

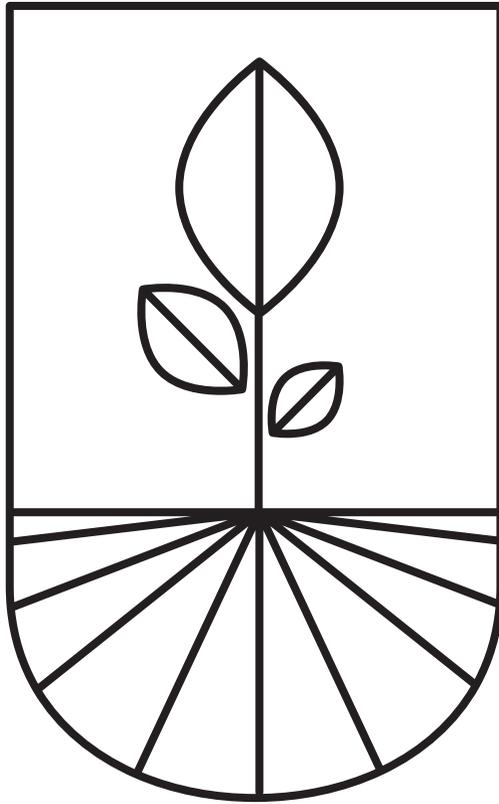
ROOTED



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ROOTED

Nine conversations to establish your faith

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Putting Down Roots

The Bible often describes our lives in the language of plants: trees, vines, branches, water, soil, fruit. This imagery helps us to see ourselves in a life long process of growing to maturity.

At the beginning of a plant's life, its energy is mostly spent on growing a strong root system. **This book focuses on the roots of your life in Christ**; growing them deep and strong so that your faith is resilient and sustainable for a lifetime.

Colossians 2:6-7

“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”

IN CHRIST

The first three conversations address life's fundamental questions about **Identity, Belonging** and **Purpose**. Many people search their entire lives but never find the answers that satisfy their souls. As followers of Jesus, we now find these answers “in Christ”, a phrase that the New Testament uses over 150 times to describe believers.

LOVE GOD

The second three conversations focus on our relationship with God - the foundational love relationship we are designed to experience. The concepts of the **Trinity, Bible** and **Prayer** are introduced but can literally be explored for a lifetime.

LOVE PEOPLE

The last three conversations introduce the idea that following Jesus is not just about our individual relationship with God. God designed us to love both Him and people. People who are far from God desperately need the message of His love. We explore how we can help people find and follow Jesus through the **Gospel, Mission** and **Design**.

PRACTICES

Each conversation contains some of the basic practices followers of Jesus can develop to become established in our faith. Mastering these practices is not the ultimate goal. They are simply a means by which the roots of our faith grow deep into the life God in Christ.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
And whose trust is the Lord.
For he will be like a tree planted by the water,
That extends its roots by a stream,
And will not fear when the heat comes;
But its leaves will be green,
And it will not be anxious in a year of drought,
Nor cease to yield fruit.

J E R E M I A H 1 7 : 7 - 8

How to use this book

Following Jesus is not meant to be done alone! When you meet with friends to talk through the nine conversations in this book, make sure you include time to:

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately by asking questions such as:

- How has your week been?
- What have been some highs and lows? Any challenges or celebrations?
- How is your relationship with Jesus impacting your response to life lately?

Check in on how everyone is doing with the Practices introduced during the previous meeting.

Pray for each other and for your time together; inviting God's Spirit to reveal truth to you.

Begin to discuss today's topic by answering a couple of introductory questions.

GROW

Create a space where all questions are welcome and each person is attentive and present to each other.

- Read through the Grow section together or ask everyone to read it ahead of time and review the main ideas when you meet.
- Discuss the questions and challenge each other to practically apply God's truth to your life.

ENGAGE

Our lives begin to change when we actually practice the way of Jesus day by day in the power of His Spirit. Each conversation introduces 1-2 foundational Practices to begin intentionally and actively following Jesus.

- Talk through the Practices in each conversation and commit to doing them between meetings.

CORE PRACTICES

Reading the Bible, praying, and talking to people about your relationship with God are among the best ways to grow your roots in Christ. In fact, making these three Core Practices part of your daily life are essential for you to begin to know and love God deeply.

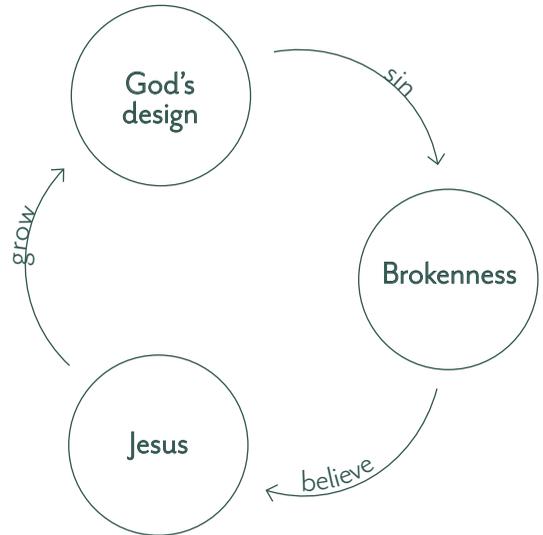
- Challenge each other to regularly spend time with God using the Core Practices guide in each conversation.

The Gospel

The good news of how we can be reconciled to God through Jesus.

GOD'S DESIGN

Out of God's great love, He created a world that was good. He made people to enjoy a deeply connected relationship with Him and to represent Him through our lives. (Genesis 1:26-28, 31) As a loving Father, He communicated boundaries to protect us and to allow us to fully enjoy our relationships with Him and with other people (Genesis 2:15-16).



BROKENNESS

Yet, when we look around our world, brokenness and evil are evident everywhere - war, famine, disease, corruption. If we are honest, we also see brokenness and evil inside ourselves - deceit, hatred, greed, lust.

This is because we have rejected God's design and chosen to follow our own way.

- Our rejection of God and His ways is what the Bible calls sin. (Romans 3:23)
- Our sin results in separation from God which the Bible calls death. (Romans 6:23a)

Unless our sin is forgiven, we will remain separated from God forever.

JESUS

God does not want to leave us in our sin and brokenness!

- God graciously provided a way to forgive our sin and to freely give us eternal life - a life connected to God both now and forever. (Romans 6:23b; John 17:3)
- God's only Son Jesus died in our place. He took upon Himself the penalty that we deserve because of our sin. Then, Jesus rose from the dead, and forever defeated the power of sin and death. (Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

BELIEVE

We respond to Jesus by believing in Him for the forgiveness of our sin.

- To believe in Jesus means that you no longer try to earn God's approval through what you do, nor do you deny that you need forgiveness and rescue. Instead, you accept God's free gift of eternal life. Belief or faith is simply being convinced or persuaded that something or someone is trustworthy (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Everyone who believes in Jesus is forgiven of their sin and receives eternal life. We can now know God personally and experience the life we were designed to live (John 3:16-17).

In Christ

Identity + Belonging + Purpose

Identity *Who am I?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been? What have been some highs and lows?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

How do you typically describe yourself when meeting someone for the first time?

What people and experiences have been the most influential in shaping who you are today?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

One of the greatest challenges in life is to develop a true sense of self. In our modern world, we are constantly bombarded by cultural messages that tell us who to be and how to live. In reality, identities are shaped by our genetics, our environment and our choices. We build them to meet our deep need for value, worth and security.

Identities are often based on:

- **Performance** - "I am what I do" (achievements, success, roles, job, status)
- **Possessions** - "I am what I own" (things, brands)
- **Pleasure** - "I am what I want" (sex, food, travel)
- **Popularity** - "I am what you think of me" (likes, followers, approval, influence)

The danger with basing an identity on these things is that they are temporary. If they are taken away, we are left to ask "who am I without ____?" Who am I without my job? Who am I without the latest technology? Who am I when my best friend betrays me?

I am a loved child of God

As believers in Jesus, we have been given an eternal, lasting identity from God Himself! We don't have to earn it or work to keep it. In Christ, we are a new creation (1 Corinthians 5:17). Our core identity changes from a person disconnected and separated from God to a loved son or daughter of God.

- "But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." -**John 1:12**

- “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” -1 John 3:1

I am eternally secure in Christ

Just as a person who is born into a human family can't change their biological connection to that family, believers in Jesus can't lose their spiritual connection to God. Nothing we do and nothing that is done to us can ever separate us from God's love and the eternal life we have in Christ.

“My sheep hear My (Jesus) voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

-John 10:27-29

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” -Romans 8:38-39

Becoming Who I Am

When a child is adopted, they legally become a son or daughter in that family. Then they must learn to actually live out of their new identity as a son or daughter; not as an outsider or stranger. So too, the lifelong journey of believing in and following Jesus is one of becoming who we already are - a loved child of God.

- “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! (Daddy) Father!” -Romans 8:15

“Now, with God's help, I shall become myself.”

-Soren Kierkegaard

Danish theologian

Discuss together.

In what ways have you been basing your identity on performance, possessions, pleasure or popularity?

Is there anything keeping you from really believing you are who God says you are in Jesus?

How can your new identity in Christ impact or change your roles and relationships at work, in school, with family and friends?

Jesus experienced a moment when His identity was confirmed by His Father after He was baptized. Read Matthew 3:16-17. What stands out to you and why?

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality and a way to publicly identify yourself as a Christian. Have you been baptized since becoming a follower of Jesus? Why or why not?

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

What are some practical ways you can begin to live from the new identity you have in Christ? What new truth is God inviting you to believe? What is one thing you can begin to do today?

