

G O L D E N

Welcome to a journey.

Five years ago, Vox Church was started with a dream and a vision to see people being saved for Christ all across the New England region. That dream is still alive today, propelling us forward in faith as we see real life transformation in response to the Gospel. God has blessed us in too many ways to count, but He still has more. God wants to unlock the potential in each one of us to be firmly rooted in Christ, and at the same time, an unwavering light to the rest of the world. God wants to unlock growth.

In this series, we want to take a look at seven different aspects of the Christian walk and examine how God uses each one to grow us into the godly people we were created to be. This book is a resource along the way; designed to help you investigate further what following Christ looks like in your life. Through the application and meditation of scripture, we pray these next seven weeks will be an eye-opening journey for you as you discover the grace and freedom found in daily interactions with your Creator.

Vox
C H U R C H

DAILY TIME WITH GOD

God desperately wants to know you personally. Like with any relationship, getting to know someone requires that you spend time with them. That is why we are kicking off this series with a teaching on your daily time with God. For the next seven days, set aside one hour of your day for 30 minutes of reading the Bible and 30 minutes of prayer. Use the following outline in addition to the scriptural devotions listed under each day:

BIBLE READING: begin your hour with 30 minutes of reading the scriptures. As you approach the Bible, consider starting with one of the following books:

The Gospel of John: John was an eyewitness to the life, death, and resurrections of Jesus. He was also one of Jesus' closest and most trusted friends.

The Letter of James: James was likely the half brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. His letter to the churches is practical and powerful.

The Letter to the Romans: Written by the Apostle Paul, this letter is packed with many of the core truths of Christianity.

Psalms: This collection of songs and prayers reveals much of the nature of God and the journey of people to become more like Him.

Try reading two chapters per day at most and go through the following process as you read:

Observation: write down a key verse that stuck out during your reading. Meditate on this verse and focus on the truth contained within it.

Application: write down a practical way to apply the truth contained in that verse to your everyday life.

Journal: it is helpful to keep a journal with you during your time in the Scriptures. Writing down the things God has spoken to you will help you remember and apply the truth.

PRAYER: take the last 30 minutes of your hour and use any of the following five ways to pray.

Worship: focus on His greatness, sing, write or speak to God about who He is.

Meditate: focus all of your attention on a few key scriptures. Let your mind think deeply on God's truth.

Listen: ask God to speak to your heart. Wait for your mind to be still so you can hear His inner voice.

Ask: this is a time of making requests to God. Asking Him actually releases His blessing in your life. It is important to discern His will for you through scripture, then ask for big, specific requests.

Contend: to intercede, or contend, means to plead for a cause. It means to stand between God and a situation and cry out for God to intervene. Find a promise from scripture and pray it full of faith.

WEEK 1

MONDAY:

Romans 6:15-21 (Expanded passage Romans 5:18 - 6:23)

"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time

from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."

THINK

Search yourself for an area where you don't walk in freedom but continue to struggle with sin. When do you easily give in to temptation? Why? Are there times when you don't feel the pull so strongly? Why? What comfort, relief, or pleasure does the sin give you (no matter how short-lived or shallow)? What pain or discomfort does it bring? What do you fear you would lose if you gave up the sin?

READ

Read the passage with your specific sin in mind. If these verses through your life experience. How do they hold up? Do you find Paul's description of "living as slaves to impurity" to be accurate? What about his perspective on living in obedience to the commands of God? Take time to identify what you do and don't agree with.

PRAY

Talk to God about the things you've uncovered. If you have unanswered questions or problems you can't reconcile, share them. If you are frustrated, express it to Him. Maybe you will challenge Him to show you freedom, as you agree to take on the challenge of giving His ways a shot.

LIVE

You "have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of righteousness." Rest in this freedom today.

TUESDAY

Deuteronomy 10:12-21 (Expanded passage Deut 10:12 - 11:12)

"So now Israel, what do you think God expects from you? Just this: Live in His presence in holy reverence, follow the road He sets out for you, love Him, serve God, your God, with everything you have in you, obey the commandments

and regulations of God that I'm commanding you today—live a good life.

Look around you: Everything you see is God's—the heavens above and beyond, the Earth, and everything on it. But it was your ancestors who God fell in love with; he picked their children—that's you!—out of all the other peoples. That's where we are right now. So cut away the thick calluses from your heart and stop being so willfully hardheaded. God, your God, is the God of all gods, He's the Master of all masters, a God immense and powerful and awesome. He doesn't play favorites, takes no bribes, makes sure orphans and widows are treated fairly, takes loving care of foreigners by seeing that they get food and clothing.

You must treat foreigners with the same loving care—remember, you were once foreigners in Egypt.

