

# GROUNDWORKS

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FOR STUDENTS

—SUMMIT—  
*students*





# GROUNDWORKS





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**THE SUMMIT CHURCH**

**MISSION**





**Following the  
Holy Spirit, we  
exist to create a  
movement of  
disciple-making  
disciples, in RDU  
and around the  
world.**



# GROUNDWORKS

## WELCOME

Do you want to grow in your relationship with Christ?  
Do you want to help others as they grow in following Christ?

We hope and pray that *Groundworks* encourages  
you in your walk with Christ, and serves you in  
helping others walk with him.

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## MAKE DISCIPLES

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”*

—Jesus (Matthew 28:19–20a CSB)

Jesus calls every disciple to go and make disciples. What does it mean to “make disciples”? Jesus explains very clearly in Matthew 28 that making disciples involves baptizing and teaching (vv. 19–20).

Baptism is an outward sign that represents the reality that Jesus’ death and resurrection in our place becomes ours when we trust in him (Romans 6:1–6). We also see that believers are baptized in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19).

Teaching is essential to making disciples. This is not surprising because the word “disciple” means a “follower” and a “learner.” In order to make disciples, we must teach. What are we to teach? Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “teach them everything I have commanded you.” He says, “teach them *to observe everything I have commanded you*” (v. 20). We are not merely after teaching information and facts. We want people’s lives to be transformed! We desire to make disciples who not only *know* everything Jesus commands, they also obey everything Jesus commands.

So, when Jesus commands us to make disciples, he is talking about evangelism and helping believers grow in maturity. Evangelism is sharing the gospel with non-Christians with the aim of persuading them to believe in Christ. Making disciples doesn’t stop once they believe, it also involves helping new followers grow in their obedience to Christ.

This emphasis on making disciples is the reason why at The Summit Church, we say: “We make disciples, not just converts.” We don’t mean that people who convert to following Christ are not disciples. Every true convert is a disciple of Christ. But our goal is not to only get people to say,

“I am following Jesus.” Rather, we want genuine disciples whose lives reflect a desire to obey everything Jesus commands us.

*Groundworks* is not primarily an evangelism tool. *Groundworks* is a tool to help you show someone how to grow in their walk with Jesus.

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## PREFACE

*Groundworks* is a tool to help you show someone how to grow in their walk with Jesus.

Our aim is to cultivate a bible-saturated culture of discipleship in our congregation. We long to see students helping each other grow in their walk with Christ. We hope that this book will help you use the Bible to build others up toward maturity.

**Groundworks requires commitment.**

The Greek word for “disciple” in the New Testament is *mathētēs*. It simply means “learner” or someone who apprentices with a teacher to learn from them. This is how the word “disciple” is used in the Gospels: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

The disciples of Jesus were clearly learning lessons from their Master. However, to be a disciple meant much more than just learning information. These learners followed their Teacher around. They didn’t just *listen* to his words, but they saw his actions. They walked with him and began to live like him. Jesus desires his learners to walk with him and to learn to be like him.

To be a disciple of Jesus involves an exclusive commitment to following Jesus. “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). To be a learner of Jesus is to put him above everything else, even your very life (Mark 8:34–37).

As you progress through *Groundworks*, you will do a good bit of reading and learning. This is because Jesus has a lot to teach his learners. This book will also challenge you to change your way of life, your habits. This is because Jesus didn’t just want to inform his disciples, he wanted to *transform* them. The content and applications in this book are deliberately demanding. We aim to raise the bar and want to challenge you to grow in your walk with Jesus.

***Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. - Hebrews 12:2***

One Scottish pastor from the 19th century famously said, “For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.”<sup>1</sup> From beginning to end, following Christ is about keeping our eyes on him, not ourselves. Pastor Tim Keller calls this “the freedom of self-forgetfulness.”<sup>2</sup> The disciples first believed in Christ after gazing upon his glory (John 2:11), and disciples continue to be transformed as they look at his glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Growth in the Christian life doesn’t come from looking at ourselves, but through gazing at the glory of God in Christ. Christians are captivated with the Lord Jesus Christ and are freed from obsessively looking at themselves.

***Examine yourself. - 2 Corinthians 13:5***

As we look to Christ and his Word, we begin to have a correct view of ourselves. As we hear God’s Word, it reveals to us what we are really like, and it challenges us to grow in Christlikeness. The book of James