

THE JOURNEY

BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS



UNIT SIX – TO ABIDE IN 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 6 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 6: To Abide in 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.
- With any of the content or At-Home components, please feel free to alter,

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add to, and take away what doesn't fit your particular group.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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

BEFORE YOU CAN START A 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

- 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)? _____
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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

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UNIT SIX: TO ABIDE IN HIM CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

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5. Shirley Guthrie
6. John Hedgepeth
7. Brad Davis
8. Bishop Tommy McGhee

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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!

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LESSON ONE: ABIDE IN THE VINE

INTRODUCTION: At last, we have come to the final unit of The Journey. Over the previous five units, we have encountered Jesus. Through “Knowing,” “Loving,” “Trusting,” and “Obeying” Jesus, we experience “Blessing.”

Notice that the progression of faith is positional. Knowing occurs from a distance. As we know “about” Jesus, we are brought closer to Him. As we move closer to the source and direction of our faith, we begin to love “on,” trust “in,” and obey Jesus. Moving closer to Jesus brings blessings to our lives.

Of course, blessings do occur on a scale. Paul reminds us that “though we were afar off” (away from Jesus), Christ has brought us close through His blood (Ephesians 2:13). This blessing is available to every person. Life itself is another example of this kind of blessing. However, the closer we move to Jesus and the more connected we are to the life of God’s kingdom, we will experience deeper blessings that only come from our closeness to Him: i.e., contentment, joy, peace.

But blessing is not the goal or the end. Our faith’s end goal is “Abiding”: a deep-rooted one-ness, or connection, with Jesus where His life becomes our life. We decrease so that He can increase. We learn to draw on His strength, not our own. We find power in our weakness and dependence.

As we learn to abide in Jesus and draw life from Him, we will find ourselves producing fruit, serving others, and fulfilling the call to spread the Gospel. Any attempt to do these things on our own will lead to burnout, frustration, and emptiness. Imagine, eager to serve Jesus, we try to use our power to bring about the kingdom of God, and we end up farther away from Him. We might even produce our



own fruit, but any action on our part that does not start from the strength of Jesus will end up failing us and producing fruit that does not last.

“Then, why do we keep doing that?” you ask; because our default setting is to save ourselves. Our broken humanity response is seeking the answer within, finding strength inside, and relying on ourselves. To Abide in Jesus is counter to every fallen human impulse we possess, but abiding is the way. It is maturing. It is deepening. It is becoming less like myself and more like Jesus. Is that what you want in your life?

Jesus gives us a powerful illustration of Abiding in John 15.

I. WHO IS THE VINE?

READ ALOUD: Exodus 3:12-15: So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’”

John 15:1-6: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does this image of Jesus as

the Vine in John 15 mean to you? Why do you think Jesus chose this image to illustrate the spiritual truth of abiding?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): John 15:1 is the last of Jesus' "I am" statements in John's Gospel, and it is a powerful image of Jesus as the True Vine. Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus uses the phrase "I am" to capture the attention of His audience, as well as the readers. "I Am" was the name God gave Himself in Exodus at the burning bush. By invoking this language, Jesus is calling Himself by the name of God, establishing His divinity. The "I Am" statements in John are also powerful statements of who Jesus is and how we relate to Him (John 6:35-51; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5).

In this last "I Am" statement, Jesus uses a metaphor from the Old Testament. The imagery of Israel as a vineyard is used in Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6, but Israel, unlike Jesus, was faithless. Even though God, the Vinedresser, did everything correctly, Israel produced bad fruit. Jesus contrasts Himself with Israel by saying He is the True Vine. He is the Messiah: the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and all Old Testament hopes. He is faithful and true and produces good fruit.

So, we see that Jesus is the Vine, God the Father is the vinedresser (or caretaker), and we are the branches. The most dependent part in this picture is the branch. Why? A branch on its own cannot bear fruit. The branch is dependent on the Vine for its life and nourishment. It is also dependent on the caretaker to trim out rotten sections and create the space for healthy growth. We will discuss this in more detail in the next lesson.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ABIDE?

READ ALOUD: John 15: 7-11: If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Talk about a time when you found yourself relying on Christ's strength in a greater way. What did you learn in that season?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Central to our act of abiding is resting in Christ's love (v. 9). This takes us back to one of the first lessons in The Journey: "What Does Jesus Call Me?" "The foundational truth of your life is that you are loved. Before you could do anything, own anything, or offer anything, you were and are loved by God."

As the Beloved, we do not carry the burden of earning Christ's love for us. It is a gift freely given. Our understanding of this truth is the first step towards abiding in the Vine.

Think about this image of resting in Christ's love. As the branch, our priority is to stay connected to the Vine for our existence. Resting means letting go of the responsibility of self-management and self-care. We trust in the love of the Vine to take care of us. Abiding is letting go. We must trust outside of ourselves. This is contrary to the call of the world that says to look inward for life.

This calls us back to Unit 3 of The Journey: To Trust Him. When we trust Jesus, we believe He is who He says He is (the divine Son of God) and has done what He says He has done (completed the work of salvation and restoration). His finished work is enough. I am not expected to earn my way into abiding. I believe, and I am connected to the Vine.

An essential part of this abiding life is discovering the meaning of Sabbath living. It is so vital that an entire lesson in this unit is devoted to the subject. Learning to abide is to learn to let go of striving: striving for our goals, striving for our dreams, running ourselves worn and ragged. That is not an abundant life, and it is not a healthy life. Sabbath living is learning to savor our life with Jesus, and this extends beyond Sunday. The Sabbath is more than one day a week. We must find the role of the Sabbath in every day. Sabbath is saying, "I have limits. I am insufficient for the task. I need rest."

As we learn to reimagine and reorient our lives around that truth, we will learn to abide and rest in Jesus.

III. HOW DO WE ABIDE?

READ ALOUD: John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What stands between you and the abiding life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus could not have been any clearer about our need for abiding in Him than His statement in John 15:5: “Without Me, you can do nothing.” Remember back to His teaching on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in Spirit.” We are dependent beings, but there is great hope here. With Jesus, all things are possible. We can live an abiding life. God is faithful to complete the work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

So how do we do this? We cannot abide by trying harder or by force of will. We must learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to help us. In John 14, Jesus promised the disciples that He would send a Comforter after He was gone. Jesus sent the Comforter to remind us of everything He taught and to be the indwelling presence of God in our lives. When we are pursuing a life of abiding in Jesus, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we enter this life and are sustained. Look for more about the role of the Holy Spirit in a later lesson.

Abiding in Jesus is not reserved for the most faithful, nor is it optional. John 15 is clear: without abiding, we will not produce the fruit of Christ, nor will we create anything of lasting importance. We might create our own fruit from our own strength, but without the sustaining life of the Vine, this fruit will be empty and our efforts in vain. One writer said, “There may be plenty of activity and yet barrenness. Works are not fruit.”

We must also consider the warning in John 15:2. Every branch that does not bear fruit will be cut off. Remember, to not bear fruit, the branch has cut itself off from the Vine first. But we must not become obsessed with fruit production. We will go through seasons when we may feel empty and barren, but remember, our purpose is not to produce fruit. It is to be connected to the Vine. The Vine will produce the fruit in us. Let us draw nearer to Jesus, and He will see to the fruit.

John 15:8 shows us the goal of abiding in Christ. The goal is to bring glory to God. We begin to see the full story of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, come together here. The goal of Scripture, the goal of Christ's coming, and our life's purpose is to glorify God. When we are connected to Jesus, obey His words, and submit ourselves to Him, He will produce His fruit in us.

Finally, when we think about abiding, it is important to control what we can control. We cannot produce fruit on our own, but we can stay connected to the Vine. We cannot try harder to be more faithful, but we can control our schedule. We can control our time. Abiding in Jesus is placing Him in the center. When we construct our lives around Him, we are bringing God glory. This is why Bible reading, prayer, worship, and so many other daily disciplines and habits are essential to our health. They are not in themselves life-giving, but they do create the space for us to connect to the Life-giver. Yes, and amen!

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Think about the image of resting in Christ's love. What is your response to this powerful truth?
- 2) If "without Jesus, we can do nothing," why do we try to do so much in our own strength?
- 3) "I have limits. I am insufficient for the task. I need rest." Reflect on these statements together.
- 4) Discuss a time when you felt "barren" (not producing fruit). What was that experience like? What did you learn about Jesus during that time?

