



STUDENT ————— ✨ DISCIPLESHIP ————— ✨ GROUP GUIDE

THE HEIGHTS STUDENT MINISTRY

AND JESUS CAME AND SAID TO THEM, "ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME. GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE."

MATTHEW 28:18-20



INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Discipleship is a Spirit-led process whereby we are conformed into the image of Christ (see Romans 8:29), bringing all aspects of our lives under the reign and rule of King Jesus. In a nutshell, discipleship is following Jesus as He brings renewal to all things.

As the Holy Spirit works to transform our lives along this pathway of discipleship, something always happens; we begin to change. Our desires shift. Our trajectory begins to align with God's intended trajectory for us. We also can't help but want others to walk this pathway with us. The transformation that God is doing in our lives as disciples inevitably begins to multiply as we begin to lead others down this pathway that has impacted our lives.

While Jesus was on earth, He spent time teaching and preaching to many large groups, but where He spent most of His time was with His small group of disciples. He spent time teaching them how to live and love like He did and help others do the same. As Christ-followers, He specifically asks us to do the same. At The Heights, we believe God is calling our church to Wake The World up to Jesus. To accomplish that grand vision, we will follow Jesus in His invitation to join Him in making disciples who make disciples.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Simply put, a disciple is someone who loves and follows Jesus in every area of their life, and helps others to do the same.

If we claim to be disciples of Jesus, then our lives, priorities, habits, and relationships are to reflect the character of Jesus. When we talk about being a disciple of Jesus, we often talk about the 5Gs, five markers or identifiers of those who follow Jesus.

GRACE

Grace is favor we didn't deserve and could not earn.

A disciple's life is marked by their understanding of God's grace for each of us. Jesus took our sin and our brokenness upon Himself through the cross and, through His grace, we have full life in Jesus. Therefore, we can approach God with confidence knowing that Jesus' death has freed us and made us alive with Christ.

GATHER

We are better together.

A disciple understands that we cannot become all that we are called to be on our own, and so we must be intentional to gather together as believers. It is within consistent, committed community that we flourish.

GROW

Healthy things grow.

A disciple understands that God desires for us to grow to look more and more like Jesus in every area of our life.

GIVE

Generosity transforms lives.

A disciple understands that we have all been given time, talents, and treasures that we are called to use for God and His Kingdom. God has called us to use those gifts to benefit others and to experience the joy of making a difference.

GO

You were created to go and join Jesus in His Harvest.

A disciple obeys the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to take the gospel to people and, for those who respond positively, teach them how to follow Jesus and help others do the same. Jesus told His followers that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. You, Christian, are the laborer!

WHY DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS?

As we go through the different seasons of life, the work of discipleship will take many forms. In some seasons, discipleship may look like faithfully changing diapers and rocking crying babies through long sleepless nights so that they will know the love and safety of a Good Parent. In other seasons, it may look like generously giving of your time and talents to help meet the physical needs of the poor and hurting in our communities so that they may know the One who will always provide. And in other seasons, discipleship may be done in quiet places where prayers for revival are whispered out in faith. This guide is a resource specifically for **Discipleship Groups**, which is just one way this local body participates in the greater work of discipleship.

A Discipleship Group is a gender-specific, closed group of 2-4 people committed to meeting weekly or bi-weekly for a season of accelerated spiritual transformation.

Discipleship Groups are marked by:

- Intentionality - A Discipleship Group is not simply meant to help someone follow Christ in their own life (though that is important), but also to train them to be able to help another person follow Christ (who will turn around and repeat this process with someone else). See 2 Timothy 2:2.
- Reproducibility - A Discipleship Group works through a repeatable process and use of a curriculum. This sets up its members to be able to go forward and do with someone else what they experienced with the person who led their Discipleship Group.

BEFORE
YOU BEGIN

WHAT HAPPENS IN A D-GROUP

A Discipleship Group has four main components that will guide your group's time together each week. Each of these four components are critical to accomplishing the goal of a D-Group, and on the next page, you will see a suggested schedule to help guide your time with your group.

- **Fellowship:** Your group should be intentional to spend some time each meeting catching up with each other and sharing what has been going on in your lives. The hope is that this group becomes a safe place for you to share your burdens as well as your joys.
- **Scripture Study:** Your group has chosen to use Scripture and practice spiritual disciplines. Each week, your group will be expected to spend time reading through Scripture and reflecting on what you have read. When you meet, your leader will ask what you learned and how that week's Scripture study has impacted or challenged you. Your group will also choose a spiritual discipline to grow in together.
- **Accountability:** Accountability is how we put what we learn through study into practice in our daily lives. We want to be not just hearers of the word but doers. As you are learning what the Christian life is meant to be through Scripture, your group leader will lead the group through a series of personal questions that are intended to encourage reflection and vulnerability. In this time, you and your group will help each other discern how to faithfully live out what you are learning in your own lives.
- **Prayer:** We are only able to live like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so we never want to gather together without praying over each other and asking God to work in our lives as we seek to work alongside Him. Each week, there will be a time to share prayer requests, and pray over each other as a group.

SUGGESTED FLOW OF D-GROUP MEETINGS

Our lives are often hectic and unpredictable, and so we encourage you to find a consistent rhythm and flow for your D-Group meetings so that everyone can show up knowing what to expect. That added level of consistency can help lower the mental barriers to entry, and make D-Group time a welcome break in people's weeks.

In order to ensure all four key components of a Discipleship Group are present in each D-Group meeting, we recommend following the outline below. This will help structure and guide your time, as well as ensuring that it is spiritually fruitful.

Look Back

For the first 10-15 minutes of your time with your group each week, begin by asking about the personal lives of each member ("Looking back" on everyone's week). Talk about how your weeks went, how topics or issues brought up weeks prior have resolved, etc. This time doesn't need to be heavy, intense, or overly structured. This is space for relationships between group members to naturally grow and deepen. This is where fellowship happens.

Look Up

This will be the bulk of the time your group spends together. You want to spend the majority of your time "looking up" at what God is teaching you all through your study of Scripture. This is also where accountability takes place. The group leader's role in this time is to prompt honest discussions of Scripture, as well as to ask relevant accountability questions to help group members apply what Scripture teaches to their lives.

