically changed our lives?

**Reading:**

Philippians 4:5

Galatians 5:22-23

Colossians 3:12

Proverbs 14:31

Ephesians 4:32

Proverbs 14:21

**Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God's character?
2. How do these texts about Godly kindness affect the way that we think about ourselves and others?
3. What are some action steps you can take to reflect God's kindness without compromising truth?

# Goodness

*“The goodness of God is infinitely more wonderful than we will ever be able to comprehend.” - A.W. Tozer*

God is perfect, praiseworthy, generous, and benevolent, He is the ultimate good. In Psalm 34:8, David wrote, *“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”* In Mark 10:18, Jesus said, *“No one is good—except God alone.”* It’s interesting when we say something or someone is “good,” because that depends on what the standard of “good” is. For example, if someone compares themselves to the average basketball player, they may be pretty good, but if they compare themselves to LeBron James chances are they are not very good. God is good, therefore our goodness falls miserably short. Still, we can reflect on God’s goodness when we trust in God’s goodness.

One thing that marked the lives of men and women in scripture whom God used in powerful ways was their trust in God’s goodness even when the circumstances around them were anything but good. In Psalm 23:6, David who endured some extremely difficult seasons wrote, *“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”*



Paul, who famously sang praises to God with his hands and feet locked in a Roman dungeon, stated in Romans 8:28, *“God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* If we trust that God is good, that He is at work in every circumstance for His glory and our good, we will reflect His goodness to those around us.

### **Reading:**

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Galatians 5:22-23

1 Chronicles 16:34

Matthew 5:16

James 1:17

Luke 6:45

### **Questions:**

1. What are some of the first things that come to mind when you think of the goodness of God?
2. How does God’s goodness redefine our view of goodness? How does that shape our identity and goals?
3. What are some action steps you can take to avoid false standards of goodness that distract us from true, Godly goodness?

# Faithfulness

*“Faithfulness is our business; fruitfulness is an issue that we must be content to leave with God.” - J.I. Packer*

The word faithfulness in scripture refers to a deep sense of belief, commitment, and loyalty. Throughout the long winding story that unfolds throughout the Bible, one unmistakable theme is God’s faithfulness to His people and His promises. Even though His people continually failed to be faithful to Him, God’s faithfulness to them never wavered. In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul says, *“God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* God has a proven track record. We can have faith in His faithfulness.

As God is faithful, we are to be faithful. Inspired by our love for Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can be faithful to our commitment to Him and to a life that reflects His goodness. Our faithfulness is not to earn the love of God, rather it is our response to God’s love for us through Jesus. This should spark a radical faithfulness to God that marks our lives. Faithfulness to God leads to faithfulness in our work, with our families, in our relationships, and with our gifts. For us, faithfulness is not about perfection, but about commitment.

**Reading:**

Proverbs 3:3-4

Galatians 5:22-23

Romans 12:3

Deuteronomy 7:9

Psalms 119:89-90

1 Corinthians 10:13

2 Thessalonians 3:3

**Questions:**

1. What feelings stir when you think about God's faithfulness?
2. How does God's faithfulness challenge us?
3. What are some action steps you can take this week to further embody God's faithfulness in your life: habits, work, family, etc.?

# Gentleness

*“Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, he insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness, not power.” - John Stott*

Gentleness, in both the Old and New Testaments, conveys strength, humility, and kindness. To be gentle is the opposite of being harsh, divisive, domineering, or violent. In its healthiest sense, gentleness leads to peace and unity. This does not mean that we are passive, fail to take stands, or hide from difficult truths. It does mean that we act, take necessary stands, and share truth with genuine love (Ephesians 4:15). Jesus was a perfect example. Nothing about Jesus was passive or weak, but he was gentle. Even when he took necessary stands and delivered harsh truths, it was rooted in genuine love.

In Matthew 11:29, Jesus famously stated, *“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.”* The deeper our commitment to Jesus, the more his character will begin to shape ours, including gentleness. In scripture, gentleness is often used interchangeably with humility.

There is a quote credited to C.S. Lewis, “*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.*”

Ultimately, gentleness is rooted in humility and genuine care for others. We can be honest, gentleness comes a little more easily for some than others. It can and often does look different, but as we continually look to Jesus we will continue to take on more of his character in ways that are true to how He uniquely created us.