AT- HOME SCRIPTURE: John 3:1-21

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study John 3:1-21. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Spend some time thinking about all of the activities you do during the week. Which activities do you rely on Jesus for His strength? Which activities do you rely on your strength? Where is your opportunity to grow? Prayerfully seek the Lord's help as you learn to fully abide in Him.

3) If our first priority is to remain connected to the Vine, what are some ways that you can do that in your life? Write down 3-5 activities you can do that help you stay connected to Jesus. Are you doing these currently or do you need to re-order your schedule to allow time for them? Cut the things that are keeping you from abiding!

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LESSON TWO:

THE FRUIT OF ABIDING

INTRODUCTION: Jesus offers us this guarantee in John 15: If we abide in Him, we will bear fruit. He knows what He's talking about. We can trust Him.

Some of the fruit that Jesus produces in us is consistent and constant. As we are united to Christ, we will take on His character in our lives (think the fruit of the Spirit); these "interior" indicators of our relationship with Him will remain consistent. However, these interior fruits will not stay interior. They tend to be noticed by others. And as God works in us, He will begin to work through us.

We also produce exterior fruits that may be seasonal (Great Commission work, discipling relationships, evangelism, service, etc.). In some seasons, we may enjoy greater levels of exterior fruit production, but we may experience little to no production in other seasons.

Yet, we have to return again and again to the truth of the previous lesson: we cannot produce fruit in and of ourselves. We can try. We can work harder. But without the life of Jesus in us, we will not create the fruit of Christ. Whatever fruit we produce will be bad fruit. Remember that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing (John 15:5), but as Dallas Willard once wrote, "If we do nothing, it will be apart from Him."

I. FRUITFULNESS IS POSITIONAL

READ ALOUD: John 15:1-17: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean



because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How do we know someone is a disciple/follower of Jesus? How do we balance accounting for the fruit we can see and the fruit we can’t see?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Being a disciple means being united to Christ, and Jesus shows us the way to know that we are his disciples. Our fruitfulness shows our position (John 15:8; Matthew 7:15-20). No fruit? Not a disciple. Bad fruit? Someone who is working through their own power. Of course, we cannot achieve perfection. Jesus can and will continue to use us, despite our imperfections, as He continues to form us over our lives. Thanks be to God.

As we learn to rest in the Vine’s love, we will be learning submission

and obedience to Jesus. Jesus will sustain us as we abide in Him by our obedience (John 15:10). We obey Him from a heart of love (and not out of duty). We obey out of our relationship with Him. Indeed, we will walk as Jesus walked when we walk in obedience. In John 6:57, Jesus says, “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” When we feed on Christ, the Bread of Life, we will live. How do we consume the Bread of Life? By doing the things that He has taught us to do. That means we must be students of the Word of God. We know. We trust. We obey.

This illustrates a principle for us called “transformation by indirection.” In our strength, we cannot produce the fruit of Jesus or experience transformation. That is the work of God in us, but we can participate in our transformation through our obedience. James Bryan Smith illustrates this by saying, “We do what we can in order to do what we cannot by our direct effort.” That means I cannot choose to change myself (my direct effort), but I can choose my actions (Bible reading or other disciplines). I can choose to change the way I think about God and myself. I can choose to participate in a community of believers. When we account for the things we can control and couple that with the Holy Spirit’s power (the One who does the heavy lifting for us), that is when we become fruitful and experience God’s transforming power. As Dallas Willard once said, “Grace is not opposed to our effort, but it is opposed to our earning.”

II. WHAT WILL WE SEE?

READ ALOUD: Galatians 5:19-26: Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not

become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What do you find most exciting about the Fruit of the Spirit? How has the Fruit of the Spirit in other people shown you more about God?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): We have discussed, at some length, that if we are connected to Jesus (the Vine), then we will produce fruit. The question is, what kinds of fruit should we expect to see?

Our passage from Galatians is a great place to start. Paul, following the example of Jesus, uses an illustration from the garden to discuss spiritual matters. In this list of nine Fruit of the Spirit, Paul is describing attitudes and actions of the people of God. Often, we are guilty of reading this list and cherry-picking the ones we like the best. For example, we would all like a little more love and joy, but gentleness and self-control can be for someone else. Notice, though, that Paul does not say the “Fruits” of the Spirit. He says fruit, singular. All nine are interconnected and interdependent. They all go together, and we cannot pick and choose. Some will come easily to us, but the ones we find the most difficult are the ones where God receives the most glory in our lives.

With this imagery of fruit, it is essential to remember that fruit grows gradually. It is not an overnight endeavor, and there are no magic bullets. Sometimes, we are blessed with spurts of growth, but this illustration represents the slow, sometimes invisible, development process. Whether fast or slow, in Christian life, we should expect to experience character transformation.

Specific to John 15, Jesus tells us four fruit from our abiding in Him: joy, love of God’s people and one another, growing dependence through union and friendship with God, and answered prayers. By anchoring ourselves in Jesus, we get to share in the joy and love that are hallmark descriptions of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Joy does not come from inside of us, by attaining anything, or by earning. In God’s Kingdom, joy comes only

through relationship with God. Everything else is a fleeting falsehood. In the same way, love that does not stem from relationship with God will prioritize the love of self and that which loves back. But Jesus shows us that love from God will result in a deep love of even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

We should also expect to sense a growing relational dependence through union and friendship with God (John 15:14-15). Out of this union, Jesus promises us in verse 16 that our prayers will be answered. Now, this is not willy-nilly, nor is it as we want. Alan Fadling, in his book, *The Unhurried Life*, describes answered prayers this way: “Answered prayers arrive in unexpected ways, not how we envision or dictate.” Indeed, answered prayers are an indication of our arrival on the journey of becoming like Jesus. When we are like Jesus, we will never pray anything that cannot be answered because abiding results in our will coinciding with God’s will (John 15:7, 16). When we know Jesus and His Word, we can truly pray, “Not my will, but yours.” And we can pray like Job, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21b).

III. PRUNING IS COMING

READ ALOUD: John 15:2: Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Have you ever experienced pruning? Was that process painful? Was the result worth the process?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): The last evidence of our abiding in Christ is that we will be pruned. Pruning is not a punishment. God is not angry when He is pruning us. It’s a necessity. If you’ve ever spent time in a garden, you will know that an untended, uncared-for, and unpruned plant will produce significantly less than a pruned plant. This is a process known as training. Look up images of trained apple trees. It’s quite marvelous. What is happening here? The gardener is training the plant to reroute their life in a more significant, fruitful way. When we are experiencing God’s pruning, He is training us to reroute our spiritual life. He cuts off the unnecessary. He trims back any diseased branches. He removes the excess. He shapes us.

Sometimes, God uses the realities of life to prune us. Pruning could occur in outward realities (the loss of relationships, positions, possessions, opportunities, etc.) or inward realities (loss of dreams, hopes, expectations, awareness of God, etc.). Pruning never feels good, and in the moment, it certainly does not feel fruitful. Many times, from our narrow vantage point, pruning may feel wholly removed from spiritual growth or fruitfulness of any kind.

Sometimes, pruned things are “good” things, but they are not good for us. Alan Fadling again: “I think sometimes pruning is the experience of God taking away from us something we thought was very fruitful but was, in fact, keeping us from being as fruitful as we could be.” Jan Johnson describes pruning as the “work of the Spirit to remove hindrances from a person’s heart, cleansing their thoughts, or even taking away sinful tendencies” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Will we submit ourselves to God’s pruning?

There is an essential truth to pruning: the pruned branch must grow closer to the Vine in order to receive new life, heal, and thus become more fruitful. Let us draw nearer to Jesus, and He will see to the fruit.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How do you respond to the idea that union with God is not only possible but likely as we abide in Christ?
- 2) What does abiding in Christ look like in your life?
- 3) Which Fruit of the Spirit is your greatest opportunity for growth?
- 4) Discuss the idea of “transformation by indirection.” Do you agree with this idea?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Psalm 62:1-8; Galatians 5:16-26

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Psalm 62:1-8 and Galatians 5:16-26. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity

Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) One of the fundamental ways the Holy Spirit speaks to us is through the Bible. Daily engagement is critical to our spiritual health. A helpful way of keeping God's Word close is by memorization. The Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance the truth of Scripture, but we must take up the discipline of memorization. How can you begin doing this in your life? Try starting with a single verse.