Look Forward

As your group wraps up and begins to "look forward" to the week ahead, take time to share what you have on your plate and to pray over each other. Once you have prayed, be sure to touch base on your plans for your next meeting. Life gets pretty chaotic, so it's always helpful to remind your group of what you will be reading and discussing next, as well as confirming the time and place of your next D-Group meeting.

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP COVENANT

Anything worthwhile requires a commitment and the same is true in your Walk with God.

Please carefully read and seriously consider the commitments being requested of you.

During the duration of this Discipleship Group, I will do my best to...

- Give myself fully to the Lord as I anticipate a season of accelerated spiritual transformation.
- Commit to this group and consider how I may best spur others on in their relationship with Jesus.
- Meet with my Discipleship Group regularly (60-90 minutes). When unable, I will stay involved through sharing Discipleship Group Guides and prayer requests.
- Commit to the process: Look Back, Look Up, Look Forward.
- Contribute to a group atmosphere of confidentiality, honesty, and transparency.
- Pray every week for the other members of my Discipleship Group and those in my life who don't know Jesus.
- Pray and look for others in my life who I can invite into a new Discipleship Group when my current group decides to multiply.

Signed Member:

Date:

MEETING GUIDE



REGULAR MEETING

This is a guide for all of the Discipleship Group meetings that will be held between the first and the last session with your group. This is a guide, not a checklist, so your group's rhythms may vary slightly. Although we do encourage consistency, we also acknowledge that some weeks, the most God-honoring thing for your group to do is to set aside the schedule.

Look Back (10-15min)

- Spend a few minutes catching up with your group
- Spend a few minutes asking for honest updates on how the past week went for everyone.

Look Up (30-45min)

Scripture Study (20-25min)

- Take a moment to re-read the passage you studied that week, and discuss your *observations* from the text.
- Discuss everyone's interpretations of the passage you read.
- Discuss how everyone sees that passage applying to us as Christians today. (It might be helpful to ask *some* of these follow-up questions to encourage your group to look deeply into the text.)
 - Does this passage say something about who God is?
 - How can this change the way that I see God?
 - How can this change the way that I talk to God?
 - Does this passage say something about who I am?
 - How can this change the way that I see myself?
 - How can this change the way that I relate to God?
 - Consider this helpful framework when trying to discern the application you should take from the text. Remember this (yes, another) acronym: S.P.E.C.K.
 - S - Is there a SIN to confess and avoid?
 - P - Is there a PROMISE to keep?
 - E - Is there an EXAMPLE to follow?
 - C - Is there a COMMAND to obey?
 - K - Is there KNOWLEDGE of God I need to reflect on?
 - The theme of God as redeemer runs from the beginning through the end of Scripture. How do you see God's redemption in this passage?
 - Does this passage speak to the condition of my heart toward myself, God, or others?
 - Am I sensing the conviction of the Holy Spirit as I read this passage? What am I feeling convicted about?
 - Does this passage speak to the way that I view the world?

Accountability (15-20min)

- Your leader will transition your group into a time of accountability. They will encourage everyone to be fully honest and remind the group that what is discussed in the group ought to stay within the group.
- Your leader will ask *some* of the following accountability questions each week. (*The only question that **must** be asked each week is the question in the “grow” category that asks about your group’s chosen spiritual discipline.*)
 - GRACE
 - In the previous week, did you find your identity in Christ or in other things?
 - Did the Gospel live in you this week?
 - Did you freely enjoy God this week, or find yourself trying to earn His favor or the worlds?
 - Were you quick to extend grace to others just as you were freely shown grace?
 - Did you find yourself turning to anything other than God for a sense of security?
 - GATHER
 - Did you attend worship this week?
 - Did you gather with Christian community this week?
 - How have you shown love for your brothers and sisters in Christ this week?
 - GROW
 - How did you practice our chosen Spiritual Discipline this week?
 - What did you learn from your practice?
 - Did you spend consistent time with God in His Word and presence?
 - How was your prayer life this week?
 - Have you honored God with your thoughts, words and deeds this past week?
 - Have you given in to any addictive behaviors this week?
 - Were you fully honest with your words this week?
 - Have you intentionally or unintentionally wounded someone by word or deed this week? How do you plan to make peace with them?
 - Have you participated in anything unethical this week?

- GIVE
 - Have you been generous with your finances this week?
 - Have you been responsible with your finances so that you may be generous this week?
 - Have you been generous with your time this week?
 - Did you spend quality time with your family or friends this week?
 - Have you been generous with your talents this week?
 - Did you have opportunity to use your talents or abilities to help someone this week? Did you take that opportunity?
- GO
 - Did you have any interactions with your One this week? How did it go?
 - Did you seek opportunities to be a blessing to those outside of the Faith?
 - Did you seek opportunities to speak about Jesus to those outside the Faith?
 - Were your words and actions a faithful example of Christ's character and heart for the lost this week?
 - Did you pray for anyone outside of the Faith this week?

Look Up (5-10min)

- Take a few moments to share any prayer requests with the group, we encourage you to write down these prayer requests so you can follow up weekly.
- Take some time to lift up those prayer requests, and to pray over each other and what was shared during your meeting.
- Before you wrap up, your leader will remind everyone what the passage for the week ahead is, and any other relevant information.

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP SCHEDULE

PREPARATION PAGES

PREPERATION PAGE

Use these preparation outlines as a guide to prepare for your Discipleship Group Meeting each week. Start by writing the Scripture Passage you are reading as a group that week, and the Spiritual Discipline your group is focusing on.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: _____

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: _____

Now take time to walk through the following prompts to help you prepare for your upcoming meeting. You can use these Preparation Pages in addition to your personal journal, or you can use these as your primary journal!

LOOK BACK:

What are the three biggest things that happened in your life this week?

LOOK UP:

As you study your group's selected Scripture Passage this week, reflect on the following questions: (Remember, if you're struggling to figure out a Scripture Study method that works best for you, there are additional resources in the back of this guide that can give you some tips and tricks!)

- What was your biggest takeaway from your study of this week's Scripture Passage?

