

THE JOURNEY

BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS



UNIT TWO – TO KNOW HIM

LEADER'S GUIDE

THE JOURNEY

DEAR LEADER,

Thank you for your willingness to invest in the discipleship of your people. We hope that The Journey will be a valuable resource for you. Just a reminder, we need your feedback to help make improvements. Please submit your feedback to thejourney@iphc.org.

In this document, you will find:

1. Unit 2 Commitment Forms

- Hold your people accountable to their commitments to show up, participate, and care for others in the group.

2. Eight lessons of Unit 2: To Love Him

- Each lesson contains scripture, discussion, content, conversation starters, and At-Home scriptures and exercises.
- We suggest devoting 15-20 minutes to teaching the content, which allows for 20-25 minutes of discussion among the group. The conversation starters will be great at the end of class.
- For some of the discussions, we included possible answers that may help you start the conversation. Otherwise, scan the content of that section for helpful leads.
- In each lesson, there are At-Home scriptures and exercises. These are included to help participants carry the lesson into their week.
- Some of these exercises are simple and some may require more thoughtful scheduling, but please encourage your people to commit to the At-Home section. It is during this time At-Home that you will see the greatest growth in their lives with Jesus.
- Don't feel obligated to use all of the At-Home exercises. These are suggestions. You know your group and what they need better than we do. If these exercises fit your needs then please use them.

THE JOURNEY

- With any of the content or At-Home components, please feel free to alter, add to, and take away what doesn't fit your particular group.
3. At-Home Exercise worksheets and description sheets
 - At the end of this document, there are supporting documents for the At-Home component.
 - The worksheet can be completed each week. This allows the participants to make commitments and hold each other accountable.
 - Some of the At-Home exercises teach spiritual disciplines which might need more explanation. For those, we have included printable description sheets and worksheets.
 4. Be sure to also download the Participant Guides for your group as well!
 - The Participant Guide is a simplified front-and-back document that allows your people to stay engaged in the lesson, while also providing them with a take-home component.
 - Encourage them to bring a notebook and a Bible.
 5. For additional resources, check out our website at iphc.org/thejourney

We want to help you in any way that we can. If you have questions, feel free to contact us. We want you to have success in discipling your people. Our prayer is that The Journey can play a small part in that.

In Christ,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

Email us: thejourney@iphc.org

Call us: 405-792-7171

CHECKPOINT FOR THE JOURNEY

IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A STARTING
POINT FOR YOUR JOURNEY.

HOW OFTEN ARE YOU CONSCIOUSLY AWARE OF GOD IN THESE SETTINGS?

RANK YOUR ANSWERS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10.

WORK	HOME	CHURCH	RELATIONSHIPS
_____	_____	_____	_____

WHERE DO YOU MISS GOD THE MOST IN YOUR LIFE? WHY?

MY COMMITMENT

- 1) Will you commit to participating in The Journey the next eight weeks to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)? _____
- 2) Will you commit to set aside time so that you can do the At-Home Exercises? _____
- 3) Will you commit to check on a friend in the group each week to see how they are doing with The Journey? _____ Who will it be?

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Please sign and date and hand in to your Journey leader.

MY COMMITMENT

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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

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THE JOURNEY

DEAR FELLOW TRAVELER,

Welcome to The Journey. We are so glad you are here. We believe that discipleship is a journey of becoming more like Jesus, and we want to come alongside you on this adventure. Perhaps you are new to following Jesus. Or maybe you've been following Him for many years. Regardless of your place on the path, we believe The Journey is for you.

The Journey is a versatile resource designed with the church and home in mind. The content will contain foundational, biblical teaching presented in an interactive format. It's intended for use in community with other believers. We also have built At-Home Exercises into the content for you to engage in at home throughout the week. We hope that these exercises help to strengthen your understanding of Jesus and hold you accountable for meeting with Jesus daily.

Our lives are radically changed by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit through salvation, but our journey with the Lord shouldn't stop at our salvation experience. We must then embark on a journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. By digging deeper into this relationship, The Journey will help you extend discipleship beyond Sundays. By immersing yourself into God's Word, prayer, and worship, you will fall more in love with the One who loves you most. Remember, there is always more to learn, still room to grow, and always support available for you on the journey.

We have been praying for you. We have had you in mind as we have been preparing this study. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work mightily in your life as you commit to this personal and communal discipleship journey with the Lord.

With you on The Journey,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

THE JOURNEY

Table of Contents

UNIT TWO: TO LOVE HIM

LOVING GOD & LOVING OTHERS

1. The Greatest Commandment

LOVING GOD

2. Loving God: Bible Study

3. Loving God: Worship

4. Loving God: Submission and Holiness

5. Loving God: Prayer

LOVING OTHERS

6. Loving Others: Generosity

7. Loving Others: Community

8. Loving Others: Service

THE JOURNEY

Table of Contents

UNIT TWO: TO LOVE HIM CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

LOVING GOD & LOVING OTHERS

1. Bishop Tommy McGhee

LOVING GOD

2. Rebecca Shirey

3. Dr. Wes Tuttle

4. Ben Crisp

5. Jamie Cain

LOVING OTHERS

6. Bishop Doug Beacham

7. Justin Blankenship

8. Kent Bell

THE JOURNEY

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT BIBLE TRANSLATION ARE YOU USING?

All scriptures used in The Journey will be the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

HOW IS THE JOURNEY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BIBLE STUDIES?

The Journey is an invitation to say yes to Jesus in every part of your life. Centered around weekly class experiences, the focus of The Journey is on the 6 days you aren't with your group. We want you to grow in knowledge, as all Bible studies do, but we also want you to be transformed by the power of God and become more like Jesus. By connecting, growing in knowledge, daily intimacy with Jesus, and participation in community, we hope that you will experience transformation.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH DISCUSSION?

We believe that the discussion of the lesson with one another is a vital part of learning. It teaches us to think critically about what we are hearing, to be dependent on one another (someone else may have an insight that we need to hear), and to build trust and relationships in the group.

DOES THIS WORK FOR SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS?

Yes! We believe that the flexibility of this resource allows it to function in both settings. It can be easily adapted to fit the needs of any sized group!

THE JOURNEY

LESSON ONE:

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

INTRODUCTION: Eight lessons ago, we began our “Journey” of becoming more like Jesus. We are so thankful you said “Yes” and have joined us as we walk together with Him through this process. Previously we focused on “knowing Him,” and I hope that you sense His presence as we learn more about Him. I believe that as we know more about Jesus and His love for us, we will love Him more and more. I trust you are experiencing a growing love toward Him already.

This week, I want to share an Old Testament passage with a New Testament meaning. Specifically, we will examine the love between Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and David. As you read together, I hope you will see the spiritual parallels between Jonathan’s love for David and our love for Jesus.

I. LOVE IS EXPERIENCED

READ ALOUD: 1 Samuel 18:1-5: Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father’s house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt. So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Jonathan was the heir apparent to his father’s kingdom. What could make Jonathan love David so much that he would want David to be king in his place?



CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In this Old Testament passage, we see a beautiful illustration of how our love for our Savior can be both experienced and expressed. This love is illustrated in the relationship between Jonathan and David. Three times the Scripture says Jonathan loved David “as his own soul.” This depth of love and commitment points us to what Jesus would say is the greatest commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt 22:37).

Jonathan first met David when he came to minister to his father, Saul (1 Samuel 16). King Saul was being tormented because the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Saul’s servants suggested that music would comfort his troubled spirit and that a man skillful on the harp should play for him. One of the king’s servants told Saul about David: “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person: and the Lord is with him.”

1) DAVID’S CHARACTER

David arrived before King Saul and there Jonathan met him and observed that he was a man of character. Everything the servant had spoken about David was accurate. Jonathan was drawn to David’s integrity, and as he came to know him, he began to love him. He learned the following about David:

- His Competence – He was “skillful in playing.” David had applied himself by worshiping God on the harp (1 Chronicles 13:8).
- His Courage – He was a “mighty man of valor.” These were the same words spoken to Gideon during his encounter with the Lord: “The Lord is with you, thou mighty man of valor” (Judges 6:12).
- His Caution – He was “prudent in speech.” David was careful in his conversations (1 Samuel 16:18).
- His Countenance – He was “a handsome person” (1 Samuel 16:12).
- His Company – “The Lord was with Him.” David’s close relationship with God is reminiscent of what people said about the Disciples. It was apparent that “they had been with Jesus” (1 Samuel 18:14).

The more we observe and come to know Jesus, the more we will become like Him. And, we will not only be more like Him, but our love for Him will grow. Do you sense a growing desire to spend more time with the Lord in His Word, to know Him and to love Him?