3) Take an inventory of the Fruit of the Spirit and the role they play in your life? Where are you strongest? Where are you weakest? Choose one and ask the Holy Spirit to help you begin to develop this Fruit. You'll be surprised at the opportunities to use this new muscle.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON THREE: CONTENTMENT

INTRODUCTION: The opening words of David's beloved Psalm 23 have been read through generations worldwide at funerals, weddings, dedications, and kids' church services. If we aren't careful, our familiarity with this verse can cause us to miss the gift it bears: contentment. Because Jesus is our Shepherd, we must be His sheep. If we are His, we have no want or lack. Perfect contentment.

But doesn't the phrase, "I shall not want," fly in the face of the basic cry of humanity to be satisfied?

We want. We want more. More success. More validation. More of what we feel we deserve. We dislike where we are—wanting affirmation, status, and whatever else makes us feel like our lives count. "If I had more; if I measured up; if I could be like another person...then I would be content."

We can play this flesh song on repeat: Life disappoints us because it's not enough, and we disappoint ourselves because we aren't enough. A hungry black hole called discontentment swells in the very core of our flesh, keeping us from satisfaction and keeping us from growing in Christ. Our deficit, rooted in pride, whines, "I deserve to be more." Our demand is never satisfied. It tires us out and blinds us to our increasing rebellion towards our Father, who wants to give us good gifts.

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My sheep" (John 10:14a). Jesus looks after us with great care, knowing our wants and needs yet leading us toward what is truly best for us. He gently prods us with humanly impossible yet nourishing directives: "Don't want." "Don't worry." "Trust Me." His way causes our contentment to bloom and God's will to flourish.



In contrast, when we ignore His instructions, we foster discontentment, igniting Satan's plans for our journey. Jesus is calling us to be satisfied with Him as our Good Shepherd. He is the only one who made us, knows us, calls us by name, and who can cause us to say, "I shall not want!"

I. CONTENT WITH WHAT WE HAVE

READ ALOUD: Psalm 23:1-2: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What are some roadblocks to being content with what you have?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): All of us can probably see barriers to satisfaction in our lives, but have we discovered what causes us to feel discontented? Ask the Lord to reveal any sin keeping you from receiving His gift of contentment. Scripture tells us roadblocks that rob us of the great gain that comes with godly contentment.

- **Fear:**

The stronghold of fear houses and feeds the monster of discontentment. We arrive on earth needy, fleshly, hungry. On day one, we begin to claw and grasp for enough and for independence. As adults, the need only grows. We fear that who we are and what we have will never be enough to comfort us. And we are right.

The remedy for this basic, overpowering fear is found in Matthew 6:25-34. The cure is believing Jesus' words when He says we have a loving heavenly Father who is able to care and provide for us. He knows our needs before we ask. Fear imprisons our faith and keeps us from believing He is good enough to satisfy us.

Are you afraid He won't care for you? Are you worried and caught in the trap of thinking your needs can be met by your human striving? It's good to ask God if some of our "needs" may be our opinion of how our

provision should look. When we abide in Christ, He supplies our true need.

Prayer: Lord, show us how to trust You to determine our needs and fill them. As we seek You first, thank You that all “these things” will be added to us.

- **Pride:**

We can be blind to rugged, untamed mountains of pride and selfishness in our hearts that we have unknowingly protected. These areas block the growth of contentment. In selfish pride, we survey our work and compare ourselves to others to our detriment. Based on our observations of ourselves and others, we decide that we aren’t getting what we deserve. We imagine we have been cheated. Wanting more becomes right to us because it is our “right.” We build a roadblock with our own hands, forbidding our hearts to rest in how God has chosen to provide for us.

Our relief for selfish pride is to read and consider the call of Philippians 4:10-13. Living with a whole-hearted love for and trust in Christ will bring humility, opening our eyes to the God who made us and knows the blueprint of our lives. Paul was able to live content in whatever situation he found himself in because of God’s strength through Christ (vv. 12-13).

Prayer: Lord, we repent of selfish pride. Forgive us for trying to live our lives in our own strength. We choose to trust You and live in Your strength instead of our own.

- **Jealousy:**

Jealousy is a vicious sin that keeps us far away from the care of the Good Shepherd. We see other’s successes displayed proudly on social media (all completely believable, right?), and we unknowingly compare ourselves to them. We redefine “needs” based on what someone else was given—discontentment rages.

Hebrews 13:5-6 speaks directly to our broken perspectives and instructs us, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear.’”

Prayer: Lord, we repent for being consumed with jealousy. Reveal to us that the pursuit of You is all we need. You know and provide for us, and

You are near. In You, Christ, we find the only source of contentment.

- Love for the World:

The Bible speaks of a “Love for the world.” Without realizing, our hearts are led slowly into darkness by wants and desires. We fall in love with the world, thinking like the world and wanting to achieve the world’s approval. 1 John 2:15-17 reads, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Prayer: Father, we replace our misguided love for a passing world with the words of Jesus in Mark 12:30: Lord, help us to “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul[s], with all [our] mind[s], and with all [our] strength.”

II. CONTENT WITH WHERE I AM

READ ALOUD: Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Have you ever wanted God to move you somewhere else? Why?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Many of us have decided, at some point, that we want to be somewhere different than where we are. Maybe even today, the place where we find ourselves is painful, confusing, or unjust.

At times we want to change where we are because of challenges or difficulties. At times we may feel mediocre. Perhaps we don’t like where we are because we’re looking back, believing the past was better. Maybe we don’t like where we are because we imagine greener pastures somewhere “out there.” The truth is, we are where we are, and God wants to teach us here. We may want to get away so badly that we refuse lessons He

is teaching now. The places where we experience the most profound dissatisfaction are often the very spots God will use to change our lives and teach us lasting lessons.

Prayer: Lord, teach us what You want to teach us right where we are. We don't ask to get out or get away. You know what we need. Give us the grace to trust You wholeheartedly. We "trust in the Lord with all [our] heart[s]... [knowing] He shall direct [our] paths."

III. CONTENT WITH WHO I AM

READ ALOUD: Philippians 3:12-14: Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

4:10-13: But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): One of the fastest-growing industries in the world is the self-improvement business. Why do you think this industry is growing so quickly?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): From an estimated value of \$5.5B in 2016 to a projected valuation of \$56.6B by 2027, the self-improvement market is thriving, particularly among millennials. From life coaches and personal trainers to motivational podcasts and self-affirming routines, we are drowning in ways to become our "best self." Stop and ask, "When will I be good enough to feel good about myself?"

According to the Apostle Paul, we are to be changing from glory to glory. In

So how can we handle the impossible challenges every day and the many relentless demands for which we are “not enough”? We weigh ourselves on the scale of “enough-ness.” Our concerns and lack outweigh our grand attempts. Hope fades, and the dark cloud of discontent takes hold. Our hearts grumble, “If only I were more, had that degree, were smarter, were prettier... If only.” We search to be enough in the reflection of a self-improvement culture instead of the glory of Christ. His glory outweighs our lack. We must grow in His glory, not ours.

Ask the Good Shepherd to step into your search for satisfaction and declare over your life, “I [God] am enough.” His glorious abundance melts frailty and neediness, revealing His sufficiency to cover all our inadequacies, known and unknown. Abiding in Christ dispels want and leads to true rest. He is the power in you to face your days. He is enough; He is “I am.” In Him, we are whole and content.

When we believe God will lead us and provide, contentment grows naturally. He closes the canyon of lack, and our contentment, won by Christ, brings Him glory and brings us true rest.

No matter what comes, we can say, “The Lord is My Shepherd! I want nothing!”

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How do you define contentment?
- 2) What barriers to contentment do you see in your life?
- 3) Share about a time when you wanted something you thought would bring contentment, but instead, it left you dissatisfied.
- 4) How does abiding in Christ lead to contentment?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Colossians 4:2-6; Psalm 34:1-10

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Paul lived a contented life because of the strength He received from Christ (Philippians 4:11). However, that doesn't mean he waited passively, hoping God would fill him with power to overcome temptations like jealousy or pride. Read Philippians 4:8-13 and consider how meditating on the things of God (things that are true, noble, etc.) could have been a way Paul grew into contentment. Then, ask how following Paul's teaching in verses 8-9 might help you develop contentment in Christ.