Reverently respect God, your God, serve him, hold tight to him,

back up your promises with the authority of his name.

He's your praise! He's your God!

He did all these tremendous, these staggering things that you saw with your own eyes."

READ

Read the passage aloud slowly

THINK

Read it aloud slowly again.

1. What phrase is most memorable?
2. What quality of God stands out to you? Why?
3. What command stands out to you? Why?

PRAY

Here are some ways to pray back the passage. Use as many of these suggestions as you wish.

1. Express to God your thoughts about living in His presence. Has living in His presence been important to you or not?
2. Express to God those areas in which you would guess he considers you "hardheaded."

3. Express to God your feelings about the have-nots you know (widows, orphans, foreigners). Talk to God honestly about how willing or unwilling you have been to include such people in your life.

LIVE

Experiment with living in God's presence while caring for the rest of the world. Relax. Quiet yourself. Just be.

WEDNESDAY

Psalm 62:1-2 (Expanded passage Psalm 62)

*"For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken."*

READ

Take this book outside (if possible) and read the passage.

THINK

In our Western mindset, we describe God with intangible ideas, such as God is love, God is peace, or God is compassionate. But in the Eastern mindset, thoughts are described in vivid imagery and word pictures. The Psalms in particular describe God with tangible ideas: God is Father, God is the wind, God is an eagle. In this psalm David describes God as a rock. Take a few moments to reflect on the specific characteristics of rocks and how they describe God's character. Write down your reflections.

PRAY

Thank God He is like a rock, referring to your list to offer specific details. Thank Him for what each of these aspects of His character means to you.

LIVE

Find a small stone and carry it with you today in your pocket or purse. Every time your hand closes on it, reflect on the fact that God is your rock.

THURSDAY

Hebrews 4:12-13 (Expanded passage Hebrews 4-5)

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

READ

Read these two verses twice, taking more time to digest the words during the second time.

THINK

Most of us believe that God’s Message, His Word, is important. In fact, you probably wouldn’t be reading these words right now if you didn’t believe God’s Word is significant. But if you are like many people, reading it sometimes feels like a chore - less than enjoyable.

Most Jewish children in the first century would memorize the first five books of the Bible before their 13th birthday. They were taught to believe that the words were a love letter to them from God himself.

Think now about how important Scripture is to you. What if you were unable to read or hear anything from the Bible for twelve months? Would you miss it? In what ways have you experienced God’s Word to be precise and powerful, “sharp as a two edged sword?”

PRAY

Start praying by thanking God for the gift of His Word. Ask Him to give you more passion and desire for it. Give God permission to let His Word lay you open to listen and obey in the days and weeks ahead.

LIVE

Memorize these verses, and pray them regularly as a way of asking God to make Scripture increasingly important in your life.

FRIDAY

Matthew 9:9-13 (Expanded passage Matthew 9-10)

"As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him.

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' But when he heard it, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

READ

Once you are in a quiet place, thank God for the gift of His Word. Then read the passage.

THINK

When have you felt like the outsider? When have people scrutinized and criticized you for the people you associated with? Do you think their judgement was fair?

Ponder these words from Jesus: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Where do you think Jesus was going with this statement?

PRAY

Hold your hands open in front of you. Sit in silence for a few minutes, staring at them. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your life today. Pray that your hands will be a physical representation of what you desire your heart to be. Ask the Holy Spirit for His guidance toward paths of mercy, not religiosity. Ask Him to bring to mind outsiders to whom you can show mercy today.

LIVE

As you are reminded of God's mercy on your life, take the risk of showing mercy to outsiders

SATURDAY

Isaiah 35:4-9 (Expanded passage Isaiah 34-35)

*Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you."
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.[a]
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.*

READ

Read the first verse aloud and then the rest silently.

THINK

Read the passage again, watching for its emphasis on restoration and healing. What pictures of healing speak to you? What do you like best about the "Way of Holiness"? What phrases speak to you most? Why do you think that is? What does your choice tell you about what you want from God?

PRAY

Tell God about the images that resonate most with you. Ask God for the restoration or healing that you or others need.

LIVE

Pray for someone this week

SUNDAY

Jeremiah 33:2-3 (Expanded passage Jeremiah 33)

"Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

READ

Find a quiet place and read this passage slowly. Pause in the silence. Let these words wash over you. Make them personal. Claim them as God speaking specifically to you.

THINK

What sticks out to you? What word or phrase settles deeply into your soul? Deep down, do you really believe that God will answer you when you call to him? Why or why not? What does this passage say about His character?

As you hear God's personal message, spoken straight from His being, what do you feel? What words from this passage can you make your own?