2) DAVID'S CONQUEST

Then came the day when David saved the people of Israel from a great enemy. David's battle with Goliath foreshadows what Jesus accomplished on the cross to save all His people from the greatest enemy - death. Chapter 17 details how David won the fight for God's people. Notice that like Jesus, David arrives on the battlefield as:

- The "sent" one - David's father sent him to his brothers (1 Samuel 17:17). Our Lord Jesus was sent from our Heavenly Father to dwell among us, minister, and ultimately to die for our sins (1 John 4:9).
- The "scorned" one - When David arrived on the battlefield, his brothers ridiculed and scorned him (1 Samuel 17:28). Scripture tells us something similar about Jesus: "He came to his own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).
- The "saving" one - David, like Jesus, was tempted to fight the battle in the flesh by using Saul's armor (1 Samuel 17:38-46). Jesus was tempted by Satan to accomplish His task in the flesh, but He also refused (Matthew 4:1-11).

Can you imagine what it would have been like to watch David go down to fight the great giant, Goliath? For 40 days, the giant stood on one side of the valley and threatened the army of Israel, demanding they send one man to fight him. Additionally, Goliath threatened to enslave Israel if he defeated their warrior.

Can you imagine how Jonathan felt as he watched David head into the valley, knowing the entire kingdom was riding on whether this young man could defeat this great giant? When David released the stone that brought the giant down and took his sword to cut off the head of Goliath, no doubt, Jonathan let out a great shout of praise for David's conquest. David had saved him, all of them, from defeat and death.

When I was a young boy, someone gave me a children's picture Bible. As I turned the pages and looked at the pictures, I was drawn to two images. One was the picture of young David having just released a stone to the forehead of Goliath, who was falling to the ground with a thunder and a thud. I could imagine a great shout coming from the armies of Israel and terrified Philistines suddenly on the run as a defeated foe. The second picture was that of Jesus hanging on the cross dying a cruel and cursed death for you and me. As with David against Goliath, if the enemy wins, we are all lost. But Jesus is greater than David, and so is His victory. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus, who defeated our enemy when He cried, "It is finished." Now I, the recipient of His grace, go free by the saving work of the "saving one," Jesus.

Jonathan's words of devoted covenant (1 Samuel 18:3) come on the heels of David's great victory, and if ever I should love Jesus, it is when I realize that His death and resurrection provides forgiveness for my sins and an eternal home in heaven with Him! It's at the cross that we should say, "Oh, how I love Him."

II. LOVE IS EXPRESSED

READ ALOUD: 1 Samuel 18:3-4: Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): In what specific ways can I express my love for God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): I want us to consider how Jonathan's love for David was not only experienced but also expressed. We are told in 1 John 3:18, "Let us not love in word but in deed and truth." God's love for us was expressed not only in word but also in deed. John 3:16 states, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." When we love someone, we express genuine love by more than what we say. Our love is also demonstrated by what we give. God loved by giving us His most valuable possession, His only Son. Let's look at how Jonathan expressed his love for David.

1) JONATHAN'S CONFESSION

No doubt, Jonathan confessed his love for David in words: "he loved him as his own soul." He was not ashamed to speak of his love for David. Even his father knew of the relationship that existed between them and became jealous to the point that he wanted both of them dead. Jesus desires that we love him to the degree that we will confess Him before men. Jesus said, "Whosoever shall confess me before men shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8).

After the death of Jonathan, we hear David confess his love for him, "I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful." We should want to love Jesus so much that He could say of us that our love for Him was wonderful.

The covenant Jonathan initiates with David draws us to what Jesus said in the "Greatest Commandment". Jonathan loved David "with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all of his mind". Pay close attention to the detail given as to what Jonathan brought David as a symbol of their covenant as we ask ourselves, "Do I love Jesus in the way Jonathan loved David, and as Jesus instructs us in the "Greatest Commandment?" I pray the Holy Spirit will cause us to understand how our love for Jesus can become more complete and expressive.

2) JONATHAN'S COVENANT

Jonathan expressed his love for David most powerfully and prophetically by entering into a special covenant relationship with him. This covenant symbolizes how we can show our love for Jesus. The meaning of the word "covenant" in this context means "a cutting." Blood was shed as the most powerful witness of the solemn commitment he was making to David. Other references to this covenant are found in chapters 20:16 and 23:18. Let's look at what we learn from the items Jonathan gave to David:

- Jonathan gave David his robe, symbolizing his person and his position. The outer garment worn by Jonathan was likely designed in a way that when people saw him, they knew he was the descendant of the King. Everyone anticipated that Jonathan would be their next leader. However,

when Jonathan gave his robe to David, he declared that he would not claim the kingdom. Jonathan was saying: “I want you, David, to be my King.” Our love for Jesus should be so important that we bow before Him as the King of our life. The life of full surrender to Jesus is the most significant expression of our love for Him.

- Next, we see Jonathan giving David his armor. This act speaks of the surrender of his possessions and conveys “what I have I give to you”. What about you? Have you given our King all that you are and all that you have? What an excellent way to live. When we make Jesus our all, we bring Him glory. When we love Him so much that we push all the glory to Him, we find fulfillment and rest because He is the only One worthy. As we have stated in the overarching outline of our Journey lessons, the more we know Him, the more we will love him. We will love Him with our words and our actions.

PRAYER: Let us pray together: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us before the world began and before we were born. You loved us so much that you gave your only Son. Jesus, we thank You that you became the expression of the Father’s great love toward us. Even while we were sinners, You died for us. Holy Spirit, thank You for making us aware of that great love and stirring our hearts until we said “Yes” to our Lord Jesus. Please help us to not only love You in words but also in deed. Help us today and every day to love You more and more. Amen.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) In our previous unit, we studied the concept of knowing who Jesus is. Now that you know more about who He is, how does this knowledge impact your love for Jesus?
- 2) In what ways do you struggle or perhaps fall short in your expression of love to Jesus?
- 3) Do you have a hard time grasping Jesus’ love for you? If so, why?
- 4) In what practical ways can you demonstrate your love to Jesus? In what ways does knowing He loves you impact your everyday life?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 4:7-16

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Take a few moments this week to ask yourself: In what ways am I expressing my love for Jesus? Take notes this week of the time and opportunities that you could have demonstrated your love in a greater way?
- 2) This week, take 30 minutes and stop doing things (this will be harder than you think). Sit with Jesus, the One who (much to our amazement) just wants to be with us. Christ wants to speak to us in the silence, but we're so busy talking and doing that we can never hear Him. This might feel strange to sit in silence with no plan. Try not to force yourself into a "spiritual" activity. Simply think about Jesus, His love, and His grace. As you learn to recognize His presence in these quiet moments, you'll begin to notice Him in the hurried and distracted moments.
- 3) In your private devotion time, read Psalm 95 and Psalm 100 out loud. Take note of the appeals to praise and worship the Lord in a variety of ways. Consider how you can live out these passages differently in individual vs. corporate worship settings.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON TWO:

LOVING GOD: BIBLE STUDY

INTRODUCTION: The Bible is not just any book. It is a library of sixty-six books, penned by forty human authors, written over almost sixteen centuries. It is a diverse collection of literary styles: poetry and prose, prophecy and parables, proverbs, and psalms. It is a book of history reporting what went before and a hope-filled glimpse into what is ahead. It is a travel guide for people on a journey to God, and a songbook to sing along the way.

Although scholars and theologians have parsed its passages, the Bible is a book written in plain language for people like you and me. Its pages unfold life, light, and liberty for us and our wrecked world. Despite its many human authors, the Bible is one unified book, written by one Mind as declared by the Apostle Peter: “holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

The Bible is a miraculous book with one epic story running like a scarlet thread from beginning to end. It is one testimony to one glorious truth: salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

I. PURPOSE — KNOWING JESUS AS THE WORD

READ ALOUD: John 8:31-32: “If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How do we know Jesus Christ is the long-expected Savior of the world?

Possible Answers:



- Gospels demonstrate how Jesus is the fulfillment of OT prophecies about the Messiah.
- See below for more help

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The Gospel of John opens by pronouncing that Jesus is the Word of God (1:1). As the “Word,” He speaks for God because He IS God. Jesus is the living Word that is unveiled in the written Word; the Bible (the Word) is a book about Christ (the WORD). The epic story of Scripture is one of a loving God who saves His people through His Son, Jesus.

Because of Christ’s salvation, we can know God. The phrase “to know” is often used in the Bible, and it usually refers to an intimate, personal relationship. Knowing Jesus is much more than knowing about Him. It implies that we are communicating with Him and pursuing a deeper understanding of Him because we love Him.

If the Bible is a book about Jesus, then it only makes sense that one of the best ways to know Him is by studying and abiding in God’s Word. Jesus calls us to abide in Scripture (John 8:31-32) as a part of our conscious and life-changing decision to remain in Him. A person full of Christ will be firmly established in the Word.

Abiding in the Word is a response to Jesus “who dwells in our heart through faith” (Ephesians 3:17). Christ takes up full residence by His Spirit in the hearts of Christians. He indwells, inhabits, and resides in us, and we nourish our relationship with Him through prayer and the Word.