### **Reading:**

Galatians 5:22-23

Proverbs 15:1

James 1:19

Colossians 4:6

Philippians 2:3-4

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God’s character?
2. How does God’s simultaneous strength and gentleness challenge us?
3. What are some action steps you can take this week to grow in Godly gentleness in a way that is true to God’s unique design for you?

# Self-Control

“As the Hebrews were promised the land, but had to take it by force, one town at a time, so we are promised the gift of self-control, yet we also must take it by force.” - Ed Welch

“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do,” stated Paul in Romans 7:15. Even though we have devoted our lives to Jesus, our natural human instincts and desires do not always line up with what we value. We have to be intentional about developing Godly, grace-driven self-control. Sometimes, exercising Godly self-control means that we intentionally avoid compromising situations. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, Paul writes, “Hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul used an interesting illustration of an Olympic athlete preparing for a race. He pointed out how hard they train and discipline themselves so that they can compete at the highest level. In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul delivered the mic drop line, “They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” Following Jesus is not the easy way, but it is without a doubt the best way.

As Dallas Willard put it, “*We don’t try hard, we train hard.*” Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, studying scripture, Godly community, and others strengthen us. They develop Godly self-control by continually re-orienting our minds and hearts back to the source of our strength, Jesus.

### **Reading:**

Proverbs 14:29

Galatians 5:22-23

Proverbs 25:28

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Proverbs 23:21

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God’s character?
2. How do these texts shape the way we see ourselves?
3. What are some areas of your life where you need to exercise more self-control? What is an intentional step you can take toward self-control in that area of your life?

# Hope

*“Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth, on the basis of God's own commitment, that the best is yet to come.” - J.I. Packer*

One of the most thrilling things about being a Christian is that we live with an ever-present hope, in this life and in eternity. Throughout scripture, the word hope indicates a joyous expectation or belief. Hope marks the life of believers. Unlike wishfulness, our hope is rooted in the truth of God's character, God's word, and God's promises. This hope, which outweighs the best and worst of earthly circumstances, is an anchor for our lives.

In Romans 8:24-25, Paul stated, *“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”*



This hope is an ever-present source of peace, joy, and purpose. If we are mindful of the hope that we have in Christ, both now and forever, it is going to work itself out in our lives. C.S. Lewis once wrote, *“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next.”* A life of hope is a life of purpose.

### **Reading:**

Hebrews 6:19-20

Hebrews 10:23

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

### **Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal to us about God’s character?
2. What role should our hope in Christ play in forming our identity?
3. What are some specific things you can do this week to remind yourself of the hope we have in Christ and live that out?

# Honoring: Personal Worship

*“Worship is the specific act of ascribing to God the glory, majesty, honor, and worthiness which are His.”- Jerry Bridges*

Psalm 145:3 says, *“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.”* In worship, we acknowledge the unmatched power, wisdom, love, and greatness of God. Worship is more than something we do, it also is a way of living for the glory of God in every aspect of our lives. The word used in scripture for worship refers to the act of bowing down, which was a show of deep respect and submission. In worship we acknowledge, express, and enjoy the goodness of God. Scripture is clear that God delights in our praises, but God is God, whether we acknowledge Him or not. Therefore, to worship God is also a gift to us. C.S. Lewis wrote, *“In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”*

We were created to worship. Therefore, we are going to worship something or someone. So, what or who we love and value the most will be what or who we worship. There is nothing worthy of our deepest loyalty, affection, and worship other than God. There is an overwhelming freedom and joy when we live our lives from a posture of gratitude and worship unto God.

**Reading:**

Psalm 121:1-2

Psalm 42:1-2

1 Chronicles 16:23-31

**Questions:**

1. Describe from your own perspective how worthy God is of our deepest honor, loyalty, and love.
2. How does our worship shape our identity?
3. Are there any other things, maybe even good things, that you find yourself giving god-like status in your life?

# Honoring: Corporate Worship

*“I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment... It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with.” - C.S. Lewis*

As C.S. Lewis alluded to in the quote above, there is something special about gathering with God’s people to worship, pray, and be challenged by God’s word together. The expression of our worship alongside others, as Lewis put it *“completes the enjoyment.”* Since the church was born, we have been a gathering people. In Luke 4:16 Jesus went to the synagogue for worship and prayer *“as was his custom.”* Corporate worship was a part of Jesus’ normal rhythm, which was passed on to his followers.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.”* We were not designed to follow Jesus alone but in community with others. When God’s people gather for worship, amazing things happen!