PRAY

Ask God what He wants to do with the word or phrase He has given you. Ask Him how you can best live out this gift that the Holy Spirit has placed before you. Listen patiently in the silence for the response. You may be tempted to move on to some other thought or task, but resist, simply resting in the silence yet listening actively.

LIVE

Go and live out the answer of what the Holy Spirit instructed you to do today.

SHARING YOUR FAITH

WEEK 2

MONDAY: Why do we share our faith?

Please take a few minutes and read the following verses.

Isaiah 59:1-2

*"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear."*

Romans 5: 6-10

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

Luke 19: 1-10

"He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they

all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

CONSIDER: Apart from Jesus Christ, people are spiritually lost. Therefore, as believers saved by God's grace, we must reach out to those in our world and share our faith.

JOURNAL:

On a scale from 1-10, how confident are you in sharing your faith?

Take a few moments and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal what hinders you from freely sharing the Gospel. List those things in your journal.

In your own words, write a prayer of repentance and faith to God. Include those fears or blockages you desire to be free from in order to share Christ liberally. Also ask the Holy Spirit to replace those fears with boldness, courage and whatever else you need to be free. End your prayer with thanksgiving for what God is doing in your heart.

TUESDAY: How do we share our faith?

Please take a few moments and read the following verses and reflect on the questions provided. Use what God is speaking to you through the Scriptures to journal your thoughts.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ,

God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Revisit verse 17. Stop for a minute and think about the day/time your life collided with the truth of the Gospel. That is, when you stepped out of your old life and into a new life in Christ. Journal about that experience.

Re-read verses 18-19. In this we see that God gave us the *ministry of reconciliation* and entrusted to us the *message of reconciliation*. Take a moment and ask God to show you ways that you can both serve and speak the Gospel to those around you who need Christ. Begin to journal what God is revealing to you about how to practically share your faith.

Allow the truth of verse 20 – *you are an ambassador for Christ, God is making His appeal through you for others to be reconciled with Christ* – to soak deep into your soul. Receive this truth and thank God that He empowers you to share His Gospel to those around you in effective, courageous and powerful ways.

WEDNESDAY: Who do we share our faith with?

Please take a moment and read the following verses:

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Romans 3:23-25

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

CONSIDER: We see in these verses that everyone needs to hear the Gospel, and that we are called to share this truth both near and far. Today let's focus on who in your immediate sphere of influence needs Christ. Take a moment and make a list of those you know need Jesus.

Read 1 Timothy 2:4 and 1John 5:14-15. In these verses we learn that God desires everyone to be saved and that we can have confidence when we pray according to His will.

Take the next 15 minutes and pray for each person you listed above. Ask God to draw them near and save them. Ask for opportunities to share the Gospel with them. End your prayer with faith and thanksgiving to God who is working on behalf of those you prayed for.

THURSDAY: What do we share?

Over the next two days you will be constructing your story: your testimony. Whether you have known Christ for a few weeks or many years, this is a powerful way to always be ready to share the Gospel with others.

On Tuesday, you reflected on when you first encountered Jesus. Take a few moments now, and worship God – perhaps, you can listen to a few worship songs. During this time, be expressive – sing out loud, declare your devotion to Jesus, raise your hands or kneel before Him. Spend time in His Presence.

Then, read Psalm 138. Be confident as you approach God's Word. Find yourself in that Psalm. Journal about your early encounters with God – how He heard you cry out to Him, and

drew you into your new life in Christ.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving that God opened your eyes and brought you into a saving relationship, by faith, in Christ.

FRIDAY: What do we share?

Today you will be writing out the story of your changed life. It is exciting and powerful to talk about the story of how you encountered the love and grace of God. The first step in this journey is to write it down. Take a few moments and answer these questions:

Who was I before Jesus? (Consider all realms of your life, both internal and external.)

Explain your collision with grace.

What difference has Jesus made?

PRAY AND APPLY: Pray for intentional encounters today and in the coming weeks. Ask God for His compassion in order to build close friendships with people who do not know Jesus. Remember, these people are not projects to “work on,” they are individuals that God loves and died for. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you courage and sensitivity to share your story consistently.

SATURDAY: Where do I share my faith?

Today and tomorrow, we will focus on a longer passage of scripture, John 4:1-45.

John 4:1-30

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus,

wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.[a]

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called

Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the town and were coming to him.

In these verses, we see Jesus intentional in where He goes and to whom He speaks. Do you see this intentionality reflected in your life? Why or why not?

Where in your everyday life can you begin to deliberately focus on the needs of others? Take a few moments and ask God to speak to you about this. Journal what He says to you.

As you begin to get involved in the lives of others, consider inviting them to church. Pray now for specific opportunities to share how being part of a church community has positively impacted your life. Take that step this week and invite someone to church and lunch afterwards.