LOOK UP:

Each week in your Discipleship Group Meeting, your leader will ask each member if they have any prayer requests. Prayer is one of the most powerful things we can do as believers. Be sure to write down the prayer requests of the people in your group each week, including your own, and then take time to pray over them before you meet again. Use the space below to write out those prayers now:



SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE RESOURCES

GRACE



DISCIPLINES OF GRACE ARE THOSE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHICH CAUSE THE SOUL TO DWELL AND DEPEND ON THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE, SO THAT WE MAY KNOW THE DEPTHS OF HIS LOVE, AND BECOME CONDUITS OF IT TO THOSE AROUND US.

Recommended Discipline: PRAYER

Recommended Book: MARK

In prayer, we intentionally enter into communication with God. To be sure, God is always communicating with us whether it be through creation, with the gentle prompting of the Holy Spirit, or through doors of opportunity swung wide open or firmly shut.

In prayer however, we become intentionally aware that we are in the presence of the Almighty God and that He wants to communicate with us. In prayer, we are choosing to fix our minds and hearts on dialog with our Heavenly Father.

Consider this simple structure for how to spend time intentionally communicating with God:

- P - Pausing – To savor the presence of God, to listen before we begin to speak.
- R - Rejoicing – Choosing to meditate on who He is, thanking God that He is unchanging, thanking God for His perfect provision and His blessings in our lives.
- A - Asking – Laying our requests and petitions before the God who is able to do abundantly more than we could ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).
- Y - Yielding – Acknowledging that He is God, and we are not, submitting ourselves to His leading and working in our lives, and trusting that His shaping and refining is good.¹

¹ Pete Greig, *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Carol Stream, IL: NavPress, 2018), xiii–xv.

Not every prayer needs to incorporate a structure such as this. However, in using a clarified structure we are far less likely to neglect prayer practices that are essential to our spiritual development.

This is an easy way to step out of the temptation to simply regale God with our endless list of needs. It is also a succinct reminder to savor His presence, the depth of His love for us, and to surrender ourselves to the only One worthy of our trust.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of prayer. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of prayer.

GRACE

Recommended Discipline: GRATITUDE

Recommended Book: ROMANS

Gratitude is a loving and thankful response toward God for His presence within us and within this world.

Paul reminded the church in Rome “...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1).

According to this verse, gratitude seems to be a choice to be made. Because of God’s gracious mercy in the Gospel, we present our bodies in gratitude as a living sacrifice — as an act of worship.

The wonderful thing about gratitude is that it is an act of worship that can bind together all the seemingly random pieces of our lives. Hard times, happy days, seasons of sadness, and hours of joy — everything can be sewn together into something lovely with the golden thread of gratitude.

Catch this though: this is possible not because everything goes according to plan, but because God is always present.

And though His blessings can move us into gratitude, it is not at the root of a thankful heart. Delighting in God and His Gospel is the heartbeat of thankfulness and gratitude.

This is why gratitude is rooted in the reality that “bidden or unbidden, God is present.” So said the 15th century scholar Desiderius Erasmus in his Latin phrase: *vocatus atque non vocatus, deus aderit*.

Bidden or unbidden, God is present.

Gratitude is possible not because everything goes according to plan but because God is always present. This is a discipline where we choose to present ourselves thankfully to God as living sacrifices because of His great mercy. And when we intentionally practice gratitude, we will begin to see how the pieces of our lives are being woven together as we are simultaneously stitched closer to God Himself.

GRACE

One way to practice gratitude is to think about a current and difficult situation in your life.

Consider how you feel about this difficult situation. Be honest with God.

Consider where there is evidence of God's presence and work in this situation. Is there anything you can be thankful for?

If nothing is coming to mind, spend some time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46) in one of your 5G Journals. What does Jesus want to tell you through His Word?

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of gratitude. Try this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of gratitude?

Recommended Discipline: WORSHIP

Recommended Book: PHILIPPIANS + COLOSSIANS

Worship can be anything we do in a given day. We worship God through the way that we work, through our relationships, and through the way that we care for what God has given us. Think of worship as an internal spiritual scan – the mode and frequency with which we do it says more about the condition of our heart than the practices of our hands.

Consider these three elements for practicing worship:

1) First, adjust your lens and see that everything we do is an act of worship. We want to develop rhythms of daily prayer that affect every area of our lives. As we express our gratitude to God for the things in our lives, and praise Him for the opportunities He's given to us to learn and to grow through the easy and the hard, our hearts begin to worship in the midst of the seemingly mundane.

2) Second, practice infusing intentional worship practices into our daily lives. These are practices that intentionally shift our focus to Jesus. We've missed a significant developmental opportunity if we only worship God during a Sunday morning service. We need to take these Sunday morning rhythms into the rest of our week. The health of our soul requires that we integrate what we have practiced communally on Sunday mornings into our daily lives. As we walk with God, our days should incorporate worship practices such as singing, biblical meditation, and prayer.

3) Third, we want to embrace the deity and kingship of God in our daily lives. We want to live lives submitted to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Offering our whole selves to God is worship as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

GRACE

To begin practicing and cultivating worship in your life, think of particular times in your life where you have been deeply moved in worship.

What were the circumstances happening in your life at that time?

What was going on in the actual acts of worship? What practices allow you to most easily connect with God in worship?

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of worship. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of worship.

GATHER



DISCIPLINES OF GATHER ARE THOSE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHICH STRETCH OUR SOULS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST LOVED US. THEY ARE THOSE PRACTICES WHICH DISCIPLINE OUR EYE TO SEE THE OTHER AS BELOVED, AND TO SEE OURSELVES AS OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER.

Recommended Discipline: FELLOWSHIP

Recommended Book: MATTHEW

The Bible is filled with relational themes.

Consider the very beginning. The creation of humanity is one of the most intimate encounters in Scripture where God Himself breathes into Adam's lungs the breath of His life (Genesis 2:7). This is a picture to show how humankind was created to share living fellowship that is mirrored in the communion enjoyed by The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, the apostles and disciples enjoyed a lifestyle of deep fellowship, sharing all things in common (Acts 4:32-37). Many of the apostles went out in pairs as they spread the good news of the gospel. Additionally, the New Testament church was instructed not to forsake gathering together (Hebrews 10:25). This is just a handful of examples of deep and rich fellowship throughout the Bible.