2) The way you speak about people will affect your ability to be content. Colossians 4:6 reminds us to, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt..." This week, pay attention to how you talk to and about others, and practice being gracious in your speech. Choose your words carefully and refuse to use words that wound, tear down, or discourage. Finally, pay attention to how your attitude is affected by your speech, and ask God to use this act of obedience to shape your heart.

3) To become content with who we are, we must begin to discover our true identity as a beloved son or daughter of God. One of the most significant ways we do that is by modeling Christ's practice of solitude. Author Adele Calhoun notes, "Throughout his three years of ministry, Jesus returned again and again to solitude, where the rush of attention and the accolades of the crowds could be put into their proper perspective. Solitude with God was a way Jesus remained in touch with his true identity in God." Give yourself 30 minutes of solitude this week. Walk, drive, watch a sunset and be with God. Give Him space to speak to you about who you are to Him. ask to get out or get away. You know what we need. Give us the grace to trust You wholeheartedly. We "trust in the Lord with all [our] heart[s]...[knowing] He shall direct [our] paths."

THE JOURNEY

LESSON FOUR: SABBATH REST

INTRODUCTION: Before we were tired, God gave us rest. He created the world in six days, and on the seventh day, He rested (Genesis 2:2). God created Adam on day six. On the first full day of Adam's existence, God modeled for him, and us, the priority of Sabbath rest, a day God designated as holy. The first mention of the word holy in Scripture is about time. It is about holiness in time.

In Exodus, when God engraved the fourth commandment on the stone tablets at Mount Sinai, He called upon Israel to observe the Sabbath day as holy. He set the commandment in the context of creation, reminding them to follow His example of rest (Exodus 20:8-11). He is the Creator God. We are the work of His hands. God is complete without rest. For us, rest is vital.

The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians that the Sabbath day is a "shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (2:17, NIV). In Jesus, we find the fulfillment of Sabbath rest. When we believe in Him by faith, He gives us positional rest in the gift of eternal life. He also invites us to experience rest as we are disciplined by Him and engage in service on His behalf.

Rather than being a legalistic rule to observe, Sabbath-keeping is an orientation to life in Christ. It's a heart motivation of trusting Him. It is also a literal call to rest our vessels of clay. In Sabbath-keeping, we are not consumed by time. Instead, we observe a holy pause for a holy purpose. Sabbath-keeping is a lifestyle in the easy yoke Jesus offers.



I. HIS EASY YOKE

READ ALOUD: Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV): “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why do you think Jesus uses the imagery of a yoke in Matthew 11:28-30? How can a burden be light? What is easy about a yoke?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): “Come to Me” is Christ’s invitation to enter a personal relationship with Him. Imagine the impact of this bidding on the people of His day. Christ says to them, “Come.” The rabbinical leaders said to them, “Do.” They placed on the people an unbearable yoke of the law and traditions that were impossible to keep.

“Come” is Christ’s summons to the spiritually burdened, the weary and exhausted ones, fainting under the heavy load of religion. He extends His invitation to those who are burned out by self-centered striving, religious performance, and the demands of time. Jesus offers His easy yoke to all of God’s people. When we come to Christ by faith, He gives us rest. When we answer His invitation to “take His yoke,” He leads us into rest.

Jesus uses a familiar image from work in the fields. The yoke was a significant item for a family. It went across the necks of beasts of burden, just in front of their shoulders, and connected them to a plow or wagon. It was carved from a single piece of wood, taking care to match the animal’s size and shape. For a team of oxen, each side was a perfect fit for each ox. The yoke that fit one animal would not be used for a different one.

Since Jesus was a carpenter in His earlier years, He understood the necessity for perfectly-fitting yokes. Otherwise, the yoke would chaff the animal, causing sores, infection, and possibly death. The yoke allowed an ox to perform to its highest capability. It made work more manageable and multiplied results.

Jesus has a particular yoke He offers each of us. His yoke is easy, meaning well-fitting. He doesn't give us a one-size-fits-all yoke. His relationship with each of His followers is uniquely theirs, as unique as their DNA.

II. YOKED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CHRIST

READ ALOUD: Ephesians 2:10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Have you ever been paired with a difficult coworker? What were the results of that challenging situation?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): In Christ's easy yoke, we are not excused from work. We are given assignments we are to accomplish in partnership with Him. Work done in His strength is fulfilling. Wherever God sends us, whatever He asks us to do fits our needs and our abilities perfectly. His yoke is made to measure. His will is not heavy, and His "commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Jesus tells us what the "Come" is all about in Matthew 11:27. "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." In life in the easy yoke, we hear the Holy Spirit testify to us about Jesus. We develop intimacy with Him rooted in knowing Him.

Christ invites us to a life of discipleship, one of learning from Him and His example of humility and gentleness. Taking His yoke requires surrender and trust. Learning from Him leads to maturity and deeper peace. In His easy yoke, our desires and dreams become simplified and unified around Jesus Christ. He helps us become what we could never become without Him. He offers us the matchless paradox of a light burden in His easy yoke.

He bids us, "Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace" (Matthew 11:29, MSG).

III. THE RHYTHM OF ENGAGEMENT AND RETREAT

READ ALOUD: Psalm 23:2b: He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What are some challenges in modern society that keep us from rest? What images do you associate with rest?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus lived the unforced rhythm of grace in His life on earth, and He taught His disciples to do the same. On one occasion, Jesus sent His disciples on a preaching mission. It was a huge success. They preached the message of repentance, drove out demons, and healed the sick. When they returned, they were excited to tell Jesus about all they had done and taught. One wonders if the disciples, caught up in their success, wanted to go out again. But Jesus understood what they needed. “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while” (See Mark 6:31).

Jesus knew from experience and practice that a poured-out time of ministry needs a pouring-in time of retreat. Notice in Mark 6:31-46 how rest preceded and followed the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Retreat. Engagement. Retreat.

We need rest, too. It must be built into our lives. Our modern time-saving devices, meant to save us time, often end up stealing time. Society pressures us to be productive 24/7. Social Media tempts us. Frenetic schedules drive us. We are infected with hurry. The number one enemy of spiritual formation today is exhaustion. We are running out of breath.

The common phrase, “I need to catch my breath,” has a biblical basis. More than once in Scripture, the act of rest is associated with breathing. In one case, it means “recovery of breath.” In two other places, it is associated with Sabbath and means “to breathe; to blow.” Sabbath-keeping invites us to a life of alternation between drawing breath in the place of quiet and rest with

Jesus and then exhaling the love of Christ to the world (Galatians 5:6).

Our spiritual journey must involve ebb and flow, engagement and retreat. It is in the ebb where the lessons of the last season take root. It is where God gives strategy for the next pouring out. “To be spiritually healthy, we must ruthlessly eliminate hurry,” said Christian philosopher Dallas Willard.

CONCLUSION:

Sabbath means to stop, pause, cease, desist. So, it’s okay to take a nap, take a walk, play a while, or do absolutely nothing. In the pause and stillness, God heals us, restores us, transforms us, imparts to us. Our bodies and souls are unified. If our bodies suffer, so do our souls. Everything we do in our lives, including the practice of spiritual formation, we do in our bodies. If our bodies are not sufficiently rested, our energies will be diminished, and our ability to pray, read the Bible, enter solitude, or memorize Scripture will be minimized.

Sabbath-keeping is an attitude of living that David captures in Psalm 131:2. By implication, he contrasts the weaned child with the un-weaned child. If you are familiar with the fretting demands of an un-weaned child, you have a compelling picture of the difference.

Psalm 131 is a psalm of trust. The Psalmist has calmed his soul, meaning he has “literally leveled his mind, as if plowing the ground to receive seed. It is a traveling-through-life-Psalm for pilgrim people.

Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Put this tiny verse on a continuous loop in your heart. Observe the holy in your time. Encounter Jesus. Rest in Him. Wear His easy yoke. It is made to fit!