The writer of Psalm 1 describes a disciple as one who is “planted” (or rooted) in God: “But His delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law, he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper” (1:2-3). But being “planted” in God doesn’t just happen. As this Psalm teaches, this “blessed” person has delighted in and meditated on God’s Word.

Abiding in the Word is as necessary to our spiritual health as eating healthy food is to our physical health. We read and study Scripture to live. Notice the similarity of one more invitation from John 15:4: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." Without a connection to the Word, we wither.

READ ALOUD: Isaiah 50:4-5 NIV: The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does Isaiah mean by an "instructed tongue"? What is the responsibility of the one being instructed? What does this passage say God does in this process?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): As we abide in God's Word, we find that prayer and Bible study are not separate endeavors. Prayer enriches our Bible study; Bible study enriches our prayer. One of the great privileges of the disciple is to hear God's voice as He speaks to us through His Word. But we don't just listen. A disciple hears God's instruction so they can respond. Fifteen times in the New Testament (NIV), Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," but what Jesus is saying involves far more than being physically able to hear. It is also about being willing to listen.

Jesus gives hope and instruction about our ability to hear from Him as He explained to His disciples before His ascension: "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you...I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak of His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you"

(John 16:7b, 12-14).

To grow in confidence regarding our ability to hear God speak, we must have faith that He has made it possible for us to hear Him. We can trust the Holy Spirit to awaken our ears and kindle our hearts to burn with understanding as we study His Word. He makes Scripture glow like a light on the path of our journey with Him (Psalm 119:105). Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, we know what we could not have understood without Him.

The Spirit has made our heart His dwelling place, and He communicates to us from within. He speaks Spirit to spirit. If you are Christ's own, don't be concerned about your ability to hear. Hearing Him does not come by striving and straining. We place our total trust in the knowledge that He is very good at speaking. Assuming the posture of a listener—a receiver—is our responsibility. His responsibility is to awaken our ears to hear Him. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37b).

III. PROCESS OF THE STUDENT — THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY

READ ALOUD: Matthew 22:35-38: Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Until today, had you thought of Bible Study as more of a duty or an act of love? Explain. Why do you think Jesus designates this command (v. 37) as the greatest commandment?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The Spirit engages our hearts giving us ears to hear God's voice, but He also awakens our minds to understanding. In Matthew 22:37, Christ gives us one of His most specific directives – that we are to love God with our whole selves. Although we more readily connect love with feelings, emotions, and perhaps doing, we

are also to love God with our intellect.

Bible study is a gift of grace God uses to transform us. As we make space to read Scripture, we are to engage our minds in the text. Fortunately, we are not on this journey alone. God speaks to us individually and corporately. The Church was established in part to protect and guard the truths of God's Word. So, as we do our reading and studying, we check our understanding with our community of faith, our pastors, and theologians. We listen to the wisdom of those farther along in their discipleship, and we bolster our learning with their knowledge. We study God's Word alone and look for the voice of the Spirit, but we also study God's Word corporately, still listening to God.

IV. SHARING THE WORD — THE PRIVILEGE OF IMPACTING OTHERS

READ ALOUD: Colossians 3:16-17 NASB: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your heart to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What difference do you see between abiding in God's word (John 8:31-32), and "letting the word of Christ richly dwell within you"?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): We've come full circle. Abiding in God's Word, results in the word "richly dwelling" in us. As we abide in scripture, God's Word becomes familiar, and it settles down in our hearts. Abiding in the Word becomes the Word abiding in us. As a result, the Holy Spirit uses this storehouse of truth to guide us in our life with Him. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" is a personal word to us.

But beginning "with all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another" (Colossians 3:16), this passage takes on an outward focus. We teach, caution, encourage, and remind one another in godly wisdom as we worship

and live in our community. The abundant indwelling of the Word amplifies our testimony as others see evidence of God at work in us. Bible study empowers us for ministry and authorizes us to go and tell others the Good News. And thus, abiding in the Word becomes our act of love to God and those around us.

CLOSING: At the Meades Ranch Triangulation Station, in the state of Kansas, there is a plaque marking the center point of the United States. This marker identifies the intersection of the 98th Meridian and the 39th parallel. It was placed there in 1891, and from 1901 until 1989, it was the reference point for which all locations in the U.S. were measured, and from 1913 until 1989, it was the basis for all North American continental surveys.

Imagine the confusion and territorial disputes that would have incurred if each person measured their property by the standards of their choosing. Now, consider the confusion in the lives of people who don't have an exact standard by which to measure their lives. As the postmodern culture argues that there is no absolute truth, we diligently guard the truth of the Gospel by which we measure holy living. In the words of Paul to Timothy, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What has your experience been with Bible study?
- 2) What do you find most challenging about Bible study?
- 3) Does studying the Bible in community excite you or intimidate you? Why?
- 4) After this lesson, how do you see Bible study as a means of showing love to God?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Colossians 3:12-17; Psalm 119:89-104;
2 Timothy 3:10-17

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) “Abiding in God’s Word results in the word ‘richly dwelling’ in us.” Try to think of three ways that you can practice “abiding” in God’s Word. Remember, when we read scripture, it is not about how quickly we can get through the text (the amount we read), it is about how the text can get through us (how it changes our lives). As you read the Bible this week, try to slow down and use your “abiding” methods.

2) An essential part of our life with God is sharing that life with others. One of the ways you can do this is by sharing what the Holy Spirit is teaching you in Scripture. This week, whatever you learn from your time in Bible study, share that with someone else. It could be a family member or a friend, and they don’t have to be a follower of Jesus either. Don’t be afraid; you can do it!

3) “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 things that I said to you.” The Holy Spirit is our teacher. When we read scripture, and when we pray, He is teaching and guiding us into truth. Our challenge is to listen. Every time you are ready to begin a spiritual exercise, stop and pray this prayer: “Holy Spirit, in this moment, I submit myself to You and Your truth. Lead me as I _____ (insert activity). I want to hear from You and obey. Help me to slow down, so that You can speak. I am listening. Amen.”



THE JOURNEY

LESSON THREE:

LOVING GOD: WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION: The Bible can be described as a “Book of Worship.” From Genesis to Revelation, the reader is introduced to the Creator, Deliverer, Redeemer, Eternal King: the only One Who is truly worthy of our devotion and worship. Indeed, as we read scripture with focused eyes, we will see biblical principles of worship on every page.

One such example is found in Jesus’ response to a question He was asked about the “Greatest Commandment.” Jesus refers back to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). This overarching love for God should characterize the life of the believer. It also presents a beautiful picture of what it means to be a true worshiper.

Consider Jesus’ words from the New Testament: “with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind...” Ask yourself: Are these words descriptive of the way I love God through my worship? Let’s think about these things as we unpack this idea of loving God through worship.

I. DEFINITIONS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

READ ALOUD: Exodus 20:1-6: And God spoke all these words, saying:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

“You shall have no other gods before Me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image--any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the



fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): We often equate worship with praise and worship music. While we hope all church music is worshipful, there is much more to worship than those few minutes of music in services. How would you define “biblical worship”?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In a general sense, “worship” refers to the supreme honor we give in thought, word, or deed to a person or thing. The Bible teaches that God alone is worthy of worship. This principle is so vital that God declared it in the first of the 10 Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3).

There have been numerous definitions of biblical worship. For example, Jack Hayford defines worship as “the atmosphere that welcomes God’s presence and makes room for His mighty acts.” Graham Kendrick defines worship as “transformation through adoration.” Jim Dethmer offers another definition: “Worship is responding to all that God is with all that we are.”

What is clear is that worship is a response. It is something we offer back to God in light of our understanding of who God is and what He does. How well are we doing that? Think about what it means to respond to all that God is with all that we are. As we grow in our understanding of who God is and what He does, we have an increasing awareness of the transforming presence of God in our lives. Worship changes us. If worship is a response, what does our worship say about our belief in who God is and what He does?

II. EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP

READ ALOUD: Psalm 95:1-6: Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD is the great God, And the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep

places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What expressions of worship characterize your life? Are there forms of worship that make you uncomfortable? Why?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Worship involves the whole person: intellect, emotion, and will. As a result, there will be many expressions of worship. Yet, regardless of how we worship, it is to come from the heart in humility and awe, bringing glory to God (Colossians 3:17).

We often perceive biblical worship as joyful and celebratory and immersed in an atmosphere of singing, musical instruments, shouts of praise, raised hands or even dancing. More contemplative expressions of worship include bowing or kneeling before the Lord in prayer and corporate liturgy. Another essential demonstration of worship is that of thanksgiving, offering gratitude to the Lord for what He has done (Psalm 100:4). As Vance Havner said, “The whole Christian life is one big ‘thank you,’ the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. But we take Him for granted, and what we take for granted we never take seriously.”