It is no secret that we live in an increasingly connected, disconnected world. Even with unfettered access to one another, it is really a contradictory phenomenon that loneliness is on the rise.

We were made for incarnate face-to-face relationships. We were made to gather. After all, a disciple understands that he/she cannot become all that they are called to be on their own and must be intentional to gather together. It's easy to let logistics get in the way. We let our schedule dictate our relationships. We feel self-conscious inviting someone into our home if it isn't spotless. We don't have time to cook a meal.

However, it is important as these thoughts and feelings crop up to remind ourselves that being together doesn't have to be complicated.

GATHER

As you begin to practice fellowship, consider having honest conversations with your Discipleship Group, Life Group, or neighbors about what you can bring to the table.

If a meal is too logistically complicated, make a plan to meet between mealtimes for coffee and conversation. Or have everyone bring their own take-out. Consider also meeting for lunch after church on Sunday.

Work to not be bothered by a cluttered home and share the realness of life with one another. Develop a list of “meet me in the middle” places, so no one has to worry about hosting and you can still spend time together.

Create a consistent rhythm of being together and do your best to protect that time.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of fellowship. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of fellowship.

GATHER

Recommended Discipline: SABBATH

Recommended Book: HEBREWS

The fourth commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:8-10).

Sabbath is God’s gift of repetitive and regular rest. It is given to us by God for our delight and communion with God.

On one hand, practicing Sabbath means setting aside a day during the week to recognize our limitations and thus honor the infinite God, who Himself worked and rested. Other days of the week were given over to work, but the Sabbath reminded people that they were finite.

But to fully understand and experience the benefits of practicing Sabbath, consider Hebrews 4:9: “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His.”

Think about this: what does it mean for God to rest?

It wasn’t because He was tired. God does not get tired.

It means that He was satisfied with His work.

This is the secret of true Sabbath rest. The way to practice Sabbath rest is to be satisfied with what has been done. That is rest that all the Sundays, good nights of sleep, and vacations will not give by themselves. This is because true Sabbath rest only comes when you are completely satisfied with what has been done by Jesus for you.

Remember the movie Chariots of Fire? Perhaps you remember the triumphant title song. If you recall, this is a movie about Olympic sprinters. In the movie, one man ran in the Olympics to literally “justify his existence.” Another man had such deep rest in Christ that he was willing to miss a likely gold medal by not running on Sunday.

GATHER

The first man had to get a medal because he was suffering from a deep inner pressure and the irony was that the gold medal wouldn't even be enough to give him rest. The second man though, Eric Liddell, was a follower of Jesus who didn't have the deep inner pressure to get medals because he was at rest. In fact, he was so secure in who he was in Christ that he was willing to say, "I'm not going to run on Sunday."

The gold medal was never enough. Nothing is ever enough except in Christ.

That is what the writer of Hebrews is telling us. Through the finished work of Jesus, we can look at our lives and even though there is pressure all around us to perform and prove ourselves, we can be absolutely satisfied because there is nothing else that needs to be done for God's approval of us in Christ.

To begin practicing Sabbath rhythms, think about how to arrange your sabbath for refreshment, renewal and relationships.

How do you intentionally leave the school or work week behind? Think about one thing you love to do on Sunday and one thing that makes Sunday difficult for you. If getting to church is a hurried time that brings stress to the family, spend some time thinking about how to take the pressure off "getting out the door on time." How can you approach Sabbaths in ways that are not hurried or rushed?

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of Sabbath. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of Sabbath.

Recommended Discipline: UNITY

Recommended Book: GALATIANS AND EPHESIANS

John 17 contains the last recorded prayer that Jesus prayed on the night before he died.

First he prays for himself and then his disciples. Then he does something that may surprise you. Consider these words from what theologians call his High Priestly Prayer:

“I pray also for those who will believe in me...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20–23)

The last prayer that Jesus prayed before He died included a plea for our unity with God and unity with each other.

Unity is hard, though. Unity can be messy. That’s why unity is a spiritual discipline. It is an intentional choice that we make in response to the Gospel for the sake of the Gospel.

Unity is the mark that demonstrates to the world that the body of Christ is one organism, with one faith, one hope, one baptism and one God and Father of all.

Unity lives out the reality that Christ has already reconciled all things to Himself and in Him we belong to one another.

GATHER

Consider the “one anothers” found in Scripture like the command to “love one another” (John 13:34), “encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18), “care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:24), “forgive one another” (Ephesians 4:32), and “honor one another” (Romans 12:10), among so many more.

Begin living out one of the “one anothers” by choosing one to focus on as you practice the discipline of unity. The following week, choose another “one another” to intentionally practice.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of unity. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of unity.

GATHER

Recommended Discipline: HUMILITY

Recommended Book: JUDE AND REVELATION

Humility is hard.

In a world full of political, economic, and social hierarchies, humility is hard.

After all, who wants to be on the bottom of the heap, last in line or out of the loop? People scramble to have others realize how gifted, qualified, valuable and productive they are. They compete so they won't be overlooked and underutilized.

This is normal. It is a very human thing to want to be known, appreciated, and valued for our potential.

Humility does not mean thinking demeaning and low thoughts about ourselves. In fact, consider C.S. Lewis who said, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."

It is not denying the truth of our achievements or thinking less of ourselves. Humility stems from an honest understanding of who we are in Christ. It is having someone besides yourself as the center of your attention. Followers of Jesus are chosen, loved, adopted, appreciated, and important to the God of the universe.

The Son of God died for them.

The Holy Spirit inhabits them.

They are free to be who they are — no more and no less.

Again, humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. Humble people let go of image management and self-promotion. They honor others by making the others' needs as real and important as their own.

GATHER

In the only verse in the Bible where He actually described Himself, Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). What are the characteristics of a gentle and humble heart? How are you cultivating a gentle and humble heart?

Consider the things that are sources of pride to you. What about these things makes you proud? In light of how Jesus described Himself, how do you think God is calling you to think about the things that bring you pride?

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of humility. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of humility.