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What would the ideal form of Sabbath look like in your life? How effective are you with implementing this rest?
- 2) What keeps you from Sabbath?
- 3) Why do you think we often work out of our own strength and ability instead of partnering with the easy yoke of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) Talk about some ways you can better implement Sabbath into your life.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Matthew 11:25-30; Ephesians 2

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study the At-Home Scriptures: Matthew 11:25-30 and Ephesians 2. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Give yourself a full 24 hours of Sabbath rest this week. Use this time to worship, nap, play, be present with people, relax, enjoy God's creation or anything else that joyfully connects you with God and others. Focus on bringing glory to God by trusting Him with all the areas where you usually strive: your time, relationships, finances, and success.
- 3) Pause and practice the "Palms Down, Palms Up" prayer anytime you detect feelings of stress. First, find a quiet setting and place your palms down as a symbol of your desire to surrender your concerns, frustrations, and anxieties to God. For example, you may silently pray, 'Lord, I give you the fear I have about this month's bills' or 'Father, I release the anger I feel toward my coworker.' After a few moments, turn your palms up as you ask the Lord to fill you with what He has for you. Receive His love, His peace, His faithfulness, and His words. Instead of asking for specific things, take this time to rest in Him.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON FIVE:

ABIDING LEADS TO MISSION

INTRODUCTION:One of the first questions a stranger might ask a new acquaintance is, “Where do you live?” Why do you suppose knowing that bit of information is so important? Surely it is because the place a person chooses as his habitat reveals much about his personality, self-image, values, and priorities.

As you read through the Old Testament, you discover that God also was greatly concerned with providing a suitable dwelling place for His people. This theme runs throughout Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, and other Old Testament books.

Not only did God prepare a permanent place where the Israelites could live in peace, but He also established His own earthly dwelling place right in their midst. First, on their journey from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land, God set up camp in a portable tabernacle. Later, when His people had an abiding presence in the land God had promised to give them, He allowed King Solomon to construct a more permanent abode for His glory to reside in a magnificent Temple. His majestic presence rested above the Mercy Seat in a veiled chamber known as the Holy of Holies.

The image of God living in the midst of His people is a foreshadowing of His redemptive plan through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Now, instead of residing in a tent, tabernacle, or temple, He sets up residence in the hearts of His children. Not only does He live in us, but we are also urged to find an abiding refuge in Him.

In His closing discourse to His disciples and to us, Jesus uses a familiar metaphor to elucidate His desire for us to stay continually connected to Him. He also clarified



what the results of that connection, or disconnection, would be.

I. STAYING CONNECTED

READ ALOUD: John 15:5-6: “I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Find two verbs in these two verses you consider to be the key to the metaphor of the Vine and branches. Explain why you chose those words.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Certainly, the verbs abide and bear (fruit) are keywords in the passage. To “abide” is to live, continue, or remain; so, to abide in Christ is to live in Him or remain in such a close relationship that you can hear His heartbeat. In the English language, abiding communicates a sense of longevity. For instance, a person might say, “I have an abiding love for you.” It isn’t a temporary position or fleeting emotion.

How does one maintain that connectivity to the Vine? The first step is simply being still before God. The silence allows us to hear the Lord speak to us through His Word, which is alive and active and exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. As we meditate on Him and His Word, we learn more about Him and what He expects of us as fruit-bearing disciples.

Studying the Word of God with sincerity also helps us discover who we are. It is like looking into a magnifying mirror for the first time. It reveals the façades behind which we try to hide our true selves—our motives, selfish thoughts, and hidden agendas. These revelations may be discomfiting, but they are part of the pruning process that prepares us for our mission as His disciples.

II. CALLED TO MISSION

READ ALOUD: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): By what process does a branch bear fruit?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): How does a branch bear fruit? The branch “lives” in the Vine in a silent and undisturbed union. It is not productive because of its incessant efforts of reaching for the sunshine, nor by vain struggles. The branch draws its life and productivity from the Vine. Without the Vine, the branch is totally fruitless. It must remain connected through storms and on sunny days, through droughts, and in plenty.

Jesus emphasized that abiding involves our response to His teachings: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you” (John 15:7). The Apostle Paul echoes this thought in Colossians 3:16, where he writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” From that indwelling Word, we receive our sense of mission.

But what about the statement, “you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you”? At first read, that may sound to you like a risky promise. But look carefully. God is not issuing us a blank check for our indiscriminate use. The verse has two halves—a condition and a result. The condition: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you.” The result: “Ask [in prayer] whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”

Read on: Any fruit-bearing mission is for God’s glory, not yours. God’s purpose in answering the prayers of those abiding in Him is to support and supply the mission to which He is calling them. He wants them and their mission to succeed. If they are not devoted to fruit-bearing, they have no reason to expect answers to prayer.

III. MISSION: POSSIBLE

READ ALOUD: 1 Peter 2:9-10: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): How do you define the word mission?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Some believers shudder at the prospect of being called into missions. That is usually because their understanding of the word “mission” is too narrow. They define it as a God-given assignment to “forsake all” and go into foreign nations and spread the gospel. That interpretation certainly is included in the Great Commission the Lord gave His disciples and us: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

But mission includes broader meaning than “going.” It also includes “sending” and, in some cases, “staying.” Before His ascension into heaven, the Lord told His disciples to go into Jerusalem and wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When He comes, the Lord said, “You shall receive power...and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Jerusalem was local, Judea and Samaria were national, and the ends of the earth were global.” Each disciple would be commissioned, but their fields of service would vary from hometown to worldwide ministry.

Wherever and to whatever ministry we are called, we must realize our productivity as fruit-bearing branches is possible only as we abide (live) in the True Vine. Jesus’ words are still true: “Without Me, you can do nothing.”

Think of the word commission as co-mission. The prefix co comes from Latin: meaning jointly or together. This meaning is found in such words as coworker or copilot. Now consider that meaning in connection to the metaphor of the Vine and the branches. As we remain in the Vine, receiving our sustenance for Him, we become co-laborers together with Him (see 2 Corinthians 6:1). The mission is His. We are simply invited to work alongside Him in its completion.

CONCLUSION:

The film series Mission: Impossible launched in the 90s. It soon became a huge success among viewers who enjoy spine-tingling spy thrillers. The mission to which God has called His disciples is the polar opposite. It is Mission: Possible when we abide in Him. The mission may prove to be thrilling, and it may or may not involve death-defying feats of courage. It does, however, require total commitment to the kingdom of God and the cause of Christ.

So, where do you live spiritually? As a disciple of Jesus Christ (a branch), are you staying connected to the Vine? That is a place of security; it's a place of service; it's a place of fruitfulness. That place of union with God has been His plan for His people throughout human history.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What does living out God's mission for your life entail?
- 2) Does being on mission for Christ overwhelm or intimidate you? How, so?
- 3) Knowing that a branch being connected to the vine gives it the ability to bear fruit, how does abiding in Christ "lighten the load" of being fruitful in our Christian journey?
- 4) What does fruitfulness or bearing fruit look like to you?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Psalm 37:3-6; 1 Peter 2:1-12

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Read Psalm 37:3-6 once everyday this week. Note the connection between abiding (being) and working (doing). Journal your observations from this passage and your response to God's Word. Use what you notice to write a prayer that you can recite, especially when you need to understand His will.

2) Discernment, the ability to hear the Holy Spirit's voice, is both a spiritual gift and a mark of a growing Christian. If you need direction, invite others to help you discern God's voice. Together, ask God to give you wisdom and wait quietly for His response. Here are some questions to help you get started: (1) What do I need to be reminded of that God has already shown me about who I am and where He is calling me? (2) What opportunities has God put in my life that He wants me to notice? (3) How is God calling me to trust Him right now? (4) How am I currently experiencing His love?

3) It's exciting to think about the mission God has for us, and He does indeed have good work for us that builds His Kingdom and brings Him glory. That work happens most often in the ordinary interactions with those He has placed in our lives (see Matthew 22:36-40). So, as you go through your day, focus on being fully present in your conversations. Look people in the eye, listen more than you talk, and pray for them. Ask God to help you see others as He sees them and embrace the ministry of loving well the people in your everyday life.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SIX: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

INTRODUCTION: Jesus told the story about an ill-fated traveler on a 15-mile stretch of road between Jerusalem and Jericho. His use of the phrase “a certain man” indicates that this parable was recounting an actual incident that more than likely had occurred in the present tense.