As we prioritize our lives and lead our families, it is essential to make corporate worship a priority. God's Spirit moves in uniquely powerful ways when God's people gather for worship and to be challenged by the preaching of His word.

**Reading:**

Hebrews 10:19-25

Revelation 5:11-13

Psalm 99

**Questions:**

1. How does worshiping God alongside others stir our affection toward God?
2. How does worshiping alongside others renew, strengthen, and deepen our commitment to God?
3. Is worshiping God alongside others a priority in your lives?

# Growing: Bible Study

*“The Bible is the book of my life. It’s the book I live with, the book I live by, the book I want to die by.” - N.T. Wright*

Not only is God's word true, it is the source of all truth. Immediately after Jesus was baptized, he spent forty days fasting in the wilderness. During this time he was tempted to turn stones into bread. Jesus replied in Matthew 4:4, *“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* Throughout scripture, God’s word is often referred to as food. As food strengthens and nourishes our physical body, God’s word strengthens and nourishes our soul. As we read, think about, and discuss scripture regularly, not only do we learn more about God and life, but we are also continually refocusing our attention and directing the loyalty of our hearts toward God. Scripture can be tough to understand and it takes time, but nothing is more worthwhile. One of the ways we grow in this area is through the preaching of the word. In Acts 2:42, the early church was devoted to the apostle’s teaching. Being challenged by the preaching of God’s word together was deeply formative for the early church. There is something powerful about the proclamation of God’s word in the community that empowers us. In a constantly changing world, God’s word has and will never change.

There are multiple Bible reading plans and strategies out there. One plan that can be very beneficial is called SOAP. It is a way of reading your Bible and applying what you read in a practical way.

**SOAP** stands for:

**Scripture** – Read a passage of scripture and write down a verse or two that jumps out to you.

**Observation** – What are your personal observations that you note from this scripture?

**Application** – How does it now apply to your everyday life? What can you do to apply it today?

**Prayer** – Write a personal prayer based on your observation and application.

**Reading:**

2 Timothy 3:16

Psalm 1:1-3:

Psalm 119:1-8

**Questions:**

1. How does the fact that God has revealed Himself to us through His word reveal to us about His character and nature?
2. How does studying scripture shape our perception and identity?
3. What barriers keep you from God's word?

# Growing: Prayer

*“Prayer is awe, intimacy, struggle—yet the way to reality. There is nothing more important, or harder, or richer, or thicker, or more life-altering. There is absolutely nothing so great as prayer.” - Tim Keller*

Prayer is a basic human instinct. As human beings, we were uniquely created by God for a relationship with Him. So, there is a deep longing inside of each one of us to call out to something or someone who is greater than ourselves. As Christians, we know who that someone is. Not only are we allowed, but we are welcomed to approach the throne of our all-wise and all-powerful Creator God in prayer. Prayer is multifaceted, but simply put it is communing with God. Prayer is acknowledging the goodness of God, praising and giving him thanks. Prayer is releasing our deepest cares, burdens, joys, and frustrations to God. Prayer is making our request known to Him, but trusting His wisdom. In prayer, we come to know God and continually re-orient our life around His character.

In prayer, we also see our truest self. Tim Keller stated, “God is the only person from whom you can hide nothing. Before him, you will unavoidably come to see yourself in a new, unique light.”



This is both humbling and uplifting. Prayer is essential for our spiritual vitality and one of the greatest privileges human beings have been granted. A simple, but helpful guide as we develop a life of prayer is the ACTS Model. We begin with *adoration*, we worship and acknowledge the unmatched greatness and love of God. Then we move to *confession* where we acknowledge our sin and trust in God's grace. Next is *thanksgiving*, here we express our gratitude to God for who He is and what He has done. We end with *supplication*, we make our request known to God believing that He is able.

**ACTS** – Prayer Model (Start 1-2 minutes for each step)

1. **Adoration** – Praise God for who He is.
2. **Confession** – Confess your sins to God.
3. **Thanksgiving** – Give thanks to God for His blessings.
4. **Supplication** – Pray for your needs and the needs of others.

### Reading:

Matthew 6:5-13

Mark 1:35

Ephesians 6:18-20

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Psalms 66:18-20

Luke 18:1-8

### Questions:

1. How does the fact that we can approach the throne of God in prayer stir our affection toward God?
2. Why is prayer such an important part of your life as a Jesus follower?
3. Where are you in your prayer life? What is an intentional step you can take toward becoming a man or woman of prayer?