ENGAGE

Talk through this practice together.

- **Identity in Christ** - review every day until your next meeting.

Identity in Christ

As followers of Jesus, our identity is rooted in who we are in Christ. Keep this list of ways the Bible describes believers in a place you see often. Read these truths and scriptures regularly. Ask God to help you believe and live from them.

I am the salt and light of the earth.	Matthew 5:13-14
I've been given a spirit of power, love, and self-control – not fear.	2 Timothy 1:7
I can find grace and mercy in time of need.	Hebrews 4:16
I am hidden with Christ in God. I am complete in Christ.	Colossians 3:3
I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.	Colossians 2:10
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.	Colossians 1:14
I am a citizen of heaven.	Philippians 3:20
I know that God will complete the good work He started in me.	Philippians 1:6
I may approach God with freedom and confidence.	Ephesians 3:12
I am God's workmanship.	Ephesians 2:10
I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.	Ephesians 2:18
I have been adopted as God's child.	Ephesians 1:5
I am a saint.	Ephesians 1:1
I am a minister of reconciliation for God.	2 Corinthians 5:18-21
I am a new creation.	2 Corinthians 5:17
I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God.	2 Corinthians 1:21-22
I am a member of Christ's body.	1 Corinthians 12:27
I have been bought at a price. I belong to God.	1 Corinthians 6:20
I am God's temple.	1 Corinthians 3:16
I am God's coworker.	1 Corinthians 3:9
I cannot be separated from the love of God.	Romans 8:35-39
I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.	John 15:16
I am Christ's friend.	John 15:15

If you find it difficult to believe one of these, ask God to show you what it could look like to begin to believe it? Ask Him to reveal what is keeping you from living from this truth?

Thank Him for the ongoing work of transformation that He is doing in your life.

Share with someone in your community and ask them to pray for you to believe and live from your new identity in Christ.

CORE PRACTICES

Reading the Bible, praying and talking to people about your relationship with God are among the best ways to grow your roots in Christ. Use these practices to spend time with God this week.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” -**2 Corinthians 5:17**

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” -**Ephesians 2:8-10**

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” -**1 John 5:13**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Begin to spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

ACTS - Of the many ways to engage with God in prayer, this model consists of Adoration (praise), Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (requests).

A - Quiet your mind and heart by taking a few deep breaths. Think about God; focus on His goodness and greatness. Offer words of praise to Him.

C - Tell God the truth about how you are feeling and the ways that you are trusting in other identities to provide peace and security in your life.

T - Thank God for His power to change and renew your heart and mind.

S - Ask God to help you fully believe the truth about your new identity in Christ. Ask for His help and power to begin living out this truth while silencing any other voices.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about your identity in Christ.

Belonging *Who are my people?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been?

Were you able to spend time with God and to think about your Identity in Christ? How did it impact you?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

Describe a time when you felt really connected to a group of people.

Have you ever experienced a sense of isolation or loneliness? What was it like?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

From the beginning, God designed people to be relational. The classic line from Genesis 2:18 says it all when God declares, "It is not good for the man to be alone." In our world today, despite the advances in technology and transportation, loneliness has become a modern "epidemic." A 2018 survey found that loneliness is widespread in America, with nearly 50% of respondents reporting that no one knows them well.

People have a deep longing to be welcomed, wanted and known. We need a place to belong.

I belong in God's Family

Jesus welcomes everyone who believes in Him into His family, the Church. The Bible describes the Church as a unified body or household. It is a family of brothers and sisters and Jesus is the head of the family. The church is not a social club or a group of friends who look, think, and talk similarly, but a community of diverse people following Jesus together.

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." -**Ephesians 2:19**

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." -**Romans 12:5**

There are two aspects to the Church:

- **Universal Church** - The Church (capital C) consists of all people, over all time, who trust in the person and work of Jesus - His death, burial and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins and for eternal life in Him.
- **Local Church** - A church is also a local group of Christ followers who regularly meet together to grow in our faith in Jesus. We also go into the broken world around us to share the hope of eternal life in Christ that we have found.

Biblical Community

When the Church community is healthy and thriving it is characterized by two main qualities - love and unity. These are only possible because of God's Spirit working in our lives and our faithful response to Him. True biblical community is others-focused: inviting, welcoming, making room for differences, challenging and forgiving one another.

“A new commandment I [Jesus] give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” -**John 13:34-35**

“The glory which You [God] have given Me [Jesus] I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” -**John 17:22-23 22**

Better Together

Following Jesus is never meant to be done individually. In fact, most of the instructions in the New Testament are written as plural commands, implying that they should be practiced together with others. The solidarity and support of fellow believers is essential for us all. The first followers of Jesus experienced the power and joy of living out their faith together.

“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” -**Acts 2:44-47**

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” -**Hebrews 10:23-25**

Discuss together.

What has been your experience in attending a church?

Could there be some dangers to following Jesus without participating in a community? If so, what are they?

What are some ways you personally could contribute to a local church that would benefit others?

How do you think it is possible to maintain unity with people who are different from you?

Becoming a member of a local church is a public expression of the spiritual reality that you are a member of God's family. Are you a member of a local church now? Why or why not?

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

What are some practical steps you can take to begin connecting with other believers? Who might God be inviting you to connect with this week? What is one thing you can do to begin to experience biblical community?

ENGAGE

Talk through these practices together.

- **Reading the Bible** - use as a guide to begin reading the Bible regularly this week.
- **ACTS Prayer** - use as a guide for specific times of talking and listening to God. Begin talking to God throughout your day as well - He is with you!

Reading The Bible

The Bible is God's primary source of communication to us. It is not a book designed to simply provide information or rules to follow. Instead, it tells a unified story about God - who He is and what He is like, leading us to Jesus. The truth of the Bible is intended to shape our entire lives (hearts, minds, bodies, actions) - to become like Jesus.

As we look at the life of Jesus, we see that His life was deeply rooted in the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. Jesus quoted scripture, meditated on scripture, interpreted scripture, and obeyed scripture. As His followers, we do well to anchor our lives in scripture as He did by reading, meditating on and applying the Bible.

GETTING STARTED

Use the tools below to begin a habit of spending time every day in God's Word. Keep a journal and jot down thoughts, questions and verses that stand out to you.

A Chapter a Day

A great place to begin is by reading one of the narratives of Jesus' life in the New Testament:

- Mark - 16 chapters (1 per day = ~2 weeks)
- John - 21 chapters (1 per day = 3 weeks)
- Luke - 24 chapters (1 per day = 3.5 weeks)
- Matthew - 28 chapters (1 per day = 4 weeks)

Whole books

Read these letters to New Testament churches learning to follow Jesus together. The principles still apply to us today!

- Ephesians - 6 chapters
- Philippians - 4 chapters
- Colossians - 4 chapters

ONLINE RESOURCES

Bible.com is a great resource for various Bible reading plans and devotionals.

- They have a free App for mobile devices called The Bible App/YouVersion.
- This is daily reading plan for the book of John that includes devotional content:
- <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/817-john-reading-guide>

Bibleproject.com has many excellent free videos on different books and themes of the Bible.

- This a short video series helps you begin to understand the Bible's unique literary design: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/how-to-read-the-bible/>

Thematic Reading Plan - <https://www.readscripture.org/>

- This reading plan highlights the big picture of the Bible and incorporates The Bible Project overview videos. It is available as an app on your phone.

ACTS Prayer Model

Prayer is one of the most important aspects of our relationship with God. Through prayer, we learn how to trust and love Him in deeper ways. In prayer we also have the opportunity to participate in His work as we bring our requests to Him (James 5:16-18). Below is a simple model to structure your time of prayer.

ADORATION

Praise God for who He is (His character) and what He has done (His work). His character includes qualities like His love, His truthfulness, and His power. His work includes creating the world, sending His Son Jesus to die and rise again for us, and giving us eternal life.

“I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.” -**Psalm 146:2**

CONFESSION

Confess (tell the truth about) your sins and failures to God. None of us is aware of all our sin, but we can acknowledge the failures we know about. Ask Him to reveal any other areas of sin in your life (Psalm 19:12-14). Ask for forgiveness and for the strength from the Holy Spirit to obey in the future.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” -**1 John 1:9**

THANKSGIVING

Thank God for everything He has given to you. There are nearly infinite reasons to be thankful. Thank Him for your life, for eternal life, for the Holy Spirit, for your friends and family, for providing for your daily needs, and for any specific answers to prayer.

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

SUPPLICATION (REQUEST)

Finally, present your requests to the Lord. It can be helpful to keep a list of people and specific areas of your life that you are praying about.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” -**Philippians 4:6**

In Jesus’ name, Amen

Close your prayer with this phrase, acknowledging that we have access to God only through Jesus and that what we are praying is in alignment with His nature/name.

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” -1

Thessalonians 5:11

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” -1 **Peter 4:8-10**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Begin to spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

A - Quiet your mind and heart by taking a few deep breaths. Think about God; focus on His goodness and greatness. Offer words of praise to Him.

C - Tell God the truth about how you are feeling and about any resistance you have to participating in biblical community.

T - Thank God for His power to change and renew your heart and mind.

S - Ask God to lead you to relationships with other believers within a church so that you might grow and mature in your faith. Ask God to show you ways that you can actively contribute to the life of a local church.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about belonging to God’s family.

Purpose *Why am I here?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been? What have been some challenges or things you are celebrating?
Were you able to spend time with God reading the Bible and praying? How is it going?
Pray for each other and for your time together today.

What are some of your priorities in life?