During that time, Herod’s Temple had been completed, and unemployment was epidemic. Forty thousand men had just been laid off from their jobs, and some researchers estimate that at least 12,000 thieves roamed the hills surrounding Jerusalem. Many of these were good men, upstanding citizens, who were desperate to provide for their families.

Down this highway through the hills came the traveler. Suddenly, he was confronted by thieves who robbed, beat, and left him for dead. As he lay beside the road, two religious leaders came along, looked at him, and walked on by. A Samaritan man, an outcast by birth and despised by most people, stopped to offer assistance. “Who was the real neighbor?” Jesus asked. It doesn’t take a genius to come to a conclusion.

The greatest question is not “Who is my neighbor?” but “Am I a good neighbor?” In this story, we will discover how willing we are to become involved in the greatest ministry God ever gave us—the saving of a soul.

There are numerous ways to evangelize. First is the method of simple confrontation: “Are you at a place where you know for sure that if you died you would go to heaven?” The second way of evangelizing is by leading people to Christ in spiritual church services. Then, there is a type of evangelism in the home and in the community that involves one’s lifestyle. But sooner or later, in order to be obedient



to Christ, we must begin to win persons to Christ.

Dr. D. James Kennedy said, “It has been estimated that probably 95 percent of American church members have never led anyone to Christ.” We have become experts in singing, acting, preaching, teaching, and church business, but we lack personal evangelism.

Jesus came specifically to win the lost: “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Our aim should be nothing less. I pray that this lesson will vault us into a ministry of soul winning.

I. EVANGELIZE YOUR FAMILY

READ ALOUD: Luke 10:30-35: Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why do you think Jesus used the words “came where he was” in the parable? Do you think Jesus wants us to be selective in our ministry? Why or why not? Just a thought: We must consider that we cannot predict where a prospective convert will be. We must be willing to meet them at any place and any time.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Members of one’s family can be a major evangelism field. They are souls, and they are going to spend eternity in one of two places: heaven or hell. They are the people with whom you grew up; therefore, they know all of your strengths and weaknesses. That

is why it is often difficult to win one's family. Satan likes to shackle us and keep us from witnessing to our loved ones.

My wife, Fay, is the best example I know of a family member leading a loved one to Christ. She was 12 years old when she accepted Christ at a Vacation Bible School. Immediately she felt compelled to tell her mother what had happened and to pray for her. Although her mother did not immediately respond, the Holy Spirit kept dealing with her for over a year.

One night at an evangelistic service, Fay's mother gave her life to Christ. Later, she said, "I should have been the one leading you, but you led me to the Lord." In this case, a young teen met the need of a "neighbor," her own mother.

When you yield your life to Christ, He will let your life touch others around you. For that to happen, however, you should know the Scriptures and live its principles. And your prayer life should include those of your own household. Never do anything that would mar or weaken your testimony.

II. EVANGELIZE YOUR NEIGHBORS

READ ALOUD: Proverbs 3:28: Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it," when you have it with you.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Why do you think the scribe asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): When the scribe asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. We miss the impact of the story if we do not realize the irony of that question. Any scribe would have known the verse, "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go and come back, and tomorrow I will give it; when you have it with you'" (Proverbs 3:28). Surely he knew this verse, yet he hurls it at Jesus.

The scribe used the Hebrew term *rea'ka*, a word which was not limited to a next-door neighbor, a close friend, someone in my village, or one from

my clan who resembles me. The root rea' is broad. It is the second party in any relationship. How many times have we asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Skip Moen says it is anyone God has brought to us in His providence.

A neighbor may not be someone I like or value more than others. It is anyone in need whom God sends to have an encounter with me. God may give me a divine encounter with someone across the street who is hurting. That someone probably needs to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. A neighbor means one brought to you by two things: need and divine encounter. Moen again: "Whenever I become aware of this, I stand before the heavenly throne as 'God's emissary of goodwill.'"

A neighbor can be one with any kind of need—physical, emotional, bodily, personal—or one who needs the forgiveness of Christ. You need to help get him or her ready for heaven. There is no tomorrow, so to speak, when God moves upon you for that supreme eternal moment. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2, KJV). What that person has seen in you can come to total fruition and reality if you move to the point where you can talk with him and "go and bind up his wounds" and give him the answer for his need. God has more than likely placed him in your path so you could lead him to Christ. It is a divine appointment because He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

If you will make a move to that person, they will listen. In my experience, I have never had anyone tell me not to pray for them. Nor have I ever had anybody refuse to listen when I told them how they could receive the gift of everlasting life. People are hungry for salvation.

Do not rationalize this divine moment. Do not defer this time of leading that person to Christ. For when we do, we sin. It is as simple as that, for the Scripture says, "To him, that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17, KJV).

A neighbor who is in need of everlasting life is going to be brought before you. Nothing is greater than what you are going to give him, or should we say, nothing is greater than Who you are going to give him—Jesus Christ.

III. EVANGELIZE DIFFERENT PEOPLE

READ ALOUD: 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV): God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does this passage of Scripture mean to you?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): This section, though difficult, is one of the most important of all in evangelism.

Different kinds of people populate our world. We are from different sociological, educational, and racial backgrounds, and it may seem difficult to connect with them.

Interestingly, Jesus used the phrase “by chance” when He mentioned the two religious people who came upon the fallen man left for dead. The words by chance could be defined as a “God-planned opportunity” or a “divine appointment.”

Have you ever had God prepare a “by chance” or “divine encounter” for you? I have experienced it many times. Usually, it is totally unexpected, but the outcome is so overwhelming that it is difficult to understand God’s goodness.

I have had people, young and old, respond quickly to the invitation to become saved or accept the gift of everlasting life. The Lord came to die so that all men could repent and receive the gift of everlasting life.

With your wonderful lifestyle, if you could befriend an individual and then pray for the Lord to give you the words when He opens the door for you to talk to him about his soul, you probably would find yourself in a beautiful

situation, and he would accept Christ.

CONCLUSION:

You must know how to ask a person, “Are you at a place spiritually where you know for certain that if you died today, you would go to heaven?” And then a second question: “Suppose you died today, and you stood before God, how would you answer if He asked you, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” Would your answer be like most other people: “I’m a good person,” or “I go to church,” or “I keep the 10 Commandments”?

Regardless of their answer, if they do not understand the forgiving power of Christ, you will be able to give them a short outline and lead them to salvation. That outline includes five points: Grace, Man, God, Christ, Faith. These will help you to change the lives of countless people who are lost and are waiting for you, or someone like you, to come and win them.

You should have two things that would help you to become a lifestyle soul winner:

- 1) A passion for souls. You must want them to go to heaven, and you must want to help them get there.
- 2) Never lose sight of the fact that it is difficult in most cases to show a person that you are interested in their soul when they are hungry or hurting, or they need one of life’s basic necessities.

These two go hand-in-hand, and if you have them, your passion will reach the person every time.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Is evangelism and telling the unsaved about Jesus something you prioritize in your life?
- 2) What keeps believers from being bold concerning evangelism? Do you think these barriers are the same throughout the world?
- 3) Talk about some practical ways you can be more intentional to implement evangelism into your everyday life.

4) Do you feel equipped to evangelize? How does abiding in Christ help us with this?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:1-24

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) D.L. Moody faithfully prayed every day for the same 100 people to come to Christ. Miraculously, 96 of those people became Christians before Moody died, and the last four were converted at his funeral. Make a list of people (neighbors) who do not yet know Jesus. Commit to consistently pray for those people and for God to show you how you can be a part of their journey to faith.

2) The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) follows on the heels of Jesus sending out seventy-two new disciples (Luke 10:1-24.) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study these two passages together. Ask God to show you how they are connected and how they strengthen one another. Prayerfully consider what the Lord wants to teach you from these passages about sharing the Gospel.

3) The discipline of service—modeling Christ’s lifestyle of service (Matthew 20:28)—is a powerful sign to our “neighbors” of God’s love for them. Jesus unselfishly spent His days feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, loving the forgotten, and grieving with the brokenhearted. Ask God to show you how you can serve your neighbor and for the humility and courage to act when He calls. You never know how God may use your act of service to soften their heart for the Gospel.