We also express our worship by giving. When we offer our time, our talent, and our treasure to the Lord, we are acknowledging His sovereignty over all that we have, and all that we are. Serving the needy, singing in the choir, placing our tithes in the collection basket; these are all expressions of worship when done out of love and for the glory of God. Certainly not meant to be an exhaustive list of biblical expressions of worship, these are examples observed throughout the Scriptures as appropriate ways to respond to the Lord.

Another beautiful aspect of these expressions is that they can be lifted to the Lord individually as well as corporately. We are free to express our worship in private times of devotion, as well as with our families, small groups, and church community. A life of worship will be reflected in these contexts as well as in all of life.

III. REASONS FOR WORSHIP

READ ALOUD: Psalm 100: A Psalm of Thanksgiving. Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Do we benefit from our worship? If so, how? How can we guard against worshiping for what we get out of it, instead of worshiping rightly?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): There are many biblical reasons for why we worship. First, God commands our worship (1 Chronicles 16:29; Matthew 4:10). The first four of the Ten Commandments instruct man to worship God and God alone (Exodus 20). Throughout Scripture, there are warnings against worshiping anything or anyone else but God. Wrong objects of worship include other gods (Exodus 34:14); the hosts of heaven (Deuteronomy 17:2-3); demons (Deuteronomy 32:17); images (Exodus 20:4-5; Daniel 3:15-18); man (Acts 10:25-26); creatures (Romans 1:24-25); Satan and the Antichrist (Revelation 13:4-13). God commands that our worship be exclusively for Him.

Another reason to worship is that God deserves our worship. God's divine attributes are worthy of our worship. For example, we worship God because He is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (always present). We worship Him for His holiness (Psalm 99:5, 9), for His goodness (Psalm 100:4-5); for His mercy (Exodus 4:31); and for His love (Psalm 36:5-7).

Also, God's divine actions are worthy of our worship. We worship Him because of His creation and wonderful works (Psalm 136:4-6); for His work of redemption and salvation (Psalm 18:46); and for the abundant blessings He pours out on us (Psalm 103).

Next, we worship because we need to glorify God in this way. William Temple said, “The world can be saved by one thing, and that is worship. For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” Note how Temple’s words speak to how the whole person benefits from the worship of God: conscience, mind, imagination, heart, will.

Our personal fulfillment will never be found outside of submissive, worshipful obedience to God. He is the Creator; we are the created (Revelation 4:11). We are made in His image to worship Him...in this life and for all eternity. There are many things we do in this life that we will not do in heaven. Can you think of some examples? But when we are engaged in worshipping God, we are participating in a heavenly activity that we will do for all eternity. This act brings us great joy and fulfillment even now (Psalm 16:11; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:23-24)!

If worship is a response to all that God is with all that we are, what is the result of worship? Pete Sanchez, Jr., composer of the worship music classic, “I Exalt Thee,” speaks of four effects of biblical worship. First, God is glorified (Psalm 50:23). Second, Christians are purified (Psalm 24; Hebrews 10:22). Third, the Church is edified (Acts 2; Ephesians 5). Fourth, the lost are evangelized (I Corinthians 14:23-25).

A.W. Tozer has said, “The purpose of God in sending His son to die and live and be at the right hand of God the Father was that He might restore to us the missing jewel, the jewel of worship; that we might come back and learn to do again that for which we were created to do in the first place – worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” The centerpiece of the gospel message is that Jesus’ coming, death, burial, and resurrection restored the relationship between believers and the Father. In other words, He restores a relationship of worship. Has biblical worship been a missing jewel in your life? The Father is seeking worshipers (John 4:23). He is seeking you.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) God said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Though we may not live in a culture with physical golden idols, what do people worship in our culture?
- 2) Are there biblical expressions of worship you feel you have neglected that you can incorporate into your life? If so, what is one way you can do that this week?
- 3) Recall and share a particular time when you sensed the presence of God in worship.
- 4) What is something you would like to give God thanks for right now? Pray in thanksgiving right now.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 95:1-11;
Psalm 100:1-5

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Think about the various biblical expressions of worship we've discussed. In your own devotional time, incorporate a worship expression you seldom practice.
- 2) In Matthew 25, Jesus illustrates that when we serve "the least of these," we are serving Him. Help someone new this week. Prayerfully offer that service to the Lord as an act of worship.
- 3) Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." All of creation is a testimony of God's glory. Go for a walk and observe God's creation. Allow what you see and hear to inspire your worship of God.
- 4) Psalm 96:1 says, "Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth." Learn a worship song or sing one of the Psalms to your own melody.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON FOUR: LOVING GOD: SUBMISSION & HOLINESS

INTRODUCTION: Submission and Holiness: what is your first reaction to these words? Unfortunately, for many, the response is negative. Submission has been tainted by poor teaching and worse living. Similarly, holiness has been weaponized against fringe Christians and unbelievers, creating walls of division rather than opening the doors to hope and hospitality.

Our negative experiences do not have to deter us from exploring the beauty of submission and holiness. Discovering their biblical foundations can break down our negative stereotypes and enable us to experience joyous freedom, intimacy with God, and evangelistic salvation. As we learn together, ask God to deepen your group's understanding of the connection between submission, holiness, and love.

I. SUBMISSION — THE BIBLICAL BEGINNING

READ ALOUD: Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What is at the root of Adam and Eve’s sin? Is it pride, idolatry, a lack of submission, or something else? How do our culture’s views of submission influence our understanding of biblical submission?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): This passage describes Adam and Eve’s movement from dependence to independence. The desire for independence is at the center of humanity’s fall (Gen 3). Adam and Eve’s action took them outside of God’s designed parameters. As it always does, their effort to be independent of God led them into sin’s slavery. Therein lies the paradox of submission—true freedom only comes through submission. George Matheson beautifully described this truth in his hymn:

Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free;
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life’s alarms
When by myself I stand;
Imprison me within Thine arms,
And strong shall be my hand.

Matheson sang what Adam and Eve learned through suffering. Captivity to God is the only pathway to lasting freedom.

Whether we realize it or not, our culture conditions us against submission by defining it almost exclusively as oppressive behavior, exploitation, and abuse. Western society celebrates independence over submission, and America is founded upon resistance to Britain’s demand to submit. As a result, our ability to see Scripture’s loving and freeing invitation to submit is impaired, even when it involves submission in the right way to the right One.



II. SUBMISSION — THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL

READ ALOUD: Mark 8:34: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does Christ’s life teach us about submission? What role (if any) does submission play in salvation?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Submission is foundational to the gospel. We enter into life with Christ through the gate of submission. Adam and Eve’s sin created a rift between man and God, putting us at war with Him. Consequently, the human mind “does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom 8:7, NIV). This hostility must be addressed to experience peace with God. Jesus provides the solution for this hostility with His sacrifice on the cross. Christ initiates our salvation and calls us to “repent and believe the gospel” (Mk 1:15). But “belief” is not just a mental act. God calls us to repent and put our faith in Him, which implies that we will follow Him or submit: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mk 8:34).

Repentance involves a daily commitment of renouncing ourselves and reorienting toward God. Jesus used the term, repent, to describe getting off our agenda and getting onto His. He used the term, believe, to explain the entrusting of our entire being to God. When we repent and believe, the Spirit of God empowers us to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). Such freedom from sin remains as we continually submit to God (James 4:7: Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.)

God does not command us to submit without showing the way of submission. Jesus:

- Humbly left heaven’s splendor to submit to birth by a lowly virgin (Lk 1:34-35).
- Submitted to a Spirit-led time of testing in the wilderness (Lk 4:1).
- Submitted to God’s timeline for His ministry (Jn 2).

- He relinquished His preferences and submitted to the Father’s plan for humanity (Lk 22:42).
- Submitted His own life for His enemies (Rom 5:10)—an innocent man dying a Roman revolutionist’s death on the cross.

Jesus’ entire life was marked by submission, which sprang from love—love for His Father and love for us (Heb 12:2). His humble obedience reversed Adam’s disobedience and reconciled our broken relationship with God (Rom 5:19). Ultimately, Jesus’ submission will bring every knee to the ground and every tongue to the point of confession “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11).

III. HOLINESS — THE FRUIT OF SUBMISSION

READ ALOUD: Romans 6:22: “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How would you describe “holiness”? Is there a difference between interior and exterior holiness? If so, what is it? How are submission and holiness connected?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Holiness stems from submission. It starts with recognizing and grieving over our sin, which moves us to obedience. Our motives matter tremendously. Holiness is more about the attitude of our heart than how we act or what we do. If our heart desires to please God, we will respond and do what is holy. Just as Jesus gave up His desires out of love for His Father and us, we demonstrate holiness when we submit to God’s way of living because we love Him.