How do you decide what to do with your time, resources and talents?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

Have you ever heard these slogans? "Seize the day," "Make a difference," "Choose the bigger life;" These messages strike a cord within us because they expose our deep longing for significance and purpose. We want our lives to count for something meaningful and lasting. At the same time, finding our life's purpose can feel overwhelming and stressful.

Imago Dei

The Bible teaches that God created humanity "in His image." He designed people with the amazing purpose to reflect His nature and to act as His representatives on earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Sadly, this great purpose for living was fractured when we chose to rebel against God's design. Sin and death entered into the world. Our spiritual connection with God was severed and mankind's search for meaning and purpose apart from God began.

Restored Image Bearers

The good news is that followers of Jesus have a renewed connection to God and become realigned with His purpose. We don't have to wake up every day and wonder what life is all about and what we should be doing. Our purpose is to become like Jesus by loving God, loving people and helping others do the same.

Become Like Jesus

Jesus is the ultimate example of God's vision for human life. He lived a life of self-giving love for God and people. Following Jesus consists of being with Him and practicing His way of life. This is how we learn - by spending time with a person who is an example and by practicing what they do.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” -**Ephesians 5:1-2**

“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow in His steps.” -**1 Peter 2:21**

“Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.” -**Romans 12:2**

By Loving God and Loving People

Someone once asked Jesus what was the “greatest commandment?” In essence, they were asking what is the most important priority in life? His answer was to love God and love people.

“And He [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” -**Matthew 22:37-40**

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” -**Ephesians 3:17-19**

And Helping Others Do The Same

As we become more like Christ, we want to help others find and follow Jesus too. We love people best when we share with them how they can know God personally. We show people God’s love by meeting both physical and spiritual needs.

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” -**James 2:15-16**

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” -**Matthew 28:18-20**

Discuss together.

What are some ways your life would change if you prioritized becoming like Jesus?

What are some ways you can grow in love for God in your daily life?

Who are the people in your life that are far from God but close to you? How can you begin to show them God's love?

When you think about the end of your life on earth, what do you think will matter most to you? How could investing your life in "loving God, loving people and helping others do the same" provide you with lasting significance? Read Matthew 6:19-21.

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

Do you sense God highlighting any misplaced priorities in your life or revealing any new ones? What is He inviting you to do or change?

ENGAGE

Talk through these practices together.

- **Habit Check** - use as a guide for assessing and adjusting your priorities.
- **Rhythms of Grace** - use as a guide to shape your days and weeks.

Habit Check

Whether we know it or not, **the things we do also do something to us**. Our lives are, in one sense, the cumulative effect of our habits - repeated, often unconscious, behaviors. Researchers agree that up to 40% of the actions we take every day are not the product of our conscious choices but of our habits.

Habits not only form who we are, **they also reflect what we really love**. An honest look at how we spend our time, energy and money will reveal what we truly value. By regularly assessing our habits, we have an opportunity to make adjustments. We can align our lives with our God-given purpose to become like Jesus by loving God, loving people and helping others do the same.

For one week, keep a short and simple diary of your habits and daily patterns. Use your phone notes or carry a small notebook. Write down the amount of time spent on each activity. Especially note how you spend your energy, time and money.

For example:

- 30 minutes on social media
- 30 minutes driving listening to podcasts or radio
- 1 hour working out
- 2 hours of TV/Netflix
- 2 hours and \$30 at a restaurant with friends

At the end of the week, ask yourself:

What has been shaping me without my knowing?

Are my habits helping me to become like Jesus?

Does the way I spend my resources focus mainly on myself or becoming like Jesus?

What is one thing I can change this week so that my habits reflect what I truly value?

Rhythms of Grace

Healthy habits and rhythms of pursuing God provide structure enabling our spiritual lives to grow. In the first few centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection, some of His followers developed a practice known as a "rule of life." The rule was not a list of laws to obey but a pattern of habits that helped them focus their lives toward living like Jesus. The rule of life gave them a framework for their lives to ensure that the most important priorities of life (prayer, service, care for the poor) were accomplished and not neglected.

The word rule comes from the Latin word *regula*, a word associated with a bar or trellis. A trellis provides a steady structure of support for a vine. Developing and following a "rule of life" provides followers of Jesus a pattern of habits that supports spiritual growth and living a purposeful life.

- "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." -**Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)**

Consider how you might begin to incorporate these simple daily and weekly practices into your life. Start with one or two and build slowly. As you grow in your faith, other practices and spiritual disciplines can be added to your life.

DAILY

Scripture Before Screen

Let the first message you read in the morning be God's Word to you rather than the world's agenda or other people's priorities. Have a plan for reading your Bible and a place ready to go when you wake up.

Morning and Evening Prayer

Frame your day in love for God (rather than stress or anxiety) by talking to Him in the morning when you wake up and in the evening before you fall asleep. Start with an amount of time that is doable and enjoyable!

Gratitude

Practicing gratitude is widely known as a healthy mental practice. For Jesus followers, acknowledging the source of the good we experience (God Himself!) forms us into people of love, joy and peace. Try listing three things you are grateful for each day.

"What you do every day matters more than what you do once in a while." - Gretchen Rubin

WEEKLY

Sabbath

Just like an electronic device needs to regularly be charged in order to function, human beings need to regularly rest from our work and the pressure to achieve. Practicing Sabbath reminds us that the world doesn't depend on what we can accomplish but rather on God who holds all things together.

Dedicate part or all of one day a week to:

- Stopping your regular work and any thoughts or concerns about it.
- Resting in body, mind and soul in ways that are life-giving to you.
- Delighting in God Himself and the good gifts that He has provided for you (nature, food, friends, family, hobbies, play).

Gathered Worship

Attend a Sunday service with your local church family to realign your heart in praise to God and to learn more about Him together.

Community

We all need companions on the journey of following Jesus to encourage us, pick us up when we fall and to show us our blindspots. Regularly gathering with a small group of spiritual friends provides a place to be known and supported and to do the same for others. Consider joining a group at your church or reaching out to a few friends to start an intentional community group together.

Serve

Jesus said of Himself that He came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28). He served people by meeting their physical and spiritual needs. Begin asking God to show you how you can meet needs among people in your life - neighbors, co-workers, friends, acquaintances. Make it a weekly, intentional practice to meet a physical or spiritual need.

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“Just as the Father has loved Me (Jesus), I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” **-John 15:9-11**

“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” **-2 Corinthians 5:18-20**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Begin to spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

A - Quiet your mind and heart by taking a few deep breaths. Think about God; focus on His goodness and greatness. Offer words of praise to Him.

C - Tell God the truth about the priorities in your life and what you have been investing in to fill your need for significance.

T - Thank God for giving you an ultimate purpose that fulfills the longing of your heart. Thank Him for the gifts and talents He has given you.

S - Ask God to show you how to grow in your love for Him. Ask Him for opportunities to represent Him in your daily life.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about the purpose you have in Christ.

Love God

Trinity + Bible + Prayer

Trinity *What is God like?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been?

Were you able to do the Habit Check? What did you learn about yourself?

Have you begun to incorporate any daily or weekly rhythms? How is it going?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

Do you remember when you first became aware of God? What were your thoughts about Him?

When you close your eyes and picture God, what do you see?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

Unique among all other major religions, Christianity proclaims a triune (three-in-one) God. The Trinity can be defined as follows, "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God and there is one God."¹ The word Trinity, while never used in the Bible, is a concept clearly taught throughout scripture.

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" -**Deuteronomy 6:4**

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." -**Matthew 28:19**

"Because the Christian God is triune, the Trinity is the governing center of all Christian belief, the truth that shapes and beautifies all others."²

What is the Trinity like?

God is, by His very nature, a relational community; Father, Son and Spirit. While existing as three distinct persons, the Trinity shares one divine essence that the Bible describes as love. 1 John 4:8 tells us, "God is love." Love is who He is. The relationship within the Trinity is characterized by self-giving, unconditional love. As followers of Jesus, we can look to what He said about God to begin to understand the Trinity.

Father: The Loving Life-Giver

In the Gospel accounts Jesus, first and foremost, reveals God as a loving Father. The famous prayer Jesus taught His followers known as The Lord's Prayer, begins with the words "our Father" and throughout His life Jesus repeatedly refers to God as "the Father."

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand." -**John 3:35**

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." -**John 15:9**

Son: The Beloved

Similarly, all that Jesus is and does comes from His identity as the Beloved - the eternally loved Son of God.

"While he [Peter, one of Jesus' disciples] was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" -**Matthew 17:5**

Deity and Humanity

Jesus is absolutely unique in that He is both fully God and fully man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. During His life on earth, Jesus directly claimed to be equal with God and revealed Himself to be God. His followers began to recognize and believe that He was who He said He was.

"In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." -**John 1:1, 14**

"For in Him (Jesus) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." -**Colossians 2:9**

Jesus is also fully human. Because Jesus took on humanity and lived a sinless life, two results occurred. First, His sacrificial death and resurrection rescues those who believe from the consequences of sin - separation from the Trinity. Second, His life became our model for how humanity was designed to live - in a joyful, loving relationship with the Father.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." -**Hebrews 4:14-16**

¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 226.

²Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), p. 16.

Spirit: The Power of Love

In His last days on earth, Jesus explained to His followers that He was going to go back to His Father. He promised them that He would not leave them alone but would send His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity (not a force) who lives in believers, empowering us to live by His love. The Spirit's presence in us now is the "down payment" of our future hope of living with God face-to-face.