SUNDAY: Where do I share my faith?

John 4:31-45

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.

Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

After the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

What verses in this passage stand out or speak loudly to you? What is God saying to you about sharing your faith? Journal what He is speaking to you.

This week we have spent a lot of time on the story of our new life in Jesus. The ability to share the Gospel comes from the Holy Spirit filling us with the life and love of God. Take some time to thank God for what He has done in your life this week. Fears and timidity have been broken! You have a rich testimony to share. Remember to receive daily that infilling of grace and courage to be His witness and His ambassador entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation.

FOLLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT

This week we will be digging into Scripture and discovering the wonderful truth of the life in the Holy Spirit available to every believer. As you read, pray and seek God. Expect Him to meet with you in a measure greater than you have ever experienced.

WEEK 3

MONDAY

Ezekiel 36:26-27

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

John 14:16-17

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

Luke 11:9-13

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for[a] a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

What impacts you most about the truth found in these verses?

On your spiritual journey, how have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you?

Take a few minutes and quiet your heart before God. Draw near to Him and confess any unbelief you have in regards to His Spirit living within you. Receive God's forgiveness, and then ask Him for a new and fresh infilling of His Holy Spirit. Perhaps, raise your hands as you are receiving. Ask and receive in faith.

TUESDAY

John 14:25-26

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

John 16:5-15

But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you.

What is the work of the Holy Spirit, as described in these verses?

In chapter 16, verse 13 – Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and He will guide us into all truth. He will speak and declare things to us. What are some things in your life that might be hindering this communication connection with the Holy

Spirit? (i.e., unconfessed sin, busyness that keeps you from spending time with God, unbelief that He desires to speak to you or that you can't hear His voice, etc.) Make a list of those things, and choose to turn away from them. Ask God to help you in this process. Receive His help by faith.

For five minutes, sit quietly and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Journal what you hear Him saying to you.

WEDNESDAY

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Galatians 4:6-7

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

We can approach The Bible and apply it to our personal lives. One way to do this is to take scripture and write declarations (truths that we declare over ourselves). These declarations are powerful and can have a profound effect on our lives. Here's an example: *I am led by the Spirit of God every day.*

Now, go back to the verses listed for today and draw truth from them for your life. Write out these declarations. Speak them over your heart, over you life, over others. Not just today...but make this a habit!

THURSDAY

1 Corinthians 12

Today's passage addresses spiritual gifts. The Bible tells us that *the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each believer for the common good*. As you read 1 Corinthians 12, reflect and answer the following questions.

What gifts do you see in this chapter?

In your walk with God, what has been your experience with these gifts?

Take a few moments and receive an infilling of the Holy Spirit. Specifically ask God to reveal the gifts He has placed in you, and how you can use them for the common good of others.

FRIDAY

1 Corinthians 14:1-2

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit."

Mark 16:17

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;"

Jude 1:20

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,"

One evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit is receiving a spiritual prayer language. We see in these verses that this prayer language enables us to speak mysteries to God and to build up ourselves in faith.

Have you experienced this manifestation of the Spirit?

If so, how has this enriched your spiritual life?

If you have not experienced this and desire to, take a few moments and still your heart before God. As a good Father, He wants to give His children gifts. Ask and receive. End your time with God by praising Him out loud and thanking Him for the continual indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

SATURDAY

Acts 2:1-4

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Ephesians 5:15-20

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Another evidence of the Presence of the Spirit in our lives is a boldness to share Christ with others.

Are you normally timid when it comes to sharing your faith? Take time today to put aside any fears you may have and, as you read in Ephesians 5:18, be filled with the Spirit right now.

As you spend time in prayer, ask God to create an opportunity to boldly share about your faith today. Determine that, by the power of the Holy Spirit living in you, you will make the most of every opportunity to share Christ in both word and deed.

SUNDAY

Matthew 28:16-20

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””

Mark 16:14-19

“Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover. So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.””

This week God has been revealing His desire for you to be continually and consistently filled with His Spirit. In our scripture reading today, we see that God has called us all to make disciples, preach the Gospel and lay hands on the sick so that they will recover. Our lives are based on God's love for us, and the working of His Spirit in our lives.

Who in your sphere of influence needs healing? Can you picture yourself laying hands on them and praying for healing in Jesus name? If not, what is holding you back? Confess those hindrances and turn toward the confidence available through His Spirit.

Moving forward, how will you (on a daily basis) invite the Holy Spirit to fill your life afresh? Write a prayer asking God for His help in this.

SEXUAL PURITY

No matter your past experience, we all have fractured or broken aspects of our sexuality that God wants to make whole again. Over the next seven days, you will use scripture to guide you in prayer as you submit your sexuality to the Lord and experience freedom.