THE JOURNEY

LESSON SEVEN:

THE HOLY SPIRIT & ABIDING

INTRODUCTION: The Apostle Paul found himself in the great city of Athens, ready to present his case for Christ to the philosophers, religious leaders, and scholars. In Acts 17:22-31, Paul used his words of persuasion and intellect to impress his listeners. He referred to their gods, including their altar to an unknown god, with the intent of pointing the crowd toward Jesus. Interestingly, only a few people became followers of Christ, and Paul did not establish a church in Athens. Yet, his mission there was not a failure; it became a learning experience for Paul.

In the very next chapter of Acts, we read about Paul entering Corinth. His approach was different this time, and we can see the difference in his words to the Corinthian Church in his first letter. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul writes:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech, or of wisdom declaring to the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Paul recognized that he could not rely on his own ability, style, education, background, or skill set. He learned he must depend upon, abide within, and trust the Holy Spirit to do the work.

I. ABIDING GIVES US POWER

READ ALOUD: Zechariah 4:6: So he answered and said to me: "This is the word



of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts."

Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witness to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Would you rather be without running water or electricity in your home for one week? (Most people would choose electricity over water. Why? Because we need our phones, computers, TVs, Internet/WiFi, and other devices in order to have power.)

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Our electronic world functions by power. Without power to our devices, we would be disconnected from what is currently happening globally. Our electronics allow us to watch online videos, receive breaking news, check our favorite team's current score, discover the recent rise and fall of the stock market, and much more without the need to wait until the newspaper is printed or the late local newscast airs. Power makes that happen.

In the spiritual context, the Christian also needs power. We need to remain connected to the power source, which is the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised we would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. The power is to help us become greater witnesses for Christ. Like Paul, we do not have to rely on persuasive words or excellent speech. On the contrary, we must rely on the Holy Spirit and the demonstration of His power.

In the Old Testament, God spoke to Zerubbabel through the prophet Zechariah. Zerubbabel was determined to rebuild the temple. Unfortunately, he was caught in the trap of discouragement, fear, and distraction. Things were not going as expected, and the work was at a standstill. People had abandoned the work of the temple and had begun construction on their own houses. They had even gotten comfortable with the fact the temple of the Lord was not being built. Some were saying, "Put it off to the next generation."



But the prophet Zechariah had a word for Zerubbabel that he would build the temple, but it would be, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Like Paul, Zerubbabel learned he needed the power of the Spirit to accomplish great things. And so do we.

II. ABIDING GIVES US AN ADVANTAGE

READ ALOUD: John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does it mean to have an advantage? If you had an advantage, would you use it?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Those who play video games will understand this: Up, Up, Right, Right, Square, Circle, Down, Left, Triangle, Start. The game controller is in your hand, and you just entered the cheat code. Regardless of the game, cheat codes can make you do things that seem impossible. NBA2K21 has a cheat code that gives the player the ability to make every shot. In Super Mario Bros., a certain cheat code gives the player 99 lives. Regardless of the game, hidden cheat codes can provide the player an advantage that the non-gamer would never know or experience.

The Holy Spirit is the Christian’s “cheat code.” Jesus made it clear that He had to return to the Father. His work on the cross was complete. He had defeated death, and His resurrection provided a way for believers to have abundant life (John 10:10). As Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to give us our advantage.

Why is it to our benefit that we take advantage of the advantage Jesus gave to us?

- He is our Helper (John 14:15-16, John 16:7)

We have the Holy Spirit, our Companion, to help us in our time of need. He provides wisdom and insight when we are unsure. He is available to help us in everything we do.

- He is our Teacher (John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit is not like a classroom teacher with a chalkboard and grade book, hoping you fail the class. On the contrary, He should be our favorite teacher because He wants what is best for our lives. The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will instruct you on how to live. He teaches us how to handle challenging situations, love our spouse, discipline our children, and lead with authority. He guides us in making and managing money, ministering to the broken, loving our neighbor, and so much more.

- He is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:16-17; John 15:26)

In a world where everyone seems to be following their own “truth,” we need the Holy Spirit to help us know the only truth. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth and protect you from the false religions and lies of the world. His truth does not lead to confusion or hopelessness. His truth leads to life everlasting.

READ ALOUD: Romans 14:17 “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): If you could design a kingdom of your own, what would it consist of? Work together as a group to brainstorm about this kingdom.

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Throughout The Journey, the goal is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. As His followers, we must understand that we are part of the Kingdom of God, and we have a role within that Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God consists of several components. These include a King, the King’s standard (rules or laws), and citizens of the Kingdom. The King has a standard by which the citizens are to live within the Kingdom.

Throughout the Old Testament, God gave His people (Israel) a list of rules or commandments: the Ten Commandments and additional laws. These rules clarified how a person was to worship God, interact with others, and conduct himself within the Kingdom. They even stipulated what an individual was allowed to eat.

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul makes the point that the Kingdom is more than following rules. It has a set of standards—yes. But just following a list of do's and don'ts does not change a person. The transformation takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the Kingdom of God as “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit empowers us to live by the King's standard.

- Righteousness:

Righteousness means one is in right standing with God. Of course, there are many interpretations of what right standing means. Jesus confronted those who thought they were in right standing—“the religious”—and called them white-washed tombs. They looked good on the outside, but nothing was alive or growing within them.

John 16:8 states, “And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

The role of the Holy Spirit is to point people to Christ. He is the key component of salvation. He convicts sinners of wrongful and sinful actions and moves them toward Christ.

- Peace:

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26) As followers of Christ, we will not always be in the limelight or on the mountaintop. There are valleys and difficult days, so we need the Holy Spirit to comfort us and bring us peace during our trials.

The Holy Spirit gives us peace amid our most dangerous storms. Hurricanes are dangerous storms that can wreak havoc and loss. We like to relate to storms when we are going through difficult times: a problematic marriage, issues with our children, jobs, money, anxiety, etc.

It is great to know that the Holy Spirit is with us in both our good times and challenging times. He provides us peace with God (righteousness) and the peace of God (comfort).

- Joy:

The challenge for us is to differentiate between happiness and joy. There is a difference. The Apostle Paul did not say “happiness in the Holy Spirit.” Happiness is an emotion. It tends to be externally triggered and is based on happenings, people, places, or things. In other words, people, places, and things can make you happy. However, as quickly as they excite you, those same people, places, and things can stir anger, sadness, and hurt.

In a biblical context, joy is an attitude of the heart and mind. It is a state of fulfillment, even when things around you are difficult. Joy is based on the internal refuge you find in Christ. With this joy, you are not moved or shaken by the events of the day or the people who come and go in your life.

CONCLUSION:

It is to our advantage to embrace abiding in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in us empowers us to live abundantly as we journey to become more like Jesus.

In the kingdom of God, our joy is in the Holy Spirit. As we abide in the Spirit, we will have righteousness, peace, and joy in the midst of a fallen and broken world. It is this righteousness that allows us to walk uprightly and live above reproach. It is this peace that will enable us to face another day even after a tragedy or disappointment. It is this joy that allows us to be a witness to those who have no hope. Abiding in the Spirit keeps us in the kingdom of God.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Talk about times where you may fail to lean into the power of the Holy Spirit and tend to rely on your own strength and ability.
- 2) In what ways do you hear and sense the Holy Spirit in your daily life?

3) Do you struggle with depending on happiness and external circumstances to define your joy? How has the Holy Spirit helped you experience joy in difficult times?

4) Assess whether you fully utilize the advantage of the Holy Spirit in your everyday life? How can you embrace this advantage more fully? Talk about it.

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE: John 17

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scripture: John 17. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Are you walking in the power and boldness of a Spirit-filled life? This essential "advantage" keeps us in faith and drives us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. This is abundant life (John 10:10). Think of two ways you can lean on the Holy Spirit this week. At the end of the week, spend some time reflecting on how these activities deepened your awareness of the Holy Spirit's role in your life.

3) Spend some time this week in solitude. Feel free to choose an activity that you love for this time (fishing, walking, golfing, relaxing, etc). Avoid any activities that require technology. Pay attention to the ways in which the Holy Spirit speaks to you during this time. As we slow down and pull away from distractions, we can more fully engage with God. Be sure to write down your experience!