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." -**John 14:16-17**

"In Him (Jesus), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge (down payment) of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." -**Ephesians 1:13-14**

Welcomed In

As believers in Jesus, we are welcomed into the trinitarian community of love through belief in Jesus. We begin to experience that the Father is for us, that the Son is with us, and that the Spirit is in us. Because God is love, He gives us His love and as we follow Him faithfully, God reshapes us more and more to love Him and to love others.

"And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." -**Romans 5:5**

"Have you ever known someone so magnetically kind and gracious, so warm and generous of spirit that just a little time spent with them affects how you think, feel and behave? Someone whose presence makes you better - even if only for a while, when you are with them? ... This God is love in such a profound and potent way that you simply cannot know Him without yourself becoming loving."

-Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*

Discuss together.

How does the fact that the essential nature of God is love impact you?

What surprises you or is challenging to you about the Trinity?

How does seeing the way Jesus related to the Father help you to relate to God?

How does knowing that God is for you, with you and in you impact your life?

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

What new truth is God inviting you to believe? What is one thing you can begin to do today to experience the love of God?

ENGAGE

Talk through this practice together.

Solitude and Silence - use as a guide to spend time enjoying God's presence.

Practicing Solitude + Silence

Busyness, distraction, noise, hurry - these are the waters in which we all swim, often unconsciously. We can easily occupy every waking moment with some kind of activity or stimulus. If we are honest, we will admit that digital distraction is likely the first thing most of us turn to when we have a “free moment”, making it possible for days and even weeks to go by without acknowledging God’s presence or spending quality time with Him.

By contrast, Jesus often went to a solitary place to spend time alone with God the Father. He taught His disciples to do the same in the midst of life’s demands and busyness. (Luke 5:15-16)

START SIMPLY

You may already be spending regular time alone reading your Bible and praying ... that is great! Continue to build on this practice by incorporating Solitude and Silence into your time with God.

Solitude

Find a quiet place where you can be alone and can actually focus on God. This may require kindly letting the people you live with know you’d like to be alone without interruption.

Silence

Spend a short amount of time (5 minutes) listening to God in silence. Refrain from reading a book or listening to music or even praying with words. Just be with God in the quiet. Give Him your full attention and time. Receive from Him love, truth, and peace. Focus on His presence and nearness. Slowly add more time as you are led by God.

- “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.” -**Psalm 73:28**

SIMPLE YET CHALLENGING

While the concepts of silence and solitude are easy to understand, you may be surprised at how difficult they can be to put into practice in the moment. When we get alone and quiet, we discover just how much people, productivity and pleasures occupy our thoughts. Painful emotions that we have pushed away may also emerge. Our minds may jump from one thought to another (sometimes called monkey mind!) causing frustration.

CHALLENGING BUT SO WORTH IT

Allow God to lead you through these challenges by returning your attention to Him when it strays. God’s promise is that when we “seek Him” we will find Him. In solitude and silence, we can find renewal, healing, and a centered peace from God that passes all understanding. Slowly our hearts and minds are realigned to His ways and will. Slowly, we become like Jesus Himself, the great lover of God and people.

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” -Ephesians 3:14-19

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

A - Quiet your mind and heart by taking a few deep breaths. Think about God; focus on His goodness and greatness. Offer words of praise to Him.

C - Tell God the truth about how you are feeling and the ways that you are not experiencing His love for you.

T - Thank God for revealing Himself to you and for welcoming you into a loving relationship with Him.

S - Ask God to continue to reveal Himself to you through His word and in times of prayer. Ask for His help and power to begin living in the security of His great love.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about what God is like.

Bible *How does God reveal Himself to us?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been? How is your relationship with Jesus impacting your response to life this week?

How was spending time in Solitude and Silence with God?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

What do you think your friends and family believe about the Bible?

What has been your experience with the Bible?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

Reading the Bible can be challenging. Like any other ancient literature, it can seem complex and unfamiliar. We may wonder if it holds any relevance for us today. Before considering what the Bible is and its purpose in our lives, it can be helpful to first look at what the Bible is not.

The Bible is not a ...

Self-help book - consisting of tips and techniques to be used by me to create my "best life now."

Rulebook - consisting of rules to follow for a guaranteed outcome. "If I follow these rules then my life will be good, my kids will turn out okay, my business will succeed; God will owe me."

Textbook - an interesting topic to study, to gather information and become an "expert." In other words, to master the content.

Science book - used to answer specific technical questions about the natural world.

Political science book - used to validate or discredit political ideologies.

Twitter feed - good for short, pithy sayings to motivate, inspire and randomly retweet.

In all of these approaches to reading the Bible, the reader essentially acts as an authority over scripture; controlling it, using it, choosing what to focus on and what to ignore. Ultimately these approaches are incompatible with truly following Jesus as His disciple or learner.

The Bible is ...

The epic, true story about God's love for humanity -revealing who He is and what He is like. The Bible describes God's loving nature and His just ways. This literary masterpiece explains God, humanity and reality itself.

"The reason for our confusion over the Bible is that we usually read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories each with a moral for how we should live our lives. It is not this. Rather it comprises a single story telling us how the human race got into this present condition and how God through Jesus Christ has come and will come to put things right."

-Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

What is the epic story (metanarrative) of the Bible?

Creation - God created a good world for humanity, and He created mankind to represent Him and co-rule with Him.

Fall - Humanity has rejected God and His design for life, giving into pride and leading to separation from God - a death-like existence.

Redemption - God sent Jesus to rescue us and reconnect us to God, restoring us to life when we trust in Him.

Restoration - God will ultimately restore all things on earth as they were originally intended to be, where everything is truly good again.

A library -the Bible can be described as "a library of writings that are both divine and human, that together tell a unified story, which leads us to Jesus."¹

Just as a library contains many different genres of books, writings from many different authors, and works that span time and cultures, so does the Bible.

~43% of the Bible is narrative or story, from historical narrative to parables.

~33% of the Bible is poetry, including songs and reflective and prophetic poetry.

~24% of the Bible is discourse or teaching, including laws, sermons and letters.

Our approach to reading, interpreting and understanding the Bible will be different depending on which book in the "library" we are reading.

Inspired -the writings found in the Bible are the result of divine and human collaboration. Imagine listening to music being played on a saxophone or trumpet. The musician breathes into the instrument and sound, notes and music is formed. The Bible was written like this. God inspired, "breathed" through, human authors to record His Word to us.

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." -2 Peter 1:20-21

¹Taken from Bridgetown Church (Portland, Oregon), Year of Biblical Literacy

“All Scripture is inspired (breathed) by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”-**2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Meditative literature -the Bible is written to reveal its wisdom over time as we immerse ourselves in it. Have you ever repeatedly watched a favorite movie only to see more and more of what was there all along? Reading the Bible is like this. As we read God’s Word slowly and consistently over time, God shows us more and more of His wisdom.

“I am up before dawn crying for help. I find hope in your word. My eyes anticipate the nighttime hours, so that I can meditate on your word.” -**Psalms 119:147-148**

Formational - God’s Word is designed to form us not merely inform us. Just like there are physical principles that govern the natural world, the Bible reveals the spiritual, moral and relational principles God designed into our world. As we come to understand and align our hearts with God’s ways, we are re-created and formed to be more like Jesus.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” -**Hebrews 4:12**

“You (Timothy, a young minister), however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” -**2 Timothy 3:14-15**

Jesus and the Bible

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He would often open up the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogues, teaching and preaching with authority. Jesus read, taught, interpreted and obeyed the Word of God. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was in the wilderness and had been fasting for 40 days. When He was tempted by Satan, Jesus responded with Scripture showing that true life is found in listening to God’s voice alone.

“And the tempter came and said to Him (Jesus), ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”’” -**Matthew 4:3-4**

“Ultimately, our trust in the Bible stems from our trust in Jesus Christ, the man who is God, the King of the world, the crucified, risen and exalted rescuer. I don’t trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible. I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love Him and I’ve decided to follow Him. So if He acts and talks as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful and powerful, I will too; even if some of my questions remain unanswered or my answers remain unpopular.”

-Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable*

Discuss together.

Where do you typically turn for understanding about life?

What has been your approach to reading the Bible? Have you seen it as a book mainly about you or about God? Why?

How does the idea that the Bible is meant to be read slowly over and over rather than quickly (like a textbook or twitter feed) change your view of it?

If someone asked you what the purpose of the Bible is, what would you say?

Read John 14:25-27. What help has God provided for us to understand His Word?

Challenge each other to practically apply God’s truth in your life.

What changes to your personal reading of the Bible can you make this week?

Take the 7-Day Challenge: Scripture before Screen

If we are honest, often the first thing we turn to when we wake up is our phone to “check” email, social media or the news. For the next 7 days, challenge yourself to read God’s Word before listening to any other voices. By cultivating this habit, we will place ourselves in a position to be shaped by God through His Word.

ENGAGE

Talk through this practice together.

- **Discovery Bible Study** - use as a guide to consistently study God’s Word.

Discovery Bible Study

Discovery Bible Study is a practice that consists of reading a section of scripture and answering five basic questions. The focus of the method is to both read the Bible AND to put it into practice in your life. Discovery Bible Study is great to do with a few friends - reading the Bible and applying it together!

Choose a passage of scripture, read it aloud (1-2 times).

Retell it in your own words.

Answer these five questions:

1. What does this passage teach about God?
2. What does this passage teach about people or myself?
3. What stands out most in this passage?
4. Since God's word is true, how should I change as a result? What will I do in response to this passage?

Consider the following:

Is there an example for me to follow?

Is there a sin for me to avoid?

Is there a command for me to obey?

Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a challenge for me to face?

- 5. With whom am I going to share this passage and what I am learning from the Bible?