WEEK 4

MONDAY

Psalm 139:1-6, 23-24 (Expanded passage Psalm 139)

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

You hem me in, behind and before,

and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is high; I cannot attain it...

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!”

CONSIDER: If you truly believe that God already knows every thought and intention of your heart, how would that influence your communication with Him about your struggles with sexuality?

As you read Psalm 139, use the words of the psalmist as an invitation to submit all of your thoughts and feelings to the Lord. Filter the words through the lens of sexuality. Ask God to highlight the areas of your sexuality where you struggle. Then, have an honest conversation with Him about those areas. Journal the things that God reveals to you, and be specific.

TUESDAY

Matthew 5: 27-30

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Yesterday, you allowed God to search your heart. Today, allow the Holy Spirit to pinpoint specific relationships, situations and choices that are keeping you from the sexually pure life God has for you. Write these things down as God speaks to you. For example, this might be inappropriate flirting at work, watching sexually explicit movies, or having sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend. Whatever it may look like for you, be clear and honest in writing down what God highlights.

1 John 1:9

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

Enter into a time of repentance. To "repent" means to turn away from one thing and move toward something else. God asks us to repent not in a spirit of condemnation, but in order to turn towards His grace and re-align our hearts with His. Take each situation or relationship that God highlighted for you earlier, and personally repent of these things. By faith, receive His forgiveness and cleansing. You can write your prayers down in your journal, or speak them aloud. Take your time and be thorough.

Spend some time thanking God for His good work in you.

WEDNESDAY

James 5:16

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

Proverbs 28:13

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

The enemy wants us to hide our sins in shame. By hiding, we remain in bondage to the lie that says, "You are the only one that deals with this." When we confess our struggles to a close and trusted friend, most often we are not received with judgment and condemnation as the enemy would lead us to believe. Instead we are met with empathy, encouragement and support. Confessing brings your sins out of the dark and into the light, where the power of sin and shame is broken.

Read the above scriptures again. What fears are keeping you from full confession? What do these scriptures reveal about God's character in terms of forgiveness?

Continue your conversation with God by asking Him what you specifically need to confess. As God reveals these things to you, ask Him also to reveal the person you can confide in. Reach out to that person today, and in faith, begin to share your struggles in sexuality.

THURSDAY

Psalms 119:37

"Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways."

Hebrews 4:16

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

Hebrews 10:24-25

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

God has an abundant life ready for us, but we need the help of our close friends to stir us up in pursuing that life. When living in isolation, it is easy to deceive ourselves and justify our sinful behavior, especially concerning the area of sexuality. We need people in our lives speaking truth and holding us accountable.

Spend some time with the Lord in prayer and think about the triggers that cause you to fall into sexual sin. Some examples may be hanging out with particular people, visiting a certain website, watching a movie with graphic sex scenes, or drinking too much alcohol. Journal about the triggers that lead you into sin and allow God to help you set up firm boundaries. For example, if having your laptop in your room tempts you to view pornography at night, then don't. Choose to leave it in another room.

Share the boundaries you set for yourself with an accountability partner. Your accountability partner should be someone of the same sex who knows you, loves you, and challenges you. Reach out to that person today and ask him or her to hold you accountable in pursuing purity. Allow them to check in on you consistently, and communicate honestly with them.

FRIDAY

This week you spent time searching your heart, repenting of sexual sins in your life or past, and bringing these struggles to light through confession and accountability. Now, God wants to use His Word to build you up in Christ and give you confidence to live holy and pure. For the next three days you will be praying Scripture over your life as a declaration of the freedom you have received in Christ.

Praying and declaring scripture assures us that we are in line with the will of God. For each day, read the scriptures multiple

times over and allow God to highlight the specific verses that speak life into your soul. Then use those verses to create declarations that you pray over yourself. Feel free to be as specific as you would like in your declarations.

For example, after reading 2 Corinthians 5:17 below, your declaration might be: "Because I am in Christ, I am a new creation. My old habit of viewing pornography has passed away."

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Titus 2:11-14

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

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."

SATURDAY

Romans 6: 5-11

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he

died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Romans 8:1

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

SUNDAY

Luke 10:19

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you."

2 Timothy 1:7

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Romans 8:11

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

This week you will be seeking God for His way and His will in handling our finances. The Bible has a lot to say about money. Open your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to give you revelation about this important aspect of your life.

WEEK 5

MONDAY

God is the ultimate Giver. Everything we have, all that we are....even the very breath in our lungs is a gift from our Heavenly Father. The truth that God created everything and everything belongs to Him must shape our view and use of money. The attitudes of the believers, towards finances, are very different from the unbeliever. Start this week by acknowledging God as your Source.

John 1:3

"All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

Psalm 50:10-12

"For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."