# Growing: Quiet Time

*“Retire from the world each day to some private spot. Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God’s presence envelops you.”*

-A.W. Tozer

Jesus’ ministry life was eventful, to say the least, but he would often withdraw from the demands of life to a quiet place to pray. Jesus’ life was marked by sacrificial love and service for others but He lived in a rhythm of service and time alone with God. Throughout church history, Christians have followed Jesus’ example and placed a high value on time alone with God. Psalm 46:10 says, *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* In a world where productivity, efficiency, and achievements are valued so highly, scripture invites us to set those things aside and simply be still, to rest in the goodness and love of God. Blaise Pascal stated, *“All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”* Quiet time replenishes, refocuses, and re-orientes our hearts and minds toward what and who matters most, God. One way to do this is to set aside a few minutes of our prayer time to quiet our minds and be simply present in God’s presence.

Early on our minds will drift off, but every time our minds drift is an opportunity to return. It may be helpful to refer back to the ACTS prayer model and SOAP scripture reading model from the previous two sessions.

**Reading:**

Mark 1:35

Josh 1:8

Matthew 6:33

Psalms 119:9

Psalms 1:2

Matthew 6:6

**Questions:**

1. How is quiet time important for our relationship with God?
2. What effect does quieting our minds/hearts and simply resting in the presence of God have on your life?
3. What is an action step you can take this week to resist the urge to rush and establish a pattern of stillness in God's presence?

# Sharing: Missional

*“Just as the various forces and influences of the modern world socialize or enculturate us into the values of freedom, individualism, self-reliance, and self-advancement, so the church is challenged to form a people with distinctive habits of the heart. As an alternate social reality, the church is called to teach people how to talk, how to act, how to fight, how to love, how to see the world in a peculiar way—a Christlike way.”*

- Darrel Guder (*The Missional Church*)

Commitment to Jesus as our Savior and Lord is also a commitment to His mission. Though it may look different, everyone is called “minister.” The core of God’s mission is to restore. The world we live in is amazing and beautiful, but it’s also broken. The beauty of God’s wisdom and power is on full display, but so is the destructive nature of sin. From the time sin entered the world, God’s plan to restore began. It eventually led to Jesus, who conquered sin and death. Now, our mission is to share who he is, what he did, and make the world more the way He intended it to be. Gabe Lyons once wrote, “Traveling from place to place, Christ leaves a wake of healing and restoration.” So, for us living God’s mission is “participating with God in his restoration project for the whole world.”

According to 1 Corinthians 12, we have been empowered by His spirit and uniquely gifted to do just that! Paul describes the church as a human body made up of many different parts with totally different functions but unified in its mission. When we bring our unique experiences, perspectives, and gifts to the table and live, work, and play on mission in our spheres of influence, amazing things can happen.

### **Reading:**

Acts 1:8

Colossians 4:5

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 13:47

Mark 16:15

Romans 10:13-14

### **Questions:**

1. What are some things that you noticed about God's character from these texts?
2. What are some unique gifts and passions God has given you, and how have you worked to develop them?
3. What are some opportunities that your gifts and passions have given you to make a difference in people's lives?

# Sharing: Witnessing

*“Our faith becomes stronger as we express it; a growing faith is a sharing faith.” - Billy Graham*

When something has captivated our minds and hearts, it is hard for us to keep it in. C.S. Lewis made a simple, but profound point, *“Delight is incomplete till it is expressed.”* He even gave a specific example, *“It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is.”* Whether it is a funny video, a new song, an interesting idea, our favorite restaurant, or something else, we share things that are important to us.

According to Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Just a few chapters later in Acts 4, Peter and John were threatened by the authorities to stop talking about Jesus. Then in Acts 4:20, they made a bold statement, *“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

They were empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the great news of Jesus to those in their city and beyond. As the church of today, we have also been empowered by the same Holy Spirit to be witness of the good news of Jesus to our city and beyond. God created each one of us differently. We all have unique gifts, creativities, and ways of communicating that are as unique as we are. If the good news of Jesus has truly captivated our hearts, like it did Peter and John, then somehow or some way we have to share it.