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.”

Psalm 1:1-3

1. What do these verses tell you about God?
2. What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?
3. What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

A - Quiet your mind and heart by taking a few deep breaths. Think about God; focus on His goodness and greatness. Offer words of praise to Him.

C - Tell God the truth about how you have been trusting in the voices of the world or yourself for ultimate understanding of reality.

T - Thank God for His power to change and renew your heart and mind. Thank Him for His Word that shows us what He is like and His love for us.

S - Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand His Word and truth as you read the Bible.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about the Bible.

Prayer *How do I connect with God?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been? What have been some highs and lows?

Did you do the Scripture Before Screen Challenge? How did it go?

How has reading your Bible regularly been going?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

Where do you experience deep and honest connection with others?

Did you grow up praying in your family? What has been your experience praying?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

One of the best experiences we can enjoy is a fantastic meal with family or friends around a table.

Conversation flows. People look into each other's eyes. The people at the table are typically not focusing on how to talk or listen; they are simply connecting with one another out of love and enjoyment.

This is what prayer can be like for followers of Jesus as we learn to love and connect with God.

Praying Like a Child

On several occasions, Jesus tells His followers to become "like children" as they learn His ways. Children don't have much knowledge or experience. They are messy, needy and above all dependent on their parents. Through Jesus, we come to God as our Father, bringing our true selves to Him. When we approach God in prayer as His children, we bring our requests to Him from our limited perspective and then receive from Him what we actually need according to His all-knowing perspective. In prayer, we lay down self-sufficiency and learn to align ourselves to God's ways rather than our own.

"Come to Me (Jesus), all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." -**Matthew 11:29**

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted (turned around) and become like children, you will not enter (take possession of) the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." -**Matthew 18:1-4**

“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

Praying Like Jesus

Jesus, the Beloved Son, models what it is like to connect to the Father with child-like dependence. Luke 5:16 tells us that Jesus would regularly “withdraw to desolate places and pray.” He spoke often of His dependent relationship with the Father. Time spent with His Father formed and shaped Jesus’ earthly life and work.

“I do nothing on my own authority, but speak as the Father taught me.” -**John 8:28**

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” -**John 12:49-50**

Jesus’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane gives us a powerful example of a yielded life. As the crucifixion loomed, He brought His closest friends with Him while He prayed to the Father. He poured out His heart, asking for what He deeply wanted and at the same time yielding to God’s will, demonstrating His deep trust in the Father’s love.

“And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.” And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” -**Mark 14:33-36**

Jesus’ life of prayer and communion with His Father prompted His disciples to ask Him to teach them how to pray. The prayer He taught them has been prayed by believers for centuries and is known as “The Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13). This model prayer beautifully shows us both perspective and priorities when talking to God.

A Praying Life

Conversations with family and friends take on many forms from quick chats to long talks into the night. They typically are not relegated to one time per day. So too, conversations with God ought to be woven into the fabric of our days. The New Testament implores believers to pray constantly as an overflow of their connection to God and in recognition of their dependence on Him.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” -**Philippians 4:6-7**

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word.” -**Colossians 4:2-3**

Walking + Talking by the Spirit

Just like little children learn to walk and talk as they grow, followers of Jesus learn the basics of life with God by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to lead us, to fill us, and to teach us to live as children of God. We respond to His lead, learning day by day.

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.” -**Romans 8:14-16**

“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” -**Romans 8:26-27**

Stumbling + Getting Back Up

As we walk with God, we will inevitably fail to trust Him in big and small ways. The tendency to rely on ourselves (our flesh) remains with us, and we will think, speak and act in ways that do not spring from love for God and people. This is sin. When we stumble and fall into sin, we can tell God the truth (confess) and He will restore us (forgive us) to walk with Him again.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” -**1John 1:9**

“But I say, walk by (depend on) the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” -**Galatians 5:16-18**

Discuss together.

How does the picture of prayer as conversation around the dinner table impact you?

Why do you think it is important to approach God as a Father?

Do you struggle with the idea of coming to Him as a child, in dependence and need?

How does Jesus' example of deep connection to His Father encourage and challenge you?

What aspects of prayer seem difficult for you?

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

What could walking and talking with God by His Spirit look like in your daily life?

How could you pray with and for others this week?

ENGAGE

Talk through this practice together.

- **The Lord's Prayer Model** - use as a guide to continue to develop a consistent time of connecting with God.

The Lord's Prayer Model

MATTHEW 6:9-13

When His disciples asked Jesus, “teach us to pray,” His answer became known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” While Christians have been praying this prayer for centuries, the prayer isn’t merely something to recite from memory. It is also a model to shape times of prayer. Use the suggestions below to develop a regular rhythm of prayer using the concepts from Jesus’ model prayer.

“Our Father who is in heaven...”

- Take a moment and think about the idea of God as your Father. He is full of love and good intentions toward you. He is the King of heaven and earth. He lovingly rules over all created things and knows each one personally.

“Hallowed by Your name...”

- Spend a few minutes just sitting with the Father in joyful, grateful, worship for who He is and His greatness. You might want to sit in silence for a few moments. Or sing a worship chorus. Or list the things you’re grateful for. Or praise God with specific things you love about Him.

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

- Spend a few minutes asking for God’s will to be done in specific aspects of your life, community, city and world.
- Give to God specific things in your life that you’re wrestling with and trying to control. A simple prayer of, “Your will be done in _____,” is a great place to start.

“Give us each day our daily bread...”

- Spend a few minutes praying for specific needs and wants in your life or that of your family, friends, neighbors, church, city, and world.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...”

- Spend a few minutes in quiet asking God for forgiveness in specific areas in your life. Release others through forgiveness.

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

- Spend a few minutes praying against temptation (the word can also be translated as trouble) in your life.
- Pray against specific sins....
- Pray against any kind of evil - spiritual or human evil.
- Pray against trouble in your life or community and for God’s blessing - the divine flow of good into your life and community.

Close by thanking the Father for hearing you in the name of Jesus.

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

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

1. What do these verses tell you about God?
2. What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?
3. What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

Pray through Psalm 23

The Psalms make up the longest book of the Bible and are composed of songs, prayers, and poetry in devotion to God. The Psalms have been used as a “prayer book” for followers of God for centuries. In The Psalms we find common themes of human joys and struggles all processed in the context of God’s loving rule over us.

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence
of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow
me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about prayer.

Love People

Mission + Gospel + Design

Mission *What is God doing in the world?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been?

What did you learn about yourself and about God through the practice of praying The Lord's Prayer?

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

What are some of your favorite movies or novels? Why do you like them?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

People love great stories. Whether we are transported through our imaginations to places and times that seem unattainable in our "real" lives or we identify with characters that mirror our own human experience, stories grab our hearts and minds.

We all have a story that we live in and from which we make sense of the world we experience. Some call this a philosophy of life, a worldview or a belief system. Atheism is one worldview; Buddhism is another. All the world's major religions teach a belief system that attempts to explain reality.

The True Story

We believe Christianity is the true story of God, humanity and reality itself. The Bible tells this epic narrative of what God is doing in the world using the language of a kingdom.

Creation - The Kingdom Created

Genesis 1 opens with the words, "In the beginning, God." God is the main character of the story; in fact, God is the King. When He speaks things happen; His will is always done and it is always good. God creates humanity "in His Image" to reflect His nature. He bestows free will, dignity and worth to every person. God invites us to co-rule His kingdom with Him; to draw on all the goodness He created and to multiply it, creating a culture that flourishes and that displays His greatness.

Fall - The Kingdom Rebels

Genesis 2 describes the choice that God places before mankind to ensure that His relationship with us is based on love and not coercion. We can either choose to trust in His goodness, wisdom and authority (Kingship) over us or we can choose to trust in and rule ourselves. A tree and its fruit embody this choice between life (with God) or death (separated from Him).

“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’” -**Genesis 2:16**

Genesis 3 introduces Satan, once a servant of God but through pride and rebellion became God’s enemy, and whose goal is to undermine humanity’s trust in God. In the form of a serpent, he casts doubt on God’s goodness and the truth of His word. Tragically, Adam and Eve choose to rebel (sin) against God and to become their own authority determining good and evil for themselves. This choice immediately destroys their perfect unity with God and with each other (death) as they fall into shame and blame.

Genesis 4-11 describes humanity’s descent into chaos (murder, violence, greed) as each subsequent generation gives birth to the next one passing on rebellion, sin and spiritual death as well. The good creation breaks down as mankind struggles to build their own kingdom apart from God.

But God, who is rich in mercy, promises to one day abolish the spiritual death that man’s rebellion caused and to crush evil represented by the serpent. Genesis 3:15 tells us that the “serpent crusher” will be a man, descended from Eve, who will be wounded in the process.

Genesis 12 through the end of the Old Testament tells story after story of the nation of Israel (God’s representative people) cycling through seasons of trust in God and seasons of rebellion against God, all the while waiting for the promised serpent crusher - the Messiah, the Anointed King.

God’s mission is to rescue humanity from sin and death, to restore our royal identity and purpose, and to ultimately make all things new.

Redemption - The Kingdom Breaks Through

Matthew 1 announces the identity of the long awaited rescuing King - it is Jesus, the God-Man. His humanity is established by the recounting of His family’s genealogy. His deity is confirmed in the description of His conception and birth.

Matthew 4 describes how Jesus faces off with Satan (the serpent) who tempts Him to take for Himself life apart from God. Sound familiar? Jesus combats the devil by trusting in God and His word. He scores His first victory over evil.