GATHER

GROW



GROW DISCIPLINES ARE THOSE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHICH REQUIRE THE BELIEVER TO LOOK INWARD, AND ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO PRUNE, SHAPE, AND REFINE EVERY CORNER OF THE SOUL, THAT IT MAY BE A PURIFIED TEMPLE FOR THE SPIRIT TO INDWELL.

Recommended Discipline: FASTING

Recommended Book: JOHN

Consider two broad definitions of fasting.

There is what we may call an inclusive definition of fasting from Martin Lloyd Jones that says fasting is “abstinence from anything that is legitimate in and of itself, for some special spiritual purpose.” We could fast from food, but also from sports, television, or certain categories of food.

A narrower definition of fasting is voluntary abstinence from physical nourishment— food and drink—for special spiritual purposes.

Fasting tests where our heart is because it helps us focus on God and experience Him and His Word more fully. Ultimately, it communicates that our hearts are with God, and not with this world.

Like anything in the Christian life, fasting is an invitation, not an obligation, and we need to learn to walk in it before we can run.

So start simple and don't be a hero.

For fasting to become a habit, it must be done regularly. Consider picking one day a week in which to practice fasting; skip normal meals for breakfast and lunch, and eat again at dinner time. For the first three to four weeks, don't go entirely without food for these fasts— simply shrink your meals down to something light and simple: a piece of fruit and a granola bar, or a smoothie, or just a glass of juice.

In the time that you'd normally spend eating that meal take time to pray or read Scripture.

Also, it is important to pick a focus. Having something specific for which to pray helps focus during a fast. Think about it. When the hunger pangs arrive, not having to think about what you're praying for helps.

Once you've made a particular day of the week a fast day, and your body has begun to adjust to going for a longer period with less food, you can begin to stretch.

There are two ways to do this: The first way is to go with less food in that window, shrinking down to just water or just liquids.

The second way is to extend the time, skipping more meals. If you extend time, always consider nutritional and health considerations. You might try stretching in both ways over time to see how your mind and body react and what feels like the best way to intensify your focus on prayer.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of fasting. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of fasting.

Recommended Discipline: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE
Recommended Book: 1, 2 TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON

T.S. Elliot asked, “Where shall the world be found, where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence.”

Silence and solitude is a difficult discipline to practice because we are conditioned to be comforted by noise. Yet, the fruit of engaging in silence and solitude is that we are able to intentionally think about ourselves and our God. This is the discipline that often opens the door to knowing God in ways that we previously thought were non-existent.

Silence

In a world filled with things that are constantly competing for our attention, silence is hard to come by. Silence is an opportunity to intentionally push back against the hustle and the noise and to get still before the Lord.

When we get silent before the Lord, we posture ourselves to listen.

The goal of silence is to simply wait for the Lord to lead. We so often fall into the temptation to fill empty space with our thoughts and our words. God cares about these, but our soul will grow anemic if we deprive it of this important practice.

This is an act of surrender, an act of humility, an act that communicates to God that we truly believe that what He has to say is more important, that His plan for this time is better than ours.

GROW

Solitude

Whether we realize it or not, we spend our days constantly connected to people. Our phones allow for unprecedented access to our lives, our time, our energy. This connection can be a valuable resource. However, it can also deplete even the most extroverted person.

Our souls connect with God in a lot of ways, many of which are communal, and yet some are not. Our spiritual growth requires both. In getting alone with God, we often hear from Him what we would otherwise miss.

Solitude is an effective practice to pair not only with silence but with disciplines like Scripture reading, prayer, and meditation. Try some of these practices communally and in solitude and make note of the differences. This will help you to better identify what your soul is needing each day.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of silence and solitude. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice silence and solitude.

Recommended Discipline: SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Recommended Book: 1, 2, 3 JOHN

Chuck Swindoll once said, "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture... No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified."

Scripture memory is a largely neglected discipline that has amazing benefit for the believer. The discipline's purpose is to store God's Word in our heart (Psalm 119:11). For this reason, we do not want to only memorize verses, but to meditate on them as we do it.

To begin the practice of Scripture Memory, choose a verse from your Scripture reading that was particularly impactful.

- Set a goal for when you would like to have it memorized.
- Ask someone to follow up and ask you how it's going, someone who can help you if you get stuck.
- Once you have it memorized, return to the verse and test yourself every once in a while. By doing this you ensure that the verse becomes locked in your long-term memory.

There are a variety of methods for memorizing Scripture. Here are just a few ideas to get you started.

- Read your chosen verse aloud 1-3 times daily.
- Write out your verse one time each day.
- Write your verse on an index card and tape it to your bathroom mirror. Read it several times while you brush your teeth.

It is important to note as well that the more aligned your Discipleship Group is in this particular discipline, the more beneficial it will be. It will be helpful for everyone to memorize the same passages. Though it is not required to use the same translation, it benefits everyone when they are able to work as a team to say the same verse in the same translation.

Through Scripture memory, we are choosing to make the word of God a part of who we are. We are choosing to allow it to take hold of our internal dialogue, and to begin to reshape our affections to desire the things of God.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of Scripture memory. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of Scripture memory.

GROW

Recommended Discipline: CONFESSION

Recommended Book: JAMES

Consider these words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic *Life Together*:

In confession the break-through to community takes place. 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, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole being of a person. In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted. But God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron.

Something powerful happens when we find ourselves among a group of people whom we trust to help shoulder our most significant burdens.

In life, some of our most significant burdens will be the sin patterns we struggle with.

Confession is an important part of inviting people who love us to speak love into a situation that quite likely feels much too big for us to carry on our own. In confession we are freed from isolation. Again, the enemy desires nothing more than to see us withdraw from community, to create space in our relationships in order to hide our sin. This is the best place for sin to thrive.

It's understandable that if you have never practiced confession, this will be intimidating. We all sin every day. Many of us have repetitive sin patterns that we just can't shake. Start with something, anything. Share this sin struggle with a trusted friend. Pray together. Follow up with each other.

GROW

This is not a place for instruction. As we invite one another into our private sin struggles, we are talking about them because we know that they are wrong. We are not able to fix one another. Only God is able to bring the healing that we need. He needs to be the one leading this time.

As time goes on and trust is built you will naturally feel more comfortable sharing the deeper struggles. All have sinned, no one is immune. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Without confession, our spiritual growth will plateau.