Peter called the Jews, scattered throughout Asia Minor “a holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9), and Paul called the believers in Corinth “holy ones” (1 Cor 1:2). They didn’t receive these markers because they were perfect at checking religious boxes; both groups were challenged to do better. Their naming as “holy” stemmed from their identity. They embraced who they were: “submitted ones” to Christ.

“Holiness is a thirst, a drive to know God in his fullness, and an unashamed commitment to obey God whatever it costs and wherever we are. It begins in the morning, directs our path during the day, and leads us to confession and praise in the evening.” Holiness is not about legalism. It is about love. Jesus defined love for Him by submission to his commands— “If you love me, keep my commands” (Jn 14:15). Our social and cultural presuppositions rob us of the connection between submission, holiness, and love.

- Submission is birthed out of a response to God’s love (Tit 3:4-5).
- Holiness is birthed out of our submission to God (Rom 6:22).
- Love is proven by our willingness to keep God’s commands (Jn 14:15).

Because we love God, we no longer need to submit to sin. We are free to walk in holiness (Rom 6:6). Holiness in an unholy world becomes a symbol to those who don’t know Jesus, not a sign of stale legalism. Peter explained that holiness has a specific goal. It isn’t about making our parents proud or getting God to answer our prayers. We pursue holiness with great hope that unbelievers will see our good deeds and glorify God on their day of graceful salvation (1 Pet 2:12). The fruit of our submission is that others will experience salvation (Mt 5:16). Our holiness enables unbelievers to see Christ’s light, repent, believe the gospel, and worship God.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What is challenging for you regarding submission?
- 2) Are there times you’ve equated holy living to rules you should abide by? Explain.
- 3) In what practical ways can you choose submission to Jesus in your daily life?
- 4) When you reflect on Jesus’ entire life being an act of submission - how does that help you view your own submission to Him?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Mark 8:34-38; Romans 6

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) What feelings do you have when you hear the word “submit?” Does it bring peace or anxiety? Joy or sadness? Ask yourself how these feelings impact the way you think of submission to God. Has this lesson helped define submission for you in a biblical way? Read this week’s scriptures and write down the ways that your understanding of submission has grown.
- 2) Consider your life with God. Do you think of your relationship with Christ as one of submission? Do you live as if your sinful life is dead and that you are alive in Christ? Highlight one specific area you have not yet submitted to Jesus (time, relationships, habits, preferences, etc.). Confess that to Christ and submit that area to Him. Make it a habit to ask the Spirit to give you the desire and strength to change.
- 3) Practice the language of love—holy obedience. When you want to lash out at your co-worker, choose holiness. When you are tired and feel tempted, choose holiness. When you are alone, choose holiness. When you are in public, choose holiness. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading.
- 4) Richard Foster says, “Submission is the spiritual discipline that frees us from the everlasting burden of always needing to get our way.” Within limits, this week, consciously step back and let things go. Don’t get the last word. Don’t argue to be right. Begin to learn what it means to live life unnoticed. Submission teaches us that happiness and joy come from losing our life to Jesus’ will, above our own. Spend some time this weekend prayerfully reflecting on your week of submission. How can you begin to make submission a daily habit?

THE JOURNEY

LESSON FIVE: LOVING GOD: PRAYER

INTRODUCTION: “When you pray,” Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:5). In other words, His assumption is that His followers will pray. But “pray to your Father,” he adds (verse 6). In other words, Jesus invites us to see our prayers not as requests or suggestions submitted in triplicate to the manager of the universe. They are the delighted (sometimes desperate) appeals of a child to a loving Father.

Prayer may seem like a task to be checked off, or a duty, sometimes even a chore. We can avoid these misconceptions if we see prayer for what it is: a practice born from and carried out in love.

Prayer is communication with God, certainly, building and strengthening our intimacy with a loving Father. But there’s more to this basic Christian discipline. In prayer we take part in a “symphony” of love with three movements. God loves us, as he has demonstrated by the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Jesus and by the continuing gift of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power. In loving response to God’s great love, we pray. And the prayers we offer God for others arise from and demonstrate our love for them. In this way, prayer helps us to fulfill what Jesus called the greatest of commandments: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I. WE PRAY BECAUSE GOD LOVES US

READ ALOUD: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (I John 4:9-10)



DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): John puts God’s love for us first, as a source and model for real love. In what ways could our actions “flip the script,” putting our love for God first? How does seeing that God’s love comes first change the way we pray?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): John 3:16 may be the most familiar verse of Scripture, one that is known both inside and outside the church. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” The English word *so* layers meanings in the verse. It means “so much,” as in “I love him so!” The word also describes the way God loved the world, by offering “his one and only Son” so that eternal life became a possibility for those who believe.

These ideas may seem large and abstract, prompting us to ask if God loves us? The short answer is yes. In the same chapter of 1 John where we read that “God is love,” the apostle Jesus loved explains what real love looks like. First, John reorients our thinking to see that God’s love comes first. Not only existence in general but our very life depends on God’s love, and that love has a human face. God’s love has taken human form—which is the meaning of the word *incarnate*—in the crucified and risen Son, Jesus the Messiah. (See also Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, and 2 Thessalonians 2:16.)

And because Jesus is God’s Son, he can and does invite his followers to see their relationship to God in the same loving family terms—which he then demonstrates in his teaching and his model prayer. When we pray, he says, we may address God as Father (Matthew 6:9). We can live without anxiety because “your heavenly Father knows that you need” food and clothing (Matthew 6:25-32). We can know that God hears our requests and will give us good things in return because he is a better Father than any earthly father could be (Matthew 7:7-10). And in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus makes plain that one of the best gifts we receive from our Father is his constant presence in the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13).

As Jesus says, earthly fathers give their children good gifts out of love. How could our perfect Heavenly Father, who is love, do less? If we ground our prayers in this understanding, we can approach God with joy and expectation instead of fear and uncertainty.

II. WE PRAY BECAUSE WE LOVE GOD

READ ALOUD: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How are our prayers like a sacrifice?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): First John shows us what God’s love looks like—it is sacrificial and directed toward others. And as we will see below, godly love necessarily leads us to imitate God’s love in our praying for others. But Jesus’ invitation to address God as Father also suggests that we should love God like a Father. And prayer is a foundational expression of that love.

We should imitate God’s love even in our praying. “Walking in love,” the apostle Paul suggests in the Ephesians passage we read, is sacrificial. Christ’s love meant that he “gave himself up...a fragrant offering and sacrifice.” Loving prayer means we look toward God, and it means that we offer him not merely words but also ourselves. As Dallas Willard writes in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*: “God will meet us in love, and love will keep our minds directed toward him as the magnet pulls the needle of the compass.” God receives our deep trust (because we know he is good), and our attention (because he is worthy), just as any father would receive those things from his children. He receives them as love focused on him.

Our prayers are pleasing to God. The Bible compares our prayers to the smoke from an Old Testament animal sacrifice, or the smoke of the incense offered at the Temple. “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,” the psalmist writes. “And the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” (Psalm 141:2). And in Revelation, John sees “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (5:8; see also Revelation 8:3-4). These sacrifices are described, again and again, as a “pleasing aroma” to God. Our prayers—and even ourselves, see 2 Corinthians 2:15—are just as pleasing as those sacrifices because they show our love for God and our devotion to him.

Directing our love in prayer to God has a “horizontal” dimension, as well. In an important way, prayer is love that we direct toward God for the sake of others—even our enemies.

III. JESUS CONTINUES TO PRAY

READ ALOUD: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (1 John 4:11-12)

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How can private prayer transform our public life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Imitating God’s love has two dimensions. We talked about a vertical, God-ward dimension in the last point. But imitating God’s love has a horizontal dimension, too. It affects those around us. In our love, they see what God is like. Alternatively, they see an absence of love and reject the God we’ve misrepresented.

Some people are easy to love. Praying for these people is easy, for reasons Richard Foster explains. “If we genuinely love people,” he writes in *Celebration of Discipline*, “we desire for them far more than it is within our power to give, and that will cause us to pray.” The apostle Paul has this kind of relationship with his beloved Philippians, Praying for family and friends comes as easily as our love for them does.

But not everyone is easy to love. We might want to be let off the hook when it comes to these people, but Jesus upturns our natural expectations. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” Jesus says in Matthew 5:43, “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” In other words, belonging in God’s family carries an expectation of love for enemies.

Why this impossible task? Why can't we follow our nature, love the lovable, and just avoid the unlovable? Simply put, because God continues to incarnate his love in us. We show what he is like by our love. We make visible the love of our invisible God. John writes extensively about how loving God must result in love for others. In fact, he says, we cannot love God (whom we cannot see) and hate others (whom we can see) at the same time (1 John 4:19-20).

We can begin by praying for more love. Paul prays this for the Philippians: "I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more" (1:8,9). We can pray the same thing for our enemies. In this way, Foster's admonition works in reverse, kindling concern for our enemies that can grow into God-honoring love.


CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Discuss how the tone of your prayers would change if before asking for anything, you prayed that no matter the circumstances, you wanted primarily for God's name to be exalted?
- 2) Based on the Lord's Prayer, what kinds of things should we prioritize in our prayer?
- 3) Based on the Lord's Prayer, what kind of attitude should we have as we pray?"
- 4) Discuss how better descriptions of God as Father can guide us in prayer?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Matthew 5-7

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) What Would Jesus Do? Have you ever asked yourself this question? Many of us probably have. We must understand the motivations for why Jesus did what He did on earth: it was to bring glory to His Father (you'll notice a connection between this exercise and #3). It's also helpful to personalize this question, "What would you do, Jesus?" He wants to answer us. Humbly ask this question at the start of your week, and let Jesus lead you where He would go. Be open to where He leads you, who He leads you to, or what He leads you to do.



2) Written prayers are a valuable, stabilizing tool in our life with God. They connect us to other believers and offer us words to pray when perhaps we don't have them. These could be Psalms, other passages of Scripture, or the words of another believer. This week try to incorporate one written prayer into your devotional time. Use the same prayer each day. Feel free to continue to pray in your usual ways (we need a balance between spontaneity and structure), but let the consistency of the written prayer anchor your time. You may find yourself coming back to it more than you think.

3) Do you truly long to see God's name glorified? To see His name hallowed? This week try to carry this thought beyond your prayer time. How can you glorify God's name as you buy groceries, cook for your family, drive home from work, attend church, watch the news, etc.? We exalt God's name not only with our words but with our actions. This week consciously aim to glorify God with your life. Set a time over the weekend to reflect on your experience.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON SIX:

LOVING OTHERS: GENEROSITY

INTRODUCTION: Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is a well-known tale of an ungrateful miser. Through a series of nightmarish episodes, his miserable life shows him the destructive path he has chosen. The story ends with Ebenezer Scrooge transformed into a generous person: a person who illustrates the Christmas spirit. The story, written in 1843, reflects the generosity that is the character and activity of God.

John 3:16 tells us that "God so loved the world that He gave." The Apostle Paul often refers to the "riches" of God's glory, mercy, and grace revealed in Jesus Christ (Romans 9:23, 11:33; Ephesians 1:7, 3:16; Philippians 4:19; Colossians 1:27). Isaiah 32:8 tells us that "a generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand."

The Hebrew word used for these three references to generosity is a word that describes a willing and noble heart. Another term that translates to generosity (in the NKJV) is the Hebrew word for "hand" (1 Kings 10:13; Esther 1:7, 2:18). That's an apt image: one's hand extended to help another. In 2 Corinthians 9:5, generosity is the translation of the Greek word for blessing or benefit to another.

This lesson will introduce you to three ways we are called to live generously: faithfulness to tithe, faithfulness in free-will offerings, and the generosity of sharing ourselves with others.



I. TITHING IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S COVENANT BLESSINGS

READ ALOUD: Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Is tithing an act of obedience or an act of faith?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): A tithe is 10%. In the ancient world, it was usually 10% of produce or flocks. In most of the modern world, it is 10% of the money we receive or earn. Some Christians think tithing is no longer required and view it as only applying to Israel. However, an overview of the entire Bible does not support that conclusion.

Tithing is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 14 before Israel was established. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, a Christ-type figure. Melchizedek's name means King of Righteousness, and he was king over Salem (probably Jerusalem). He is mentioned in Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 5, 6, and 7. In the Genesis 14 account, Abraham asserted his independence from the king of Sodom and declared his dependence upon the blessings of God when he tithed to Melchizedek.

Abraham taught this principle of tithing to his family, as Genesis 28:22 tells us that his grandson, Jacob, committed to giving a tenth to the Lord. Additionally, the law of Moses instituted tithing as the primary financial basis for supporting the Levitical priesthood. But even this was based on the covenant blessing recognized when Abraham tithed to Melchizedek.

In the New Testament, Jesus mentioned tithing in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42. In His fulfilling of the law of Moses, Jesus did not reject tithing. Instead, in these passages, Jesus told the Pharisees they should tithe, as well as do justice, show mercy, and have faith.

The Malachi 3:10 passage reveals that our heavenly Father has committed Himself to bless those who tithe. Tithing is not a guarantee of getting rich, but that as we trustfully obey, God promises to supply all our needs, “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). The blessing is based on God’s Word and on our faith in trusting that God keeps His covenant blessings.

II. GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

READ ALOUD: 2 Corinthians 9:7: “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How can we discern when the Holy Spirit is prompting us to give?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Besides the foundational giving of tithing, which all of God’s children should do, the Bible also speaks of additional free-will offerings. In the Old Testament, Moses asked the children of Israel to voluntarily give towards the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 25:2ff). When the Temple in Jerusalem was built, the people “offered willingly” (1 Chronicles 29:6).

In the New Testament, the offering Paul described in 2 Corinthians 9:7 was one he took to help bring relief to the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 11:28-30). Paul referred to this offering in Romans 15:25-27, which is actually the foundation for much of Paul’s spreading of the gospel in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Greece, and Rome. For Paul, this voluntary giving, based on need, was a sign of the unity of the body of Christ among Jews and Gentiles.

2 Corinthians 8 & 9 provide an important detail related to the accountability of the offering and the heart motive of the offering. This is why Paul referred to “cheerful” giving. Each of us has ample opportunities to give above our tithes. Our hearts are touched by missionaries, disaster-related emergencies, giving opportunities on social media, youth projects in our local churches, and educational needs for our Christian colleges. We give because our

hearts are stirred. The amount is not as significant as the motivation of the heart and the disposition of joyfully giving.

It is essential to notice in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that Paul rooted these additional offerings in the free gift of Jesus Christ, “that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” The point is not that we become poor; instead, the point is that we have a generous heart and awareness of the needs of others. By such generosity, we are laying up “treasures in heaven” that will last for eternity (Matthew 6:20).

III. THE GENEROSITY OF SHARING OUR SELVES

READ ALOUD: Luke 10:42: “But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

DISCUSSION QUESTION (TALK ABOUT IT): What impact do our smart devices have on our availability to others?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): It’s confession time: how many of us have been in the same room with family and texted them rather than speak to them? How many of us have been talking to someone, only to realize they are not listening because their face is in their smart device? How many of us, when having a conversation with someone, find ourselves looking over their shoulder to see if someone else is nearby? Well, I’ll start: I’m guilty!

I’ve come to realize how easy it is to be distracted by other people and things, rather than focusing on where I am. As I once heard someone remark, “Be where your feet are.” Sharing my attention and my time with the people around me is crucial. For most of us, our most valuable asset is not money, but time.

The Luke 10 story of Mary and Martha is not a condemnation of Martha’s work ethic or a revelation that Mary was lazy. Instead, it is an account of determining priorities and ordering what we love. Mary recognized that time

sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him, and giving Him her undivided attention, was more important at that moment than anything else.

Most of us take our smartphones everywhere we go, even to church. It's one thing to open an app to read the Scripture passage or take notes of the sermon on our device. It's another thing to read email, catch up on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Being present where our feet are could be the most critical decision we make as we encounter God and others.


CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Talk about ways you have been impacted by the generosity of others.
- 2) Discuss creative ideas of how we can be generous with ourselves, our time, and our resources.
- 3) Explain how you see generosity to others as an expression of love to God.
- 4) Do you struggle to "be where your feet are?" Share about how we can encourage each other to be more present in our daily life.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Philippians 4:4-20; 2 Corinthians 9

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Purposefully offer thanksgiving as an act of worship. Mike Coleman, the founder of Integrity Music, encourages believers to take a "30-minute Thanksgiving Break" in which they give thanks to the Lord for a half-hour. Be careful not to request anything, just "count your blessings." How does this exercise change the way you see generosity?
- 2) Do you ever find yourself facing "giving fatigue" with so many needs and opportunities to meet? More importantly, have you learned how to discern when the Holy Spirit is stirring your heart to give? Generosity is not an exercise in meeting everyone's needs. That's not our job; it's God's. But He does allow us to participate in the meeting of others' needs. For some of you, this week is about learning to say, "I can't meet everyone's needs" (physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.). For others, this week is about learning to answer the Holy Spirit's promptings to be generous. Which category do you fall in?



3) Has your heart been touched by the importance of being where your feet are? The gift of your presence might be one of the most valuable possessions you have. Give it wisely and cheerfully. As you spend time with family, friends, co-workers, and strangers, set aside distractions. Are the distractions more valuable than the person in front of you?

4) Generosity is not something reserved for those we love. Jesus admonishes us to do good, not only to those who are kind to us, but also to those who are not. This week do something helpful or kind for someone you don't know, for someone who has not done anything for you.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON SEVEN:

LOVING OTHERS: COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION: From the beginning of time, God has been about community. From His command for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to His revelation that Abraham would father many nations, God has been about community. He has always planned for a collective people who would love Him and one another.