Jesus then goes to war with the brokenness in the world around Him; confronting pride, healing sickness and disease, breaking spiritual strongholds, befriending marginalized people (women, lepers, slaves). He proclaims the good news or “gospel” that the Kingdom has come, inviting all to believe and follow Him. His life demonstrates what it looks like to live under God’s good rule.

Matthew 26-28 describes another garden scene in which Jesus faces a life and death choice. Unlike Adam and Eve, He trusts in His Father's goodness and surrenders His will to God's. Then Jesus takes humanity's death penalty and is crucified for sins He did not commit. This is redemption; Jesus buys our freedom from death by dying in our place. He experiences the unimaginable agony of physical, emotional and spiritual death - separation from His Father, the source of love and life. Jesus then crushes the power of sin and death by rising from the dead (resurrection). He is our hero, the risen King, the serpent crusher, whose authority is established over all of heaven and earth.

Once again, humanity stands before a tree (the cross of Christ) and every person has a life and death choice to make. Will I trust in God and by faith, say yes to Jesus' payment on the cross for my rebellion against God? Will I say yes to being joined with Jesus in His death and resurrection to eternal life?

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

“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” -**Romans 6:5-7**

Restoration - The Kingdom Re-created

For those who say yes, we follow King Jesus into the broken world to spread the good news (gospel) that His Kingdom has broken through; that there is a way back to God, the source of life. We take up our royal identity and purpose to represent the true King and to extend His culture of goodness into creation. We partner with Him to bring His light to the dark, His hope to despair, His healing to brokenness. We long, hope and pray for the day when He will finally make all things new.

- “Then I [John, writer of the Revelation] saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” -**Revelation 21:1-5**

The Story You Live In is the Story You Live Out

We love people by living out the true story of reality - Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. We share our personal story of going from death to life through belief in Jesus. We help people find and follow Jesus through our words and our actions of love. We are God's agents of renewal, joining Him in the great Kingdom work of redemption and restoration.

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” -1 Timothy 2:3-4

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” -2 Corinthians 5:20

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” -1 John 3:16-17’

Discuss together.

What surprises you about the epic narrative of Christianity? What questions does it raise?

How do you see your story fitting into God’s story?

How is sharing the story of God’s mission to rescue humanity a loving thing to do?

How can you join King Jesus in “making all things new” in your family, neighborhood, workplace and community?

Challenge each other to practically apply God’s truth in your life.

Begin to pray for opportunities to share your story this week.

ENGAGE

Talk through this practice together.

- **Sharing My Story** - use as a guide to frame the basic story of how you came to follow Jesus.

Sharing Your Story

You have a unique story of how you came to know and follow Jesus. Your story is one of the most powerful tools you have for helping other people find and follow Jesus as well.

As you begin to let people know that you are following Jesus, simply ask, “Can I share with you the story of my spiritual journey?”

Those who are interested in spiritual things are likely to demonstrate their interest in one way or another (asking questions, making a comment) and that often provides an open door to share your story.

HOW TO BEGIN

Write out your thoughts on the following topics and questions. These ideas will help you share the story of your spiritual journey, sometimes called your “testimony.”

MY LIFE BEFORE JESUS

My life revolved around _____, and I found my identity, happiness and security from _____.

Use an example from your personal life here. For instance, did your security come from money, your relationships, etc.?

How did this disappoint me? How was this unfulfilling? How did I come to realize this?

What was I struggling with (if anything) just before I believed in Jesus?

NOTE: Some people trusted Jesus when they were very young, and don't have clear memories of the time before they knew Him. If that is you, simply share this as part of your story.

HOW I FIRST BELIEVED IN JESUS

This part of your story is where you came to a transition in your life.

When and how did I first hear about Jesus?

What did I learn about the life He offers all who believe in Him?

When and why did my perspective about Jesus begin to change?

Why did I decide to believe in Jesus?

NOTE: Some of us may be able to point to specific times or circumstances regarding how or when we believed. For others of us, we can only point to a time period or gradual understanding. Both are great. Everyone's story is significant and the biggest point is that you now believe in Jesus.

MY LIFE SINCE I FIRST BELIEVED IN JESUS

How is my life different now? List some specific changes in your character, attitude and perspective on life.

How am I motivated differently now? What do I live for now?

How do I experience God now?

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

Think about your answers to the questions above, and ask yourself the following:

- Is this a continuous story that makes sense?
- Are there any consistent themes in my story?
- Can I share my story in 3-4 minutes?
- Was I clear about what I believed about Jesus?

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“For He [God] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son [Jesus], in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” -**Colossians 1:13-20**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

Begin to pray for opportunities to share with others about your faith in Jesus.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about what God is doing in the world.

Gospel *How do I introduce people to Jesus?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been? Any challenges or celebrations?

Ask 1-2 people to Share their Story; give feedback and encouragement!

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

Is talking about "religion" welcomed or avoided among your family and friends? Why?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

Have you ever gotten some really good news that you just couldn't wait to share with your friends, family or even a stranger? Maybe it was when you were accepted into a university or the time you got the job you really wanted or when the newest baby in the family arrived. News like this is meant to be shared!

The Good News About Jesus

The word "gospel" simply means "good news." Historically, the word was often used when victory on a battlefield was proclaimed, when a new ruler ascended to the throne or when an important royal announcement was made. The New Testament uses the word "gospel" to proclaim both the historical and spiritual truth of the life, death, and resurrection of King Jesus and His victory over sin and death which rescues and restores all who believe.

"Now, brothers and sisters, I (Apostle Paul) want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve." -1 Corinthians 15:1-5

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." -Colossians 2:13-14

Show the Gospel

We publicly show the power of the gospel when we love our neighbors as God loved us through genuine care, radical generosity, and our compassionate presence in their lives. Jesus is our model for loving people well. He met physical needs and spiritual needs. He befriended and socialized with

many types of people including those on the margins of society. He invited all to believe in Him and He instructs us to love all people as He did.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” -**Matthew 5:14-16**

Speak the Gospel

We also share (speak) the gospel of Jesus by telling people the truth about Him. Among Jesus' last words to His disciples were instructions to take the gospel message to the whole world, starting right where they lived.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” -**Acts 1:8**

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” -**Matthew 28:18-20**

We speak the good news of the gospel by:

- Sharing our own story of meeting Jesus and the ways we are experiencing Him in our lives.
- Sharing the true story of Christianity - Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration.
- Sharing how each person must decide to believe in Jesus (His life, death and resurrection) for themselves.
- Inviting people to believe and follow Jesus.

Good News Not Good Advice

The gospel is the truth that people need to hear in the midst of this broken world. People are searching for security and significance, love and belonging, identity and purpose. People need hope that the problems in our world will ultimately be fixed.

Culturally, we have been conditioned to pursue happiness as the goal of life. How many times have you heard a tv or movie character exclaim, “I just want you to be happy!”? Books, programs and podcasts on the subject of happiness abound. But happiness by definition is temporary and based on what is “happening” in the moment.

The gospel of Jesus is not a temporary fix; it is the ultimate and lasting answer. It is not someone's subjective opinion; it is based on the objective truth of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not an optional lifestyle; it is real rescue from spiritual death to eternal life. The gospel is not just good advice; it is the best news we could ever believe.

Jesus replied, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” -**John 14:6**

Partnering with God

Because God loves everyone, He is constantly at work to draw all to Himself, and He invites believers into this work of reconciliation. Partnering with God in this great mission is the calling of every follower of Christ.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” -2 Corinthians 5:17-19

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” -Romans 10:14-15

Discuss together.

What reputation does Christianity have in your community?

What could happen if every Jesus-follower made it a point to befriend and share the gospel with their literal neighbors?

What obstacles or resistance do you experience in sharing the gospel personally or culturally? Why?

What are some ways you can begin to both “show and tell” the gospel to your neighbors, friends, family, and those you meet along the way?

Challenge each other to practically apply God’s truth in your life.

Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with words and actions this week.

ENGAGE

Talk through these practices together.

- **Sharing the Gospel** - use as a guide to concisely share the good news of Jesus.
- **Every Neighbor Map** - use to identify people who are near to you but may be far from God.

Sharing the Gospel

In Christianity, the word “gospel” simply means the “good news” about Jesus - His life, death and resurrection. The message that through belief in Jesus we can enter into a loving relationship with God, experiencing forgiveness and receiving the gift of eternal life, is good news, indeed!

Let’s look at a concise and understandable way to communicate the gospel to your friends and family who do not yet know Jesus.

These three circles help us explain the gospel according to the Bible. Read each section and the scripture verses that follow.

GOD’S DESIGN

Out of God’s great love, He created a world that was good. He made people to enjoy a deeply connected relationship with Him and to represent Him through our lives. (Genesis 1:26-28, 31) As a loving Father, He communicated boundaries to protect us and to allow us to fully enjoy our relationships with Him and with other people (Genesis 2:15-16).

BROKENNESS

Yet, when we look around our world, brokenness and evil are evident everywhere - war, famine, disease, corruption. If we are honest, we also see brokenness and evil inside ourselves - deceit, hatred, greed, lust.

This is because we have rejected God’s design and chosen to follow our own way.