God desires to be Lord of our whole life, not just the spaces we keep ready for company. The most profound spiritual growth often happens in our life when we invite Him into the things we think He will reject us for. It's there that we see what Scripture says is true. We serve the God whose love perseveres even through the unthinkable.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of confession. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of confession.

GROW

GIVE



DISCIPLINES OF GIVE ARE THOSE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHERE WE LEARN HOW TO USE THE TIME, TALENTS, AND TREASURES THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN FOR GOD AND HIS KINGDOM. GOD HAS CALLED US TO USE THOSE GIFTS TO BENEFIT OTHERS AND TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

Recommended Discipline: PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Recommended Book: 1, 2 PETER

The Prayer of Examen is a practice based on Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he said that Christians would examine their conscience before taking the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28). Christians throughout the ages have practiced some version of it. The practice walks through a process of reflection: examining conscience and actions while paying attention to the ways that sin and selfish desires have hold of us.

The Prayer of Examen is a practice contains three movements: Examination, Confession, and Assurance.

Examination

Begin by sitting quietly and paying attention to your mind and body. Consider these reflection questions: Are you angry? Tense? Bitter? Ashamed? Frustrated? Scared?

Ask God to open your mind and heart so that you might see anything that's offensive to Him within you. Allow the feelings and emotions that come to the surface to inform you about the status of your own heart. Instead of pushing them aside, press into these questions and ask yourself why.

Confession

As you search your heart and God begins to bring things to your mind, confess your sins. Be specific.

Ultimately, confession is about honesty and trust before our merciful God. What you say to Him in confession does not always have to be sins of commission, but rather can simply be honesty and authenticity about telling God about your emotions and trusting that He cares enough for you to listen (1 Peter 5:7).

GIVE

Assurance

The practice always ends by remembering that the work of grace has already been accomplished by Jesus through His death and resurrection. Here, we must do what D. Martin Lloyd Jones has taught us – we must preach the Gospel to ourselves.

Think about this: who is the most influential person in your life?
You!

You are the most influential person in your life because you talk to yourself more than anyone else. Dr. Jones said that ultimately the aim of Scripture is to teach yourself how to talk to yourself the right way. And sometimes you have to tell your emotions what reality is and how they should feel. Because regardless of what we have going on in our soul or situation, we don't feel our way into our beliefs. Instead, we believe our way into our feelings.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the Prayer of Examen. Try out this practice several times, get familiar with this practice, before considering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the Prayer of Examen.

Recommended Discipline: SERVICE

Recommended Book: 1 CORINTHIANS

Service is a way of offering time, talent, and treasure for the care, protection, and benefit of others. The beauty of acts of service is that they tangibly give hands to the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

In serving, we are submitting ourselves to the example of Christ (Matt 20:28). We also consider others as more important than ourselves acknowledging that it is God who is at work in us “for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:3-13). Like the widow who offered Jesus all she had (Luke 21:1-4), we offer up to the Lord all we have we say, nothing is off limits, use it all.

Service is not just within the church service on Sunday morning but becomes a mark of our everyday lives as we follow Jesus.

Sit with the Lord and ask Him how He would like for you to serve.

Spend time looking around at the needs in the lives of the people you interact with on a regular basis. Consider ways that the Lord may be calling you to serve them.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

Simple acts of service are enough to make a truly great difference in someone’s life.

GIVE

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of service. Try out this practice several times, get familiar with this practice, before considering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of service.

Recommended Discipline: STEWARDSHIP

Recommended Book: 2 CORINTHIANS

Stewardship is choosing to be aware and intentional about the ways in which we use our time, talent, and treasure. Engaging in intentional stewardship reminds us that everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1), that He is the giver of everything (1 Chronicles 29:12; James 1:17).

Through the process of stewardship, we ask the Lord how He wants us to spend our time, talent, and treasure. We reevaluate our current practices and remind ourselves that the Lord works in our lives when we choose to live with open hands.

Stewardship does not come naturally or without intentional and prayerful planning and decision-making. It requires we set boundaries in how much we can invest time and finances. Consider the following steps to help work toward margin and stewardship in your life.

Prioritize

Prayerfully evaluate each resource you have (time, finances, relationships, etc) based on your current commitments and the past year. Your commitments and lifestyle will help you discern if you are correctly prioritizing your resources or overcommitted in any area.

Stop

You may need to immediately stop or plan to end commitments after prioritizing resources. Some commitments may need to stop because they are sinful or tempt you to use your resources improperly. Other commitments may indeed be good or godly, but might need to end to create margin and health.

GIVE

Build Habits & Rhythms

Consider creating rhythms and habits to help you proactively steward the resources that God has entrusted to you.

- **Recurring Time Blocks:** Create blocks of time that automatically recur for commitments you want to ensure are prioritized. This will help you develop a plan for correctly prioritizing each of your resources and protecting margin.
- **Spiritual Formation Habits:** Create a plan for simple ways to help you consistently prioritize and invest in your relationship with God, gospel community and God' mission.

In a season of reflecting on our stewardship, we are more intentional about developing practices for using what we have been given to serve others “as good managers of the varied grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of stewardship. Try this practice several times and get familiar with it before answering the following questions:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of stewardship.

GO



DISCIPLINES OF GO ARE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THAT TEACH US HOW TO GO OUT TO PEOPLE, MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE AT, AND MODEL CHRIST TO THEM. AS CHRIST FOLLOWERS, WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO TEACH OTHERS HOW TO LIVE AND LOVE LIKE HE DID.

Recommended Discipline: WITNESS

Recommended Book: ACTS

For centuries the church has experimented with a variety of models aimed at making the truth of the gospel accessible to the lost.

One of the most effective strategies has been relational evangelism. With relational evangelism, believers engage with people in their community and naturally develop healthy relationships.

It is through these relationships a believer and their friends and neighbors begin to share life. In sharing life, opportunities arise to model and to speak to the hope that we have in Jesus and the reality of a saving relationship with Jesus.

The goal is not to preach and teach but to model and love well, to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit as He draws us into gospel conversations.

No preplanned questions and illustrations needed.