THE JOURNEY

LESSON EIGHT: YOUR NEXT JOURNEY

INTRODUCTION: It is hard to believe this is the end of The Journey. We hope your life has been enriched as you have joined with others in this quest. You may be asking if your journey is actually complete. No, this is only the beginning. Becoming more like Jesus is an ongoing process that will last a lifetime. So, if you are asking, “What’s next?” this lesson is important to you and your future.

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish people who had converted from Judaism—with all its rites and rituals, feasts and festivals, symbols and sacrifices—to become followers of Jesus Christ. It appears that many of these relatively new believers were struggling, asking themselves, “Should I return to the comfortable and familiar, or should I continue into the unseen future of following a Person I can’t even see, but I am called to believe?”

So, what was next for them? Let’s see if we can find the answer to this question.

Thirteen times in Hebrews, the writer uses a two-word phrase to help unite these new believers. That phrase is “Let us.” The Christian life is meant to be lived in the context of community and fellowship with other believers.

Hebrews 6:1 (NLT): “So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.”

I. CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 4:14-16: Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our



confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 13:15: Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

DISCUSSION(TALK ABOUT IT): To what are we, like the Hebrews, drawn to return? How are you being challenged to become mature in your understanding of who Jesus is?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT):

To continue on this journey, the following is a list of some “Let us” passages:

- Continue To “Hold Fast” (Hebrews 4:14; 10:23)

In the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that the Early Church “...continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers” (2:42). The importance of becoming an unwavering, devoted disciple cannot be overstated. A disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who has committed to being His lifelong follower.

The first step, of course, is accepting Christ as Savior and Lord. Romans 10:8-13 teaches us that if we confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. When we were lost from God, He sent His Son to die for our sins. Jesus was buried, and God raised Him from the dead. When we believe this good news in our heart and make a profession of faith, we are saved and begin the journey. Jesus said that if we want Him to confess us to the Father, we must confess Him before others.

Holding fast to our profession of faith means we keep believing and speaking of the Father. Reciting the Apostles Creed as an ongoing discipline of our devotional life would be an excellent way of reminding ourselves daily who He is. Professing Him out loud reminds us, the world, and the enemy of our faith that we are committed to continuing in that faith.

Let’s read it aloud now:



I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy universal church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Singing spiritual songs, such as “This I Believe (The Creed),” by Hillsong Worship, and “Creed,” by Rich Mullins, is also a helpful way of incorporating this devotional activity.

- Continue To “Come Boldly” (Hebrews 4:16)

How do we dare approach the God of all creation with boldness? How can we, the creature, not approach the Creator with fear and trembling? His glory would annihilate us. No one could stand before Him.

Notice that we are not coming to the throne of God’s judgment. In the Old Testament, the glory of God’s presence hovered over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place. This glory is described as a kind of ball of fire. A huge veil hung between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. If anyone were to step into that place, he immediately would be

struck dead.

Only one person (the High Priest) could approach the Holy of Holies, which was only one day each year (the Day of Atonement). Even then, the High Priest had to follow all of the specific instructions God had given Moses. When he stepped behind the great veil to bring the blood of the sacrificial lamb, one of two things would happen. If God accepted the High Priest presentation, he would be allowed to live and continue to serve. But if not, he would be killed immediately.

Praise God, Jesus Christ, the Man who knew no sin, represented us. When Jesus died, the huge veil was torn from top to bottom by the hand of God, our Father. Now we have open access to the throne of grace. For thousands of years, the message of the veil was “Stay out!” Now the message is “Come in!” We can now enter the presence of God boldly because of what Jesus did on our behalf. We can get the help we need, and the great news is that we can keep coming. He never tires of helping us.

- Continue To “Offer Praise” (Hebrews 13:15)

The name of the Lord is worthy to be praised. We can offer the sacrifice of praise anytime, day or night. The Psalmist tells us that the Lord inhabits the praises of His people (see Psalm 22:3). All of us have so much for which to praise Him. We could praise Him forever. In reality, that is exactly what we will do. In Heaven, we will praise him throughout eternity.

Make this pattern yours. Each day profess your faith, come boldly, and offer praise—what a way to live.

II. A COMMISSIONED JOURNEY

READ ALOUD: Matthew 28:19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What intimidates you about Jesus’

call to go and make disciples? How can you begin doing this in your own life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): At the end of Unit 4, “To Obey Him,” we looked at Jesus’ Great Commission to go and make disciples. He has sent us with His authority. He has promised that the Holy Spirit will be with us. And He has told us what to do. Are you doing it?

Through these 48 lessons of The Journey, you have been taught what it means to have a relationship with Jesus, what it means to become like Him, and ways to continue growing in your faith. Are you ready to make disciples? Don’t be afraid. Share the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus has come, and the Kingdom is available to anyone who will say yes to Him. Is that news you want to share?

As you continue to be discipled in your faith, this challenge is before you: will you become a disciple-maker? If you are ready to take this next step, ask God to bring someone into your life that you can begin discipling to follow Jesus more closely. You do not have to know everything or have everything figured out to do this. Simply be faithful to point this person to Jesus, teach him or her the things Jesus has taught you, and Jesus will produce His fruit in them.

III. COMPLETING THE JOURNEY

READ ALOUD: Hebrews 12:1-3 (ESV): Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

John 14:1-7: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place

for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What comes to mind when you think of Heaven? Is it important that we keep Heaven before us on the journey?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Some people say, “It’s all about the journey, not the destination.” This statement does not quite fit when it comes to the journey of becoming like Jesus. For Christians, both parts are true. We have to hold them in tension, or we can lose focus: either emphasizing the here-and-now or the days-to-come. The Kingdom of God is now but not yet, and we exist in this paradoxical reality. We enjoy the presence of God today, and we are called to be a part of advancing God’s Kingdom in the world right now. But anchoring our present in God’s future promises will stabilize us and keep us from focusing on the short-term.

- The Journey Is a Person

Jesus is the Journey. It’s all about Him! As we become more like Jesus and learn to abide fully in Him, our greatest joy will come from being with Him daily. He will help anchor us when we face the storms of life. Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus. He has started our faith, and He will finish it. He has experienced everything we will in this life, and He will keep us. Consider Keith Getty’s words in “He Will Hold Me Fast.”

Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He’ll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.

- The Journey Is a Place

Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled." The promise of Heaven is not to make us want to escape the present; it is a promise that sustains us through the present. We can rely on Jesus to help us on the way to Heaven because He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

We might be tempted to think Heaven is the prize at the end of our faithful life, but that is an incorrect understanding. Heaven is the place the faithful will go, but our prize is an eternity spent in perfect union with the Trinity. We get a glimpse of this in these powerful words of the hymn, "Joy Unspeakable:"

I have found that hope so bright and clear,
Living in the realm of grace;
Oh, the Savior's presence is so near,
I can see His smiling face.

CONCLUSION:

When we began The Journey, you were asked to say "yes." Now the question is, "Will you continue in faith, respond to the commission of Jesus, and complete this journey?" I pray you will say "yes" again. May we all be faithful to finish the race that is laid out before us so that we may enter Heaven someday and be greeted with these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What strengthens you when you are drawn to return to old ways and habits?
- 2) What intimidates you about Jesus' call to go and make disciples? How can you begin doing this in your own life?
- 3) Reflect on your experience of going through The Journey. What's one thing you will take away?
- 4) Which area do you find yourself needing to continue in more: "hold fast," "come boldly," or "offer praise"?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 11; Revelation 21:22-27

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Hebrews 11 and Revelation 21:22-27. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) The call to make disciples is clear in the teachings of Jesus. You can be a part of that! After going through The Journey, we hope that you feel the call to now lead others to become more like Jesus. Who are those people in your life? It doesn't have to happen in a classroom. It could be at a coffee shop, around a dinner table, or over Zoom. Write down the names of 1-3 people that you feel the Lord is leading you to intentionally disciple. But don't forget that you still need someone in your life that is discipling you too!

3) Thinking back to the section of the lesson on Continuing the Journey, which of the three "Let us" passages from Hebrews resonated with you the most? Do you sense the Holy Spirit showing you an opportunity to deepen your faith? What is a practical way that you can begin doing that this week?

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!