Our rejection of God and His ways is what the Bible calls sin. (Romans 3:23)

Our sin results in separation from God which the Bible calls death. (Romans 6:23a)

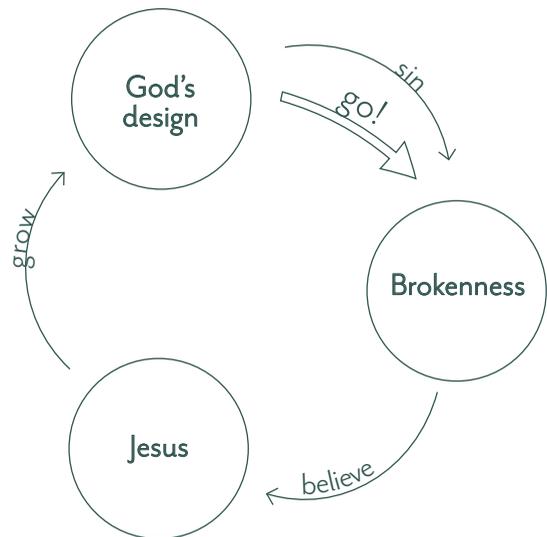
Unless our sin is forgiven, we will remain separated from God forever.

JESUS

God does not want to leave us in our sin and brokenness!

God graciously provided a way to forgive our sin and to freely give us eternal life - a life connected to God both now and forever. (Romans 6:23b; John 17:3)

God’s only Son Jesus died in our place. He took upon Himself the penalty that we deserve because of our sin. Then, Jesus rose from the dead, and forever defeated the power of sin and death. (Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5)



B E L I E V E

We respond to Jesus by believing in Him for the forgiveness of our sin.

To believe in Jesus means that you no longer try to earn God's approval through what you do, nor do you deny that you need forgiveness and rescue. Instead, you accept God's free gift of eternal life. Belief or faith is simply being convinced or persuaded that something or someone is trustworthy (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Everyone who believes in Jesus is forgiven of their sin and receives eternal life. We can now know God personally and experience the life we were designed to live (John 3:16-17).

Have you believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin? Have you put your trust in Him alone to be reconciled to God?

Possible answers and next steps:

"Yes"

Ask: "Tell me about that. When and how did that happen for you?"

Try to discern if the person is trusting in anything other than Christ alone.

Move to Grow and Go

"No, but I want to"

Affirm their decision to believe and help them to tell God in prayer of their belief in Jesus.

Example: "Thank you God for loving me by sending your Son Jesus to die for me. I believe in His life, death and resurrection to rescue me from my sin and spiritual death. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me the free gift of eternal life."

Welcome them to the Family of God!

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." **1 John 5:13**

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Move to Grow and Go

"Not Sure" / "Not Yet" / "No"

Ask: "What is keeping you from trusting in Jesus?"

Try to discern their willingness or unwillingness to believe.

For those willing, help answer their questions if possible.

For those unwilling, offer to pray for them and talk further at another time.

G R O W

Everyone who believes in Jesus should then grow in their relationship with God. We grow by knowing God more deeply and living more like Him personally.

We begin to know Him and we become like Him by following His way of living (Ephesians 4:15).

G O

Followers of Jesus have the great calling and opportunity to go into the broken world to share the love of God and the good news of the gospel message (Matthew 28:19-20).

Every Neighbor Map

Just as Jesus entered into a specific time and place, God has placed each of us into a unique context in which to share His love and to represent Him. Our context includes anyone that we commonly encounter on a regular basis which gives us the ability to have influence in their lives.

Think about the people in your spheres of influence; the people with whom you live, learn, work, and play who are near to you but might be far from God.

Also, think about people that are just beyond your normal spheres. Perhaps there is an acquaintance that you don't know well, or a neighbor who is different from you ethnically or socio-economically, or a community member that the Holy Spirit has put in your path but is more a stranger than a friend. Be creative and think outside the box!

MAP

Write down at least three names in each of these spheres.

PRAY BIG

Diligently pray for these friends to find and follow Jesus.

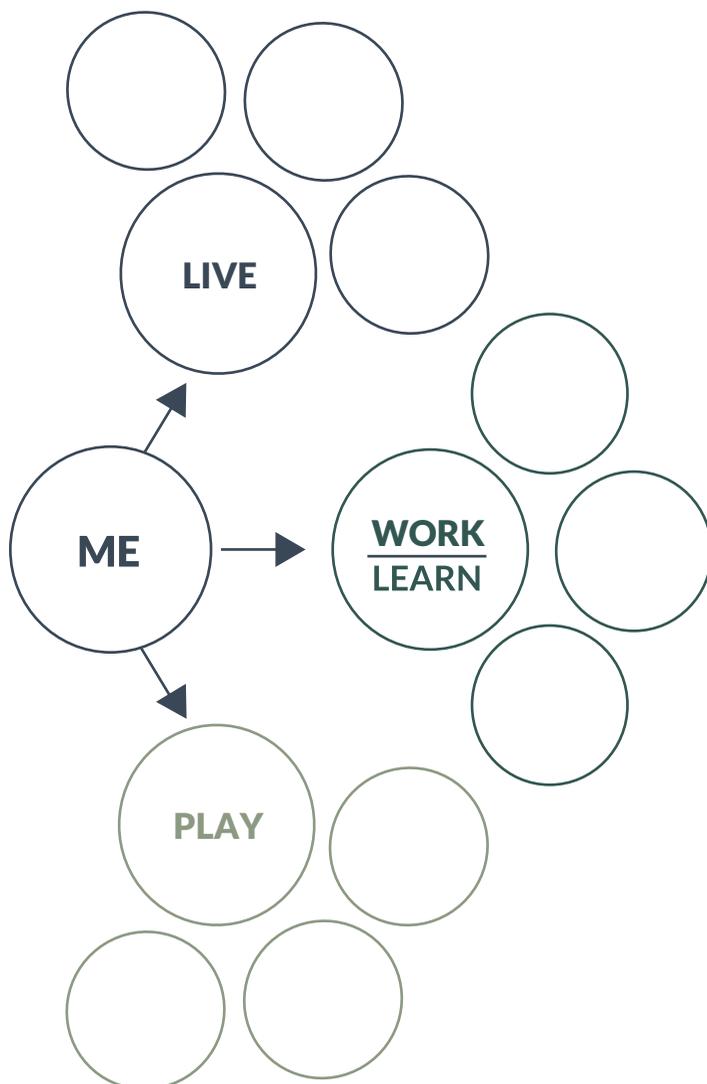
Ask God:

Who might be seeking Him or is asking hard questions about life?

Who needs acts of love and concern shown to them?

How to serve and share the love of Christ with them?

For opportunities to share your story and the gospel.



CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” -**2 Peter 3:9**

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” -**Romans 1:16**

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” -**1 Peter 3:15**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

Begin to pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with someone who does not yet know God personally.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about what God is doing in the world.

Design *How does God want to use me in His mission?*

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up on life lately and begin to discuss today's topic.

How has your week been?

Share your experiences of creating an Every Neighbor Map. Pray for opportunities to share God's love and the gospel with friends you've identified.

Pray for each other and for your time together today.

What are some of your hobbies or favorite pastimes?

What are some things that you are good at doing?

GROW

Read or review the following together.

As followers of Jesus, our identity, belonging and purpose converge as we partner with God in His great mission of redemption and restoration. We are beloved children of God (identity), linked together as members of His family (belonging), becoming like Jesus by loving God, loving people and helping them do the same (purpose).

Dependence

Jesus taught His followers that apart from Him, they could do nothing (John 15:5). It is the same for us. If we try to love and serve people in our own strength and abilities apart from His empowerment, ultimately, we are spiritually ineffective. Thankfully, what we need to work with God in His mission is amply supplied by the Holy Spirit who leads, fills and strengthens each believer as we cooperate with Him.

“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 said to you.” -**John 14:26**

“[...] that He [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.” -**Ephesians 3:16**

Compassion

Our contribution to God's mission should embrace God's heart of compassion. The Bible describes God as compassionate, gracious, and full of mercy. The word compassion is a compound word; com meaning 'with' and the verb passio meaning 'to suffer.' To have compassion is to 'suffer with' and by definition it means to hurt when others hurt; when others suffer, we suffer too.

As we step into our broken world, we go clothed in Jesus' compassion, meeting spiritual and physical needs in His name. Our compassionate love helps to make God's compassionate love tangible and believable. We offer a taste of what life in the Kingdom of God is like.

“When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.” -**Mark 6:34**

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on (clothe yourself with) a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” -**Colossians 3:12**

Courage

Partnering with God in His mission also requires courage to live and speak with grace and truth. The apostle Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). At times, we may be tempted to hide parts of our faith or the truth of the gospel because of a desire to protect our own reputation or from a fear of rejection. But if we leave out the gospel, which acknowledges sin and the need for reconciliation to God through Christ, we risk our cultural engagement losing its source of true power to rescue, restore and renew.

Remember that we are secure in Christ, that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38), and that He is with us until the end of the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Let those truths embolden us to speak up and step out with His love.

Spiritual Gifts

God resources every believer in Jesus with one or more spiritual gifts. There are numerous spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament including teaching, wisdom, service, administration, encouragement, mercy, faith, and giving (see Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12). These gifts are a special enabling, given by the Holy Spirit, to serve God, to draw others to God and to build up the church. This is how God builds His kingdom.

The diversity of the spiritual gifts and of people combine to form the beautiful unity that is the Body of Christ, the Church. Each person and each gifting is valued and necessary as we work together with God to accomplish His mission.

“For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” -**Romans 12:4-6**

“Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” -**1 Peter 4:10-11**

My Unique Contribution

Just as Jesus entered into a specific time and place during His earthly life, God has placed each of us into a unique context where we can share His gospel of love and act as His agents of renewal. God has also uniquely designed each person to contribute according to their personality, experience and gifting.

“For we are His workmanship (masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” -**Ephesians 2:10**

Discuss together.

What are some ways you can depend on the Holy Spirit in your life instead of yourself?

How have you experienced compassion from God or from someone else? How might you extend compassion to others?