Genesis 1:28

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In your journal, write a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving for the life that you've found in Christ. Look at all the blessings you have and recognize that He, and He alone, is your Source.

TUESDAY

Often times fear and anxiety can weigh us down and hinder giving. Close your eyes. Think about the stresses and worries in your life concerning finances. It may be a credit card debt that never seems to get smaller. It may be that you don't have enough for retirement, or that you can't seem to kick your habit of spending too much money on material things. Whatever it may be, allow God to highlight those things that cause you anxiety and stress.

Meditate on these verses.

Matthew 6:31-33

"Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well."

Do you live with that low level hum of anxiety about your needs? What is causing your anxiety?

What does it mean to 'seek first God's Kingdom'? Do your worries keep you from putting God first in your finances? If so, spend some time laying those anxieties down and worshipping the God who knows all your needs.

WEDNESDAY

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in

knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

Re-read verse 5. This verse shows the fruit of a life given first to God. The Lordship of Jesus will compel you to live a generous life. In your spiritual journey, how free are you to give? What does this look like in your everyday life?

Re-read verse 9. How does this truth impact your soul? Do you view yourself ‘rich’ because of the grace of Jesus? Take a few moments and ask the Holy Spirit to bring deeper revelation to you about the richness you have in Christ.

THURSDAY

As a Christian, you make giving a priority in your life. In Scripture, God gives us the tithe, or ten percent of your income, as a baseline for generosity. Throughout God’s interactions with people, giving Him ten percent has been a way to express ultimate trust in Him and live free from slavery to money. With that in mind, reflect on the following verses.

Malachi 3:6-12

“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.”

Proverbs 3:9-10

“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

Mark 12:41-44

“And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Where is your heart in regards to tithing? Do you struggle to give first from your income? If so, why? Take some time to bring your heart before the Lord in repentance. Lay down the sin that’s hindering you from obeying God. Receive His forgiveness and grace to empower you to begin tithing.

FRIDAY

God intends for our faith and faithfulness to continue to grow. Perhaps you have been faithfully giving your tithe. Now is the time to explore progressive giving, that is, increasing the percentage you give to God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

"Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving."

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it,

He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon.

His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out.

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God."

Where do you see yourself in these verses? If you are a stingy giver, what holds you back? If you are a lavish giver, where do you see the abundant crop in your life?

Take time to pray and release the things that are hindering your giving. Maybe it's fear or greed or selfishness. God wants to free you so you can delight in the giving.

What is the new, progressive percentage that God is revealing to you? Is it 11%, 15%, 20%? Are you willing to hear God's call to lavish giving and, by faith, obey Him?

SATURDAY

Proverbs 14:8

"The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving."

Proverbs 27:23-27

"Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds, for riches don't last forever, and the crown might not be passed to the next generation. After the hay is harvested and the new crop appears and the mountain grasses are gathered in, your sheep will provide wool for clothing, and your goats will provide the price of a field. And you will have enough goats' milk for yourself, your family, and your servant girls."

Scripture encourages wisdom, prudence and planning. Often times a simple budget will allow us to enter into that abundant and lavish life that God desires.

Do you have a budget? Do you stick with it? If you find it hard to live within your means, are you willing to ask God for help in this area? Take a few moments and allow the Holy Spirit to break down any stubbornness that is causing you to resist godly financial stewardship in your life. Surrender your finances wholly before God today.

SUNDAY

Proverbs 11:24-25

*"The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.
The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped."*

Use this time to revisit all the truths and principles God has shown you this past week. If you don't have a budget, there are many simple, downloadable forms available online. Find one that you can use to begin your healthy financial journey today. After you've created your budget, take the time present it before

the Lord – asking for His wisdom and strength to walk in His ways. Be sure to make giving your #1 priority.

HEALTHY RHYTHMS

This week we will be exploring healthy rhythms of life, specifically the weekly Sabbath or the intentional ceasing from activity, for the believer. Open your heart to receive truth from scripture concerning how God has created rest for our souls.

WEEK 6

MONDAY

Genesis 2:1-2

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done."

Exodus 20:10-11

"but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and 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."

Hebrews 4:9

"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,"

In these verses we see that God rested and commands us to also rest. Sabbath is defined as a weekly, 24-hour period when we cease from labors and find replenishment for our souls. Consider the following questions:

A Sabbath day is not just a day off from work when you catch up on laundry, grocery shopping and other chores. It's a time to desist from labor and requires intentional planning. What would it take for you to prepare for a Sabbath? (i.e. When would you

do all the usual 'life things' that you do on your day off? How can you involve your family in preparing for a day of rest?)

What would it look like for you to stop for 24 hours?