The church has found that people are not only more open to the gospel within the context of relationship, but that these believers are perfectly positioned to disciple their friends and neighbors once they have made a profession of faith.



Although we need not adopt a super structured plan of evangelism, it's still important that believers are equipped to share the gospel message should the opportunity arise. Find a gospel presentation model that works for you. We have provided the 3 circles model in Appendix E as an option, but this is not the only helpful model out there. Keep it simple, let the unbeliever's questions guide the encounter, but be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have (1 Pet 3:15).

Witnessing is an act of mercy and grace. It isn't our job to get them into the Kingdom, it's God's. We simply get to respond with our best "YES" as the Holy Spirit opens the doors for these conversations to happen in our daily lives.

Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of witness. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with this practice before considering the following reflections:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of witness.



Recommended Discipline: FEASTING

Recommended Book: LUKE

Ancient Israel patterned life on seasons and rhythms that were often marked with a feast. These meals and celebrations were meant to be occasions that marked the great things God had done in their history.

Today, we know how to eat but we typically don't know how to feast – how to gather around a table, linger over a meal, cherish the conversations, flavors, and stories that are shared.

A feast is an intentional, enjoyable meal that centers around remembering what the Lord has done and is doing in your life. It is about enjoying how good God is through enjoying good food and good drink with good friends.

Consider these steps for how to throw a feast.

Turn Off the Phones

Don't worry about Instagramming the experience or the food. Show up ready to be present to the actual human beings you're in the room with. Put your phone on "do not disturb" or, better yet, provide a phone bucket where all phones have to be turned in for the evening. Exceptions can of course be made to accommodate being accessible to a babysitter if kids or grandkids are left at home.

Lighten Up

Feasts should be celebrations rather than formal dining affairs. Don't worry if the house isn't perfectly put together and don't go crazy with the place settings. Serve some snacks and welcome people into the kitchen while you finish making the meal.

Forget about Calories

Feasts are the exception, not the rule, so come ready to eat. Obviously, if someone has an allergy or a serious intolerance to food, make the appropriate accommodations. However, the practice for the feast will be in line with Jesus' advice to Peter to kill and eat all manner of flora and fauna.



Conversations Should be Driven by Joy

This is perhaps the most important of the rules. At the feast table, conversations should be driven by what people are joyful about, what interests them, and what's worth celebrating. Obligatory conversation about jobs, bosses, school, homework, the weather, and other boring topics should be avoided. Reflect before you come to the table: What can we celebrate with you? What are you thankful for? What has ignited your curiosity lately? What stories do you want to tell?

Experiment and Keep At It

Feasting is a practice. Like fasting, feasting is a habit we cultivate. We want to get good at throwing a feast not because we want to impress our friends but because we want to learn to savor good things and share joy. All of our feasts will be a little imperfect, but with practice, we learn to come to the table with joy and gratitude and to leave with a little bit more.


Invitation to reflect on the discipline:

Spend some time in the practice of feasting. Try out this practice several times and get familiar with this practice before considering the following reflections:

- Did this practice come naturally to you? Why or why not?
- With practice, what was easy for you?
- What was more challenging for you?
- List some benefits of engaging in the practice of feasting.



SCRIPTURE STUDY RESOURCES

The background of the page is a dark blue gradient. In the lower half, there is a large, out-of-focus image of a group of people, likely in a meeting or study session, with their hands raised or gesturing. The image is very blurry, making individual details indistinct.

SCRIPTURE STUDY PRACTICES

Practice 1: EMPHASIZE DIFFERENT WORDS IN THE TEXT

This method takes the verse or phrase of Scripture and turns it like a diamond to examine all perspectives. So a meditation on Jesus' words at the beginning of John 11:25 would look like this:

"**I** am the resurrection and the life."

"I **am** the resurrection and the life."

"I am **the** resurrection and the life."

"I am the **resurrection** and the life."

"I am the resurrection **and** the life."

"I am the resurrection and **the** life."

"I am the resurrection and the **life**."

Of course, the point is not to simply repeat each word of the verse until they've all been emphasized. The purpose is to think deeply upon the light (truth) that flashes into your mind each time the diamond of Scripture is turned. It's simple, but effective.

Practice 2: REWRITE THE TEXT IN YOUR OWN WORDS

From his earliest schooling days, Jonathan Edwards' father taught him to do his thinking with pen in hand. This was a habit he practiced throughout his life. Meditating with pen in hand or fingers on the iPad can help you to focus your attention on the matter at hand, while stimulating your flow of thinking. With this method, imagine that you are sending the verse you've chosen in a message to someone. How would you convey the content of the verse faithfully, yet without using the words of that verse?

Practice 3: ASK HOW THE TEXT POINTS TO JESUS

After His resurrection, as Jesus was walking on the road to Emmaus with two believers, we're told that "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Essentially this approach to meditation attempts to do the same thing – it examines the text to see how it might point to something about who Jesus is or what He did.

Practice 4: ASK WHAT PICTURE ILLUSTRATES THE TEXT?

An illustration is a word picture that explains, clarifies, or confirms the object of your meditation. It can be a personal anecdote, an event in the news or in history, a quotation, an analogy, a song—anything that shines light on the text. The first thing to do when you want to picture a passage is to consider whether there is a story in the Bible that illustrates the point of the verse on which you are meditating, or, if you are meditating on a story, whether there is a single verse somewhere in Scripture that summarizes the point of that story.

Consider this example of this method from Thomas Watson as he described biblical meditation itself from the Deuteronomy 6:6. “Meditation is like the shining of the sun, it operates upon the affections, it warms the heart and makes it more holy.”

Practice 5: ASK HOW THE TEXT SPEAKS TO YOUR SITUATION

John Flavel said that “the finger of God is clearly seen by us when we pursue meditation.” Suppose the current issue in your life is financial. After you have completed your Bible reading, review what you’ve read and search for any texts that address or might apply to finances. Then consider what the text says. If the immediate concern in your life relates to your family, think about what those verses have something to say about relationships. If you are wrestling with a persistent question, go back over all you’ve read in the past few minutes and scan it for something the Holy Spirit might illumine in relation to the answer. You may be surprised by the Scriptures God uses to give you insight, understanding, or application regarding your issue or question.