As modern-day Christians, we are still called to community. The New Testament elaborates on God's design through Christ, who modeled this godly fellowship. For three years, Jesus traveled, taught, rested, talked, and ate with the same group of people, giving us a picture of what it means to love and live together. Later, the Apostle Paul was careful, in his letters, to spell out what it means to live in Christian community. We will explore some of these writings later.

We must not be naive: Christian community presents its own set of challenges. Getting along with others and helping people we do not really know is not easy, but it is an essential calling of the Church. So, let's look at how community operates in our lives.

I. A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY LOVES OTHERS

READ ALOUD: Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How would your life be different without your community? What needs do they meet for you?



CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): I grew up an only child. Thankfully, there were families in the church we attended, so I was not without playmates. After all, basketball is more fun when there is someone to play against, and hide-and-seek doesn't make much sense if you are alone. It helps to have someone else around.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, Solomon says, "Two are better than one..." This king, known for wisdom, recognized that people are designed to be in relationship with others. We have been created for community. Solomon goes on to say, "...woe to him who is alone..." So, how do we begin? Or better asked, how do we proceed when our personal preferences about Christian community create division? What happens when we are faced with denying ourselves to live for Christ and others.

Life Together is a book written by the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In it, Bonhoeffer explores what it means for Christians to live in community. Interestingly, he writes while secretly and dangerously opposing Hitler and Nazi Germany. Therefore, he is at a place where he understands the importance and need for a real community of people who will love one another amid stressful times. Perhaps some of the most insightful guidance Bonhoeffer gives includes a call to examine our motives: "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."

If we live for our dreams and our ambitions, we will destroy the community God wants to build. However, when we live for others and love them, we will create the kind of community God intends for us. We are in this "life together," and we will best glorify Christ when our focus is on Him and not ourselves.

II. A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FORGIVES OTHERS

READ ALOUD: Ephesians 4:32: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you find most challenging about forgiving others? In what ways have you struggled to forgive yourself?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): C.S. Lewis once said, “Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.” One of the primary characteristics of an authentic Christian community is that its members express a consistent willingness to forgive. But as Lewis suggests, talking about forgiveness is the easy part. Walking it out is a different story, and one that begins with right thinking.

The Apostle Paul offers a compelling explanation for why we are to forgive others. Note that he does not say to forgive others because it is the right thing to do. Paul also does not argue that we forgive others because it will make us better people. He tells us to forgive because God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32). As we grow in understanding of how great God’s forgiveness is, we respond by forgiving others. Hebrews 12:14 tells us that by pursuing peace (forgiving), we demonstrate our holiness (Christlikeness), which is an indicator of our faith.

Next, notice how God forgives us. He does not wait until we are good enough to deserve His forgiveness. Romans 5:8 reminds us that while we were in sin, Christ died for us. Because Christ does not mark our sins against us, we do not wait until people are deserving of forgiveness. We also are not to vengefully hold past wrongs over our “neighbor’s” head nor does forgiveness include pretending the hurtful thing never happened. However, it does mean that we choose not to allow evil to define us. Instead, we release others from any penalty of what they did to us.

Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:12) to ask God to “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” As we live out Christian community, we must learn to forgive others, which in turn opens us up to embracing forgiveness from God. For it is in forgiving others that we understand what it means for God to forgive us.

Finally, a significant aspect of forgiveness is learning to forgive ourselves.

Many times, we are our own hardest person to forgive, but we imprison ourselves by withholding this grace. Jesus asserted that participating in the greatest commandment involves loving our neighbor as ourselves, thereby assuming that we will be kind to ourselves. Thinking communally, when we learn to forgive ourselves, we are set free to know how to forgive others.

III. A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY REACHES OTHERS

READ ALOUD: 2 Corinthians 2:14-15: “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Describe something practical you have done to show someone else the love of Christ.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): When the Church was birthed at Pentecost, it rapidly went from God’s people praying in a room together to a Church spilling out into the streets. We were never meant to be just a group of people who met together a couple of times a week in a building. Instead, the Church is intended to be an outward-facing people that shows the love of Christ and preaches the Gospel to those outside our walls.

I once asked our congregation this question, “If the doors of our church closed today, would anyone in our community know it?” God used that challenge to push us to reach out to our community, not to make a name for ourselves, but to show the love and kindness of Christ through practical actions. We wanted those around us to know that we were a place where they could find hope and healing and that our church existed to make a difference.

Paul says that our lives leave a fragrance. Not only do we leave a fragrance to those who are being saved but also those far from God. For too long, the Church has been known for what it opposes. The world needs to know there is a place where people love them despite their mistakes and foolish decisions. We are called to be people of compassion who demonstrate an

authentic Christ-like community.

A church exhibits a genuine Christian community when it is mobilized beyond its walls, but we do not have to have a large budget to love our neighbors. Simple acts of kindness go a long way. Maybe we start by mowing the yard of older adults in our neighborhood, changing the oil for single mothers, or picking up groceries for people stuck inside their homes. All of these things will brighten someone's day, but more significantly, they can make a tangible difference in their situation: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

One thing we have learned going through a pandemic is that we still have to be the Church even when we are not meeting together. There are always needs in our community, and there are still people looking for hope. Colossians 1:27 teaches us that it is "Christ in us [that is] the hope of glory." A community listening to Christ will reach out to those who do not know Him, and as we do, we leave behind His beautiful fragrance.


CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How has being involved in a supportive community benefited you?
- 2) How do we put aside our own ideas of what community is supposed to look like to build the community God desires?
- 3) Are there times you have struggled to open up in community with others? What contributes to that hesitation?
- 4) Talk about ways we, as the church, can engage the community around us for the gospel?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Romans 14

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Sometimes, our vision of what community should look like skews our understanding of God's vision of community. This week, set aside time to write down 5 ways a community can be healthy and 5 ways that a community can be unhealthy. Ask yourself: How do I need to put aside personal dreams of what community is supposed to look like to build the community God desires?



2) Name some things that have happened to you in the last six months that can remind you of your need for others? How does this exercise cause you to feel about your community?

3) Forgiveness is an essential building block to the health of a community. This week, ask yourself these questions: Who do I need to forgive? How do I need to forgive myself?

4) Having proper checks and balances will help prevent us from developing dangerous beliefs or thoughts about God. Remember to always look for confirming verses of scripture that teach the same thing. If you have questions about a passage, ask a pastor or friend who can help you. This week, when you are reading the At-Home Scriptures, keep a list of questions you have. Share this list with a friend or mentor who can help you walk through them. This is one of the values of Christian community.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON EIGHT:

LOVING OTHERS: SERVICE

INTRODUCTION: When we think about Jesus, different images may come to mind. We may see Jesus relaxing in a chair with a child on his lap and a smile on his face. Or, we may see Jesus angrily turning over the tables of dishonest moneychangers who made His Father's house of prayer a den of thieves. We may also see Jesus, the compassionate healer, touching the leperous skin of a man desperate for a miracle. But if we look deeply into the life of Jesus, we see love at the heart of everything He said and did.

In Philippians 2:3-7 (NLT), the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, tells us, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being."

Jesus was never selfish, and he never did anything to draw attention to Himself but only to glorify His Father. He was humble, thinking of others as better than himself, and He always looked out for others. Jesus showed us that loving God and loving people doesn't mean becoming a soul-less robot, programmed to glorify Him and serve others mindlessly. When we look at Jesus' life and ministry, we see that loving God and loving people can be messy and joyful, challenging and exciting, maddening and emotional, but it always requires a choice. In John 13, we are given a compelling picture of Jesus, the Master of the Universe, humbling Himself: **helping us see that the love of God within us wears a servant's towel.**



I. JESUS, THE SERVANT

READ ALOUD: John 13:13-17: “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you think it means to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and strength? What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves? How did Jesus live out these things? What does service have to do with loving God and people?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In Matthew 20, we find Christ’s disciples in a conversation about which of them is going to be the greatest. Jesus quickly settles the issue by clarifying what constitutes greatness in God’s Kingdom. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:43-45). In essence, he says, “Okay, boys, you want places of honor, and you want recognition? Here’s what you do; you become everyone’s slave. You serve!”

In their day, washing a guest’s feet was not the responsibility of those who had authority or honor. This task was the responsibility of the lowest and least honored servants, the ones nobody paid attention to, but everyone needed. These were the nameless ones. Today, we refer to them as “the school janitor” who cleans up the mess the sick kid made. “The cleaning lady” who keeps the toilets clean at the church. “The garbage man” who rolls up to your street and empties your trash can. “The Sunday School Teacher” who dedicated 50 years of her life to teaching little ones about Jesus without any need for recognition. However, the disciples didn’t think of Jesus as one of “those” servants. Jesus was powerful and famous, and they rightly honored Him. In their minds, washing feet was way beneath Him. But through this intimate and lowly act, Jesus made a statement that would never leave them, “This is how I want you to love others; do whatever needs to be

done. No task and no person is beneath you.”