In what areas of your life will you need courage to genuinely live out your faith in Jesus?

What are your current life circumstances like? Do you see any opportunities to show God's love there?

Challenge each other to practically apply God's truth in your life.

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Do you sense God inviting you to explore using your gifting in a specific area or place? If so, where?

What steps can you take to pursue this leading?

ENGAGE

Talk through these practices together.

- **Spiritual Gifts Survey** - complete this short questionnaire to find out more about your gifting:
<http://apps.ctay.net/giftsurvey/>
- **Designed to Serve** - use as a guide to discover your gifting and potential areas of service.

Designed to Serve

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. **-Ephesians 2:10**

God has made each one of us intentionally with a unique design. Only you can be you, and there is no substitute for you. He graciously gives every person gifts, passions, and a story that are ultimately meant to honor Him as we help people find and follow Jesus.¹

Our **Gifts** provide opportunities to influence that we might otherwise not have.

Our **Passions** lead us toward people or causes that we ought to pursue.

Our **Stories** build connections with others and reveal life themes that help display God's workmanship in us.

GIFTS: NATURAL & SPIRITUAL

All people have abilities that can contribute to God's kingdom. Some are gifted physically, artistically, or intellectually. Some have strengths in communicating, problem-solving, or organizing. We might say that some abilities just seem to come "naturally." Other abilities are learned over time. Our makeup of strengths and weaknesses reveal God's unique design in us. Take some time and think through the abilities that you possess that would be considered a strength.

List what you consider to be your five strongest abilities on the My Design Sheet at the end.

- Some examples: artistic, befriending, classifying, cleaning, composing, communicating, computing, constructing, cooking, counting, crafts, decorating, discipling, editing, encouraging, entertaining, evaluating, facilitating, graphics, guiding, instrumental, interviewing, landscaping, managing, mechanical operating, mentoring, organizing, planning, promoting, public relations, recall, recruiting, repairing, researching, resourcefulness, singing, speaking, teaching, technical, welcoming, writing.

For every believer in Christ, we have also received spiritual gifts. Each spiritual gift is a special enabling, given by the Holy Spirit, to serve God, draw others to God, and build up the church. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift, but no believer has all the gifts. Take some time to consider which gifts you might have. A starting point may be to take a self-assessment spiritual gifts test. Gifts are most accurately determined from real-life experiences, the affirmation of others, and prayerful self-reflection.

List the top three spiritual gifts that you identify with in your life on the My Design Sheet at the end.

¹Some concepts in this Practice adapted from Find Your Place by Rob Wegner and Brian Phipps.

- Administration – supernatural ability to be aware of and manage resources effectively.
- Discernment – supernatural ability to correctly perceive God’s influence in real life
- Evangelism – supernatural ability to articulate the gospel in an effective manner.
- Exhortation – supernatural ability to motivate or challenge toward action.
- Faith – supernatural ability to trust in God’s presence, power, and provision
- Giving – supernatural ability to spontaneously and enthusiastically share with others
- Helps – supernatural motivation to give direct aid to a person in need
- Knowledge – supernatural ability to search, understand, retain and summarize information
- Leadership – supernatural ability to influence and direct people to accomplish a work
- Mercy – supernatural motivation to show compassion and comfort
- Pastoring – supernatural ability to care for the spiritual welfare others
- Service – supernatural motivation to assist those in need and accomplish needed tasks
- Teaching – supernatural ability to explain and see others understand biblical truth
- Wisdom – supernatural ability to apply truth resulting in practical and positive living

PASSIONS & MINISTRY STYLES

What moves us? What causes us to act? What types of people are we drawn toward? We discover our unique God-given passions as we recognize the people or causes that pull at our heartstrings, that create a desire within us to engage, that we find difficult to ignore.

Think through these questions and record your thoughts on the My Design Sheet at the end.

1. What group or types of people do you intuitively care about?
2. With what group of people do you find yourself wanting to engage?
3. What types of causes grab your attention or “light you up” when you discuss them?
4. If there was one area in which you could make a difference, what would it be?
5. What do you happily give your time toward when an opportunity presents itself?

Each believer in Christ tends to have a style of ministry that works alongside our passions – unleashing them to build up the body of Christ. These influencing styles are ways in which the passion of God is mediated through His people. Christ personally modeled all of these styles through His life and ministry. We generally tend to see in our own lives a primary influencing style and oftentimes a secondary one.

Read the descriptions below. Which best describes you? Which one would you rank second in your life? Record your answers on the My Design Sheet at the end.

- **The Entrepreneur** - sends and extends / adventurous and future thinking / builds networks / overcomes barriers / ensures the faith is established in new contexts and the next generation / explores the edges of what is possible / missional focus / missionaries and church planters / drawn to design and overall system / leadership style is decisive & strategic / ask question, "Will this help increase the mission?" / negatively can come across driven, demanding, insensitive
- **The Exhorter** - questions and critiques / attuned to God and His truth for today / calls out sin and challenges inherited cultural assumptions / calls others to greater fidelity to God, His word, His ways / strong intuition of right and wrong / provocateur & deconstructing of current systems and structures / leadership style is demonstrative and motivational / ask question, "Will this help embody God's concerns?" / negatively can come across as ideological, short sighted, simplistic
- **The Fishermen** - invites and gathers / recruits and enlists / love meeting new people and wooing them / infectious and convincing communicators / relational & communal / call other for a personal response / leadership style is motivational and persuasive / ask question, "Will this help us bring people to Christ?" / able to share gospel in everyday ways with everyday language / negatively can come across willing to settle and not be demanding enough
- **The Shepherd** - protects and nurtures / focuses on spiritual maturity, healing, and wholeness / maintains and builds communal and individual health / cultivate relationships and integrate others into relational network that fosters spiritual growth / leadership style is inclusive and collaborative / asks question, "How will this affect the organization, the individual, and the community?" / negative can come across with obsessive need for harmony and aversion of risk
- **The Teacher** - explains and organizes / mediates wisdom, understanding, and sound doctrine / helps others learn / more philosophical and easily grasps complex systems and truths / emphasizes curiosity and discovery / natural trainer / leadership style is analytical and prescriptive / answer question, "How does this align with theology and Scripture?" / negatively come across as ideological, dogmatic, and lack of urgency when needed

STORY & PERSONALITY

Each of life's experiences builds our STORY and is either forming us or revealing in us God's design. Think back over your life in these areas: relationally, vocationally, academically, and spiritually. Identify the best moments or memories. These could be an accomplishment, a success, a breakthrough, or even a moment someone believed in you. These are your STARS. Then identify the most difficult moments or memories. These could be hurts, sins, failures, brokenness, or losses. These are your SCARS.

Record your stars and scars on the My Design Sheet at the end.

Be honest as you look back. Don't allow false humility to lessen the brightness of a star. Don't allow guilt and shame to cause you to deny or hide a scar. Be careful not to build a wall between the sacred and the secular – all experiences have merit.

Oftentimes, our STARS will show us our motivation, and our SCARS will show us our ministry. We tend to minister best in areas where we have become vulnerable, experienced and broken. God doesn't waste the pain in our lives if we will entrust it to Him for His purposes.

Questions to ask:

- Which memories sparked the most emotion? Why?
- What themes are repeated most often in your story? Record these on the My Design Sheet.
- How can your STARS and SCARS be used to bless others and bring them to faith in Jesus?

Another crucial contributor to our unique design is our personality. Personality is made up of the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that make a person unique. Our personalities largely impact how we connect with others, grow in our faith, and engage with the world. When we are self-aware, it allows us to grow and become more effective in how we work with and relate to others. When we have blindspots, they can lead to needless relational tension and conflict, hindering the potential we have to contribute.

Questions to ask. Record these on the My Design Sheet at the end.

- We can connect with people like us, unlike us or somewhere in between. Who are some people with whom I find a natural chemistry? Why?
- Who complements me?
- Think through this list regarding your personality.

Role	Be in charge	or	Help support
Relationships	Many but shallow	or	A few but deeper
	Sympathizer	or	Admonisher
Emotions	Controlled	or	“Heart on your sleeve”
Structures	Rule follower	or	Rebel
	Maintainer	or	Developer
	Order	or	Variety
Decisions	Impulsive	or	Researcher
	Big picture	or	Details
Conflict	People pleaser	or	Blunt
	Thick skinned	or	Thin skinned
	Invite it	or	Avoid it
Communicate	Dump truck	or	Teaspoon
	External process	or	Internal processor

NOW WHAT?

Process what you have learned with someone you trust and who will be honest with you.

Determine one or two concrete steps toward using your gifts, passions and story to serve God in your family, your church, your community, or one of your spheres of influence.

MY DESIGN

Abilities

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Spiritual Gifts

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Passions

Types or Groups of People:

Causes:

Ministry Style

Story

STARS:

SCARS:

Life themes:

Personality

Chemistry with:

Complements me:

Traits circled:

CORE PRACTICES

Use the following practices to spend time with God this week; reading His word, praying and talking to friends about Jesus.

Bible

Read and think about these verses. Answer questions below.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation [identity], a people for God’s own possession [belonging], so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him [purpose] who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” -**1 Peter 2:9**

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” -**Colossians 1:28-29**

What do these verses tell you about God?

What do these verses tell you about people or yourself?

What will you do in response to these verses?

Prayer

Spend time regularly talking and listening to God in prayer.

Pray that God would give you insight, confidence and clear direction into your unique design and opportunities to use your gifting for His Kingdom purposes.

Share

Tell someone this week what you have been learning about how God has uniquely designed you.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 28 horizontal lines.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 8 horizontal lines.