Practice 6: MEMORIZE THE TEXT

Simply put, when you are memorizing a verse, you think about it. Further, after you memorize a verse of Scripture, you can meditate on it during your commute, while on a walk, as you are preparing a meal, when you are falling asleep, or any other time you choose.

Practice 7: PRAY THROUGH THE TEXT

In *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer asked the question, “How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each Truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.” Christian meditation is more than just riveted human concentration or creative mental energy. Praying your way through a verse of Scripture submits the mind to the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the text and intensifies your spiritual perception.

The Bible was written under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration; pray for His illumination in your meditation. True biblical meditation must always involve two parties—the Christian and the Holy Spirit. Praying over a text is the Christian’s invitation for the Holy Spirit to hold His divine light over the words of Scripture to show what you cannot see without Him.

Practice 8: USE BREATH PRAYERS TO RE-ORIENT AROUND THE TEXT

Breath prayers are exactly what they sound like: prayers that can be said in a single breath. To practice this discipline, you simply take in a deep, calming breath and, while exhaling, pray quietly or aloud a simple phrase meant to reorient you to God’s presence and His kingdom. This is a practice that brings the whole person back to an awareness of God.

You might take a favorite verse of Scripture and adapt it. For example, Matthew 11:28 can become, “Lord I am weary, give me rest.” Romans 8:1 can be prayed as a reminder that “there is no condemnation.”

The beauty of this practice is in its portability. There is no place, no meeting, no encounter in life where one can’t stop and take a slow, deep breath. If you practice it regularly, you’ll find yourself whispering prayers without having to think too much about it and they will simply be part of life.

Practice 9: APPLY THE IGNATIAN PRAYER TO THE TEXT

Ignatius of Loyola was a 16th century priest who founded the Jesuit Order within the Catholic Church. He taught his followers to meditate on the Gospels with an active imagination. For example, if you are reading the story of Jesus healing a paralytic in Mark 2, hear it as if you were the paralytic or as if you were a bystander. Feel the heat of the sun, the weariness of a journey on a long road, the shame of exposure, the judgment and condemnation from the religious leaders.

Now imagine Jesus.

What might He sound like? Does He touch you as He passes? Does He look you in the eyes? What do you hear? What do you feel?

Scripture is living and active. It is meant to take root and grow in our mind. Instead of just knowing what the story says, know how it feels and explore what the characters in the story must have experienced when they encountered Jesus.

To do this practice, go somewhere where you can avoid interruption.

Begin by taking a moment to calm down your mind and body. Take a short passage from one of the Gospels, such as any of the stories in Matthew 8. Read the passage a few times and allow your imagination to start filling in the details: the scenery, the weather, the sounds in the background, or the smell of the sea. Imagine the nervous expression on the face of the centurion. After a few readings, let your mind wander into that world. Focus on senses: sight, smell, sound, touch, taste.

What struck you? What part of the story might be worth coming back to later in the day?

This is a practice that gets richer with repetition. You are training your mind to imagine, and in doing so, you're liberating yourself from the need for spectacle and external stimulation.

SCRIPTURE JOURNALING

Each week when you meet with your group, you will share what God is teaching you through His Word. Scripture journaling is a simple tool to help us read the Bible for all it's worth. We encourage you to work this discipline into your weekly rhythms of time with the Lord!

START WITH PRAYER

Before you begin reading, take a moment to pray and ask God to guide your time in His Word. Maybe pray something like this:

“Send your Holy Spirit into my mind and give me grace to learn the Scriptures and to properly interpret their meaning, that I and others may be encouraged through their truth and power. “

READ THE PASSAGE

Now, open up to the passage you plan to journal through, and before you begin to answer the journaling prompts, simply read through the passage.

USE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Now, look back on the passage you read and take time to answer these journaling prompts.

OBSERVE: What do you see?

Who are the people mentioned? What words repeat? What sticks out? No detail is too small! Write out as many observations as you can.

INTERPRET: What does it mean?

Prayerfully consider what the text means considering its original audience, what you know about the context and what you have learned from other passages of Scripture.

APPLY: What do I do?

Sit with the Lord and consider how this passage might apply to you personally. Is there an example to follow? A truth to remember? A promise to hold on to?

SCRIPTURE APPLICATION

Does this passage say something about who God is?

- How can this change the way that I see God?
- How can this change the way that I talk to God?

Does this passage say something about who I am?

- How can this change the way that I see myself?
- How can this change the way that I relate to God?

Does this passage prompt questions?

- Write down those questions and pray through them. Consider this helpful framework when trying to discern the application you should take from the text. Remember this (yes, another) acronym: S.P.E.C.K
 - **S** - Is there a SIN to confess and avoid?
 - **P** - Is there a PROMISE to keep?
 - **E** - Is there an EXAMPLE to follow?
 - **C** - Is there a COMMAND to obey?
 - **K** - Is there KNOWLEDGE of God I need to reflect on?
- If you feel like your questions need answers, pray about how the Holy Spirit wants you to pursue answers to your questions.

The theme of God as redeemer runs from the beginning through the end of Scripture. How do you see God's redemption in this passage?

Does this passage speak to the condition of my heart toward myself, God, or others?

- If what we dwell on becomes our heart posture, what practices can I engage in to feed healthy heart postures and to adjust unhealthy heart postures.

Am I sensing the conviction of the Holy Spirit as I read this passage? What am I feeling convicted about?

- Reach out to someone in your Disciple Group and hear what the Lord is convicting you about.
- Ask them to pray for wisdom to know what to do and for the courage to obey.
- Pray for a spirit of forgiveness and compassion where it's needed, and for wisdom to know what to do.
- Pray for a spirit of forgiveness and compassion where it's needed.
- Praise God together for the refinement of your character in this process even if things don't turn out the way that we expect.

Does this passage speak to the way that I view the world?

- Without even realizing it, sometimes we allow our life filter to darken and we lose sight of the light. We begin to see the world primarily through a negative lens.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal a spirit of negativity. Choose to dwell on the goodness of God and where you see Him at work in your life.
- Shift your gaze. When you feel the negative thoughts creeping in, pray through the things that you are grateful for or the attributes of God and enjoy His light as your lens changes.