II. SERVING HIS CHURCH

READ ALOUD: John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Romans 12:3-8 (NLT): “Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What gifts and talents has God given you to use to bless others? Give an example of how people with different gifts and talents can work together for a common purpose. When some people develop their talents and become successful, they also turn inward, becoming self-absorbed and arrogant. How do we maintain humility when we experience positive feedback for our abilities?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus was motivated by love and moved with compassion. He humbled Himself and became a servant of all. Jesus is our example, and now He is calling us to live as He did. Jesus is calling us to love each other as He loved us. One challenge we might face is understanding that as God in the flesh, Jesus had abilities that we don’t. So, how do we follow His example? I have good news: through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has given you gifts and talents too!

As I write, we are in the middle of the COVID-19 global pandemic. To do our part in slowing the spread of this disease, our church family has followed the Word of the Lord (Hebrews 13, Romans 13, and 1Peter 2), and we are submitting to the governing authorities who have instructed us to suspend meeting corporately. We are not gathering together in a building, but we are staying connected like never before. We have not stopped worshipping or serving one another.

We are all finding new and creative ways to use our gifts and talents, and we have increased the frequency of our worship and discipleship! Now, seven days a week, our pastoral staff is sharing a devotional in the morning and at lunchtime on Facebook Live. Then every evening, our worship pastor presents a creative and interactive devotional that includes Bible teaching, comedy clips, and even an occasional visit to Mayberry, USA, for some words of wisdom from Andy Griffith and Barney Fife!

We have teams of people helping those at higher risk by shopping for them and delivering groceries and essentials. People reach out daily to encourage and pray for one another, and every day, we find new ways to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ – the Church.

III. SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS/COMMUNITY

READ ALOUD: Luke 10:25-37: “One day, an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, ‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you will live!’ The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’

Jesus replied with a story: ‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' 'Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?' Jesus asked.

The man replied, 'The one who showed him mercy.'

Then Jesus said, 'Yes, now go and do the same.'"

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why did the religious leaders not stop to help the wounded Jew? Why did the Samaritan stop to help and to what lengths did he go to do so? Recall a time when you were in need, and someone went above and beyond to help you. How did that affect your life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Throughout the gospels, we find Jesus serving individuals, small groups, and thousands of people at once. These weren't church services; they were personal encounters and gatherings as Jesus traveled from one place to another. We should worship corporately and meet the needs of those in our church family. But as Jesus modeled, it is just as essential to be connected with our neighbors and have deep roots in our community. We should be working to improve our relationships with those in our neighborhood and our local and state governments — like law enforcement officers, firefighters, school teachers, and local business owners. We should support and contribute to the health and wellbeing of our neighbors and our community.

In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus demonstrates that loving God and loving people can be as simple as helping someone in need. The good Samaritan didn't preach to the wounded man, nor did he pray for him. However, he did something just as powerful; he showed the love of God by meeting the man's practical needs. Sometimes we are too eager to preach and not eager enough to lend a helping hand. Jesus never called us to go to church and serve people. He called us to be the Church and love and serve our neighbor. There are people right next door, just up the street, across

town, and across the ocean who need our help. They are your neighbors. Love them. Connect with them. Befriend them. Ask how you can help them, and then serve them. Be the Church.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Have you ever washed the feet of another?
- 2) How difficult would it be to wash the feet of someone you knew was going to betray you?
- 3) Who has the most significant role in serving: the pastor, his paid staff, or the volunteers? Why?
- 4) Recall a time when you served a stranger and describe how it affected their lives. What about your life?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: John 13:1-17; Acts 2:42-47

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) If you haven't done so, commit to helping in a specific ministry of your church. Talk with a pastor or other leader to find out how you can begin this incredible journey of serving "like Christ" today.
- 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in serving someone in your community through personal outreach or an outreach ministry of your church.
- 3) Keep your hearts connected to the Holy Spirit, and ask Him to place people in your path who could use your help. Recognize that He may send you to a stranger or someone you have known your whole life.
- 4) Loving your neighbor keeps your self-love in check. This week, make an effort to lighten the burden of those around you, beginning with those with whom you live. The invaluable gift of listening is a great place to start.

AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

COMMITMENT: Setting an expectation and commitment will help in holding yourself accountable to follow through on The Journey. Share this with someone else in the group.

- I commit to do an At-Home Exercise _____ days this week for _____ minutes.
The best time of the day for me to do this is: (circle one) **Morning Noon Night**
- I commit to check on _____ to see how they are doing and to share about my own experiences.

1ST DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

2ND DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

3RD DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

WEEKLY WORKSHEET

4TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

5TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

6TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

7TH DAY: _____

- I have completed my commitment for this day.
- Describe what your experience was like today.

- What takeaway do you have from today?

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

S.O.A.P. METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY:

S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer.

FOUR STEPS:

1) SCRIPTURE

Choose a passage of scripture to do a focused reading of. Start by reading the passage and by physically writing it out. This simple act adds to your focus on the passage. As you write, ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word. Pay attention to anything that catches your eye.

2) OBSERVATION

Write down what you see in the verses. Who is the audience? Is there any repetition in the passage? What words stand out to you?

3) APPLICATION

This is when God's Word becomes life-giving and alive in our lives. Ask yourself, "What is God saying to me today? How can I apply what I just read to my personal life? What is Jesus asking me to change or give up? Is there an action I need to take?"

4) PRAYER

Pray God's Word back to Him. If you sense that God is speaking to you or has revealed something to you, take this time to pray about it. Ask Him to keep it on your mind throughout the day. Humble yourself and confess anything that needs to be confessed.

When we study God's Word with a focused approach like the S.O.A.P method, it can take as little or as long as you have time to give. You may notice that some days take a shorter time while others take a longer time. The most important thing is that you are consistently exposing yourself to the truth of God's Word with humility and surrender.

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE STUDY DESCRIPTION

FOUR STEPS

Bible Study works best if you intentionally carve out time to be alone with God. It's important to find a place that is quiet, comfortable, and free from distractions. Then, begin by asking God to speak to you through His Word and to help you notice what He has for you in this moment. Don't forget to use the Bible Study description sheet for help with the S.O.A.P. method.

1) SCRIPTURE

- Write down the passage you will be reading: _____
 - Start with silence. Quiet your thoughts and wait patiently to let distractions go by. Ask Jesus (The WORD) to speak to you in His written Word.
 - Read the passage. Don't forget to read a few verses before and after for context.
 - Write the verses down as you read.
 - Pause here. Think about what you just read. Did anything jump out at you?

2) OBSERVATION

- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What do you see in these verses?
 - Who is the audience?
 - Is there any repetition?
 - What word(s) stand out to you?
 - What do I learn about God in these verses?
- Making a bullet-point list is also a good way to write down your observations.

3) APPLICATION

- After you have reflected on the passage, prayerfully respond to what God has shown you in His Word.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What is God saying to me today in His Word?
 - What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to pray after what I've just read?
 - How can I apply what I just read to my personal life?
 - What secrets of my heart has this passage exposed? Is Jesus asking me to give something up?
 - Are there any actions I am being called to take?

4) PRAYER

- Give yourself a few moments to sit with what you just read.
- Pray God's Word back to Him.
- Thank God for speaking to you in His Word.
- Ask God to keep these truths in your mind throughout the day.
- Confess what needs to be confessed.

Don't forget to complete the At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!

AT-HOME EXERCISES

BIBLE MEMORIZATION DESCRIPTION

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105

While it's common to think of scripture memory as something reserved for children, the book of Psalms gives all of us a compelling reason to make this practice a personal habit: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you...I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (See Psalm 119:11-16).

When we take the time to memorize scripture, we are filling our minds and our hearts with God's truth. When we need encouragement, these memorized passages will come back to us as a source of strength. Storing God's truth in our hearts will boost our confidence in God, help us follow Him more closely, and draw us closer to His Son. Memorized scripture can also be used to evangelize and disciple others around us. This is truly being a ready witness.

HOW TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE:

1. Select a passage.
2. Give yourself a time frame to memorize it.
 - a. It's a good idea to have someone you can share your memory practice with.
3. Choose the method that works best for you.
 - a. Not everyone memorizes things the same way. It's important to use what works for you!
 - b. There are many Bible memory apps and websites.
 - c. Use a dry erase marker, and write it on your bathroom mirror.
 - d. Write the verse(s) on notecards and stick it in various places around your house, job, and car for easy practice.
 - f. Repetition will be helpful.
4. Once you have memorized your scripture passage, try to use it often. As much work as it takes to remember things, it's far easier to forget them.

Don't forget to complete the Weekly At-Home Exercises Worksheet as well!