**Reading:**

Acts 4:8-22

Ephesians 6:19-20

1 Peter 3:13-18

**Questions:**

1. Has the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done for us truly captivated your heart and mind to the point that you cannot keep it in?
2. How does sharing our faith strengthen our relationship with God?
3. Think about your spheres of influence and the people whom God has brought into your life. Is there someone that you know you should share your faith with?

# Connection: Small Groups

*“Living in community with other believers, wrestling through real issues, embracing the gospel together, reminding one another of our identity in Christ, lovingly holding one another accountable for involvement in the spiritual disciplines, and watching the way authentic Christians do life is God’s transformative platform.”*

-Ed Stetzer

We are better and life is better when we are connected in community. Throughout the New Testament, the church gathered in all kinds of settings, both in large groups and small groups. They prayed, studied, ate, and shared life with one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 states, *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.”*

Small groups are a unique space that allows us to encourage one another, be challenged, learn from different perspectives, be held accountable, get to know others, and allow others to get to know us. In genuine, Jesus-centered relationships we learn, heal, grow, and take steps toward becoming what God created us to be.



In Philippians 2:2-3 Paul pleaded, “Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” As we live this out our lives will be enriched and we will enrich the lives of others.

### **Reading:**

John 13:35

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 2:42-47

### **Questions:**

1. How can being a part of a small group help us come to know God at a deeper level?
2. What are some positive changes that have come about in your life as a result of being a part of this group?
3. How can you help others grow?

# Serving

*“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

- Jesus (Matthew 20:26-27)

Not only did Jesus talk about the importance of serving, he lived it out. Though He was and is the greatest, He embraced the role of “*servant*.” In John 13, Jesus caught his disciple completely off guard by washing their feet, which was a task reserved for the lowest servant. Then in John 13:15, Jesus said, “*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*” So, as Jesus' followers, we follow suit and adopt the posture of a servant. In their world and ours, high value is placed on things like status, wealth, and titles, but the Kingdom of God operates on a different set of values. It is not that any of these things are wrong, but love, humility, sacrifice, and service are valued more.

As we put our faith into action and follow Jesus' example of serving others, it actually leads to our spiritual growth. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*”

There is a connection between our relational closeness to Jesus and our obedience to what he asks of us.

### **Reading:**

Colossians 1:28-29

Romans 8:28

2 Corinthians 8:7

Colossians 3:17

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

### **Questions:**

1. How does serving others draw us closer to God?
2. Why is serving so important in shaping our identity as Jesus' followers?
3. What opportunities has God presented to you right now to use your unique gifts and passion to serve others?

# Generosity

*“For it is in giving that we receive.” - Francis of Assisi*

Toward the end of David’s life, he took an offering to prepare for the building of God’s Temple. In his prayer over the offering, David made a profound statement in 1 Chronicles 29:14, “Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” Their giving was a part of their worship. David and the people acknowledged that God was the author of all good things. Everything that they had was ultimately His. Their gratitude led to generosity. The same is true for us. Everything, including the very air we breathe, is a gift from God. Biblically speaking, we are stewards of what God has graciously entrusted to us.

Generosity is the heart of God. In the most famous verse in all of scripture, John 3:16, Jesus said, “God so loved the world that he gave...” As God’s people, created in His image to reflect His goodness in the world, we are also to live generously. Giving is one of the many ways we get to be a part of the work God is doing here in our city and beyond. Generous giving leads to changed lives, spiritual growth in the life of the giver, expansion of God’s kingdom, and blessings to those who give.

**Reading:**

Proverbs 11:1, 4

Proverbs 16-31

Matthew 6:19-211

1 John 3:16-18

**Questions:**

1. What do these texts reveal about the character of God?
2. How does living generously shape our identity as Jesus' followers?
3. What is one thing that you can do this week to live more generously?



*Looking back at the early church, Christianity exploded from a small persecuted group of Jesus followers to over half of the known world in a little over three hundred years! The Jesus movement was and is the greatest movement the world has ever seen. Historian Steven McNeil made a fascinating point, "One of the most notable elements was the anonymity of the early missionaries." It was not pastors and ministers only, it was everyone. People from all walks of life who had experienced and been changed by the good news of Jesus made it their ambition to "Make disciples." Imagine what God can and will do when His people get serious about this call to make disciples. This Disciple Makers Handbook was designed to empower all believers to live out Jesus' Great Commission.*

**PASTORERICSMITH.COM**