For you...what does a day of rest look like? What activities are life-giving for your soul?

TUESDAY

Psalm 62:5-8

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

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

Trust in him at all times, O people, pour out your heart before him;

God is a refuge for us. "

In his sermon called *Work and Rest*, Tim Keller tells us the abiding human problem is that something always needs to be done or addressed. He suggests can Sabbath shut down the machine of self-censorship, that is, it can still the quiet voice of self-reproach. It brings the much-needed rest from proving yourself and silences the inner murmur of "never enough" that brings weariness to one's soul.

Can you relate to this inner weariness? How does this 'never enough' impact your soul?

Meditate on – quietly read aloud and dwell upon – today's verses. Make them a prayer between you and God. Pour out your heart before Him.

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little

children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

1 Peter 5:6-7

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

An important aspect of Sabbath is calming the restlessness in our hearts. As you read these verses, do what the scripture says. Come to Jesus with every burden, every concern, every need, every demand – and give them to God.

List the areas in your life that are characterized by restlessness, anxiety, dread or fear.

How can you *take His yoke upon you and learn from Jesus?*
What would this look like for you in the areas you listed above?
What practical steps can you take to live in the rest or peace of God?

THURSDAY

Prior to reading, sit quietly and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you through these verses. God's Word is living and active, and He desires you to clearly hear His voice.

Deuteronomy 30

*"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, **2** and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, **3** then*

the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. **4** If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. **5** And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. **6** And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. **7** And the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. **8** And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today. **9** The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, **10** when you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

11 "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. **12** It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' **13** Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' **14** But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. **16** If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **17** But

*if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, **18** I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. **19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, **20** loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."*

Read slowly through the first 10 verses of this chapter. What are some of the promises you see God making to Israel in this passage? Which of them speak most to you?

In verses 11-18, what verses seem to connect or resound in your heart most?

Reflect on verses 19-20. God is asking the Israelites to love Him, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him. As you meditate on these things, what is God saying to you?

FRIDAY

Hebrews 12: 1-2

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

John 15:1-2

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

Sometimes our lives are so cluttered, there is no room for the Sabbath. Today we are going to ask God how to simplify our lives in order to make the time to obey His command and enter into His rest.

Submit your heart and mind to God, and ask His Holy Spirit to clearly speak. Journal what He speaks to you. Consider the following questions:

- Where in my life am I overextended?
- What am I spending my time, resources and talents on that's not a core value or priority in my life?
- How have I let the expectations of others drive me?
- What steps do I need to take in order to simplify my life?

SATURDAY

Hebrews 3:7-19

"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.*

*Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.'*

As I swore in my wrath,

'They shall not enter my rest.'"

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said,

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief."

The writer of Hebrews states that unbelief blocks God's people from entering His rest. What areas in your life are driven by unbelief and are hindering your ability to enter into a weekly Sabbath rest (for example, worry about finances causing you to work too much, over extending yourself with activities or volunteerism, etc)?

Are you willing to begin obeying God's command for a weekly Sabbath? Take some time in prayer and allow God to soften your heart toward obedience in this area.

SUNDAY

Psalm 27

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

*When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.
Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;*

though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

*One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,*

to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

*For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.*

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me,

and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not your face from me.

Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help.

Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Taking Sabbath is an act of faith. When you walk in obedience to this commandment it will bring freedom, but it will require intentional planning. Today, seek the Lord for how you can begin this practice immediately.

- **TIME:** The ultimate goal is a 24-hour period, but if you need to start smaller (with the intention of moving towards a full day) then start there. In the week ahead, when can you block off a significant chunk of time and call it Sabbath?
- **STOP:** During that time, stop all paid and unpaid work. Learn to say no, stop being overcommitted. Release the illusion that you are indispensable to the world. Practically speaking, break from technology, emails, household chores and disconnect from social media.
- **REST:** This requires planning. Take care of the practical aspects of life ahead of time. Decide what is life giving to you – time with God, family or friends...exercise, read a book, take a nap, go to the movies – do things that replenish your soul.

- **CONTEMPLATE:** Reflect, spend time with God in prayer and reading the Bible. Draw close to God in worship, journal, remind yourself of the story of how God revealed Himself to you and drew you into His life.

Incorporating a weekly Sabbath will take time. But let today be the beginning for you. Sabbath is a blessing and a benefit from your Heavenly Father. Don't get discouraged if change in this area comes slowly. Be faithful and persistent – lean into God and ask Him to help you plan and prepare. And then...enjoy!

MAKING DISCIPLES

WEEK 7

MONDAY

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

It can be easy to assume these passages are only talking about world missions and reaching the nations with the Gospel. However, it seems Jesus was touching on something far closer to home. We are not all called to go on world missions, but we are all called to be salt and light wherever we are planted. Here, Jesus speaks of the personal responsibility of making disciples that each one of us is called to do.

The word "discipleship" can be intimidating. Often times it can seem like a word from biblical times that doesn't apply to our culture today. "Disciple" can be best translated as "learner." A disciple of Jesus is someone who is actively learning to follow His teachings. Discipleship is simply the process of helping another person orient their life, values and priorities around Jesus. Re-read the passages and notice that Jesus is speaking to an all-inclusive audience. He doesn't single out a particular group of people or lay out requirements for the "disciple," but instead includes all followers of Christ in this mandate.

Interact with the Word by re-reading Matthew 28: 18-20, and imagine Jesus is speaking directly to you. Do you sense God calling you to a great level of discipleship? Jot down what you feel God is speaking to you, and how these passages apply to your life.

TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:8

"So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

Hebrews 13:7

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Chances are you have already had some level of experience with discipleship. You have either led someone in their walk with Christ, or you have been on the receiving end of a discipleship relationship. Today is the day to remember those relationships and learn from them. Think of someone who invested their time to see you grow in Christ. What did that relationship look like for you? What are the things you learned from them? Journal about the pivotal moments for you in that relationship. On the flip side, describe your past experience in mentoring others.

WEDNESDAY

2 Timothy 1: 3-7

"I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

There are people all around us who are just waiting for an invitation to be invested in. However, the hustle of today's busy life causes us to overlook opportunities right in front of us to pour into people. We rarely take the time to say hello to someone in the grocery store, let alone consider taking time out of our day to meet with someone one-on-one. But consider this:

the highest calling we receive in this life is to partner with God in spreading the Gospel and making disciples.

Think through all of your weekly interactions with the various people in your life. Ask God to highlight two or three people whom you can pray about investing in. It may be a neighbor, coworker, classmate, family member, or the Starbucks barista you see each morning. God has someone for you to raise up in Christ, you only need to ask Him to show you!

A discipleship relationship can be quite close and intimate, therefore, it's best practice to walk with someone of the same sex.

THURSDAY

Matthew 9:10

"And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples."

Jesus will always be the perfect example of how we should disciple others. In many of the scriptures, we see Jesus discipling people by teaching, preaching, and leading by example in praying for the sick and casting out demons. Yet in this passage we get the chance to see a different side to Jesus' methods of discipleship: just being Himself. Here, He is reclining with His disciples, tax collectors and sinner alike, and allowing them to see a more intimate side of His character. They experienced first-hand who the real Jesus was behind closed doors, with his feet up on the couch.

The first step to making disciples is developing a relationship with them. Picture the scene in Matthew 9, and think of ways you can let people in to who you really are. How can you "recline" around others, and in turn, allow the space for them to open up to you? What daily rhythms can you invite a friend to join you in? Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight these ideas for you and write them down.

FRIDAY

1 Corinthians 11:1

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Over the last six weeks, you have formed new habits that propelled your relationship with Christ to new levels. Now is the time to act on what you've learned and pass it on to others. What things have you learned that you can pass on to your mentees? Maybe it is a new rhythm of studying God's Word, or maybe it is something God revealed to you personally through your time with Him. Whatever the case may be, allow God to stir up in you a passion to share it with your friends. Genesis 12:2 says, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Write down the ways God has blessed you and how you are going to use those blessings to bless others.

SATURDAY

Proverbs 27:17

"Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another."

2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

Galatians 6:1

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

As we disciple others and help them grow, there will come a time when we will need to help them release things that are holding them back from experiencing true freedom in Christ. It may be daunting to think about confronting someone about his or her sin, but God calls us to share the truth in love. Read the following questions and journal about what you feel God is highlighting for you:

Have you ever had someone confront you about an area in your life that needed to be let go? What was that experience like and how did you respond? Describe the result of that confrontation in your life.

How do you feel about challenging someone else in the sinful areas of their life? Do you have any fears or reservations? What is the number one thing holding you back from boldly challenging your friends to live righteously?

Would others describe you as someone with a 'spirit of gentleness'? Take time to ask God for this fruit of the Spirit. Always remember the importance of gentleness when speaking difficult truths.

Is God highlighting someone you know who needs to be confronted or challenged? What are some ways you can gently and humbly approach them about this?

SUNDAY

2 Timothy 2:2

"What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Mark 8:34-35

"And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.'"

Today is a day of action. Look back to the people God highlighted for you on Wednesday of this study, and challenge yourself to initiate a conversation with them about discipleship within the next four weeks. Prayer should always precede action, so come before God on behalf of your people and pray for their growth in Christ. Pray for guidance on how to approach them and when. Pray for a holy burden to see them transformed into faithful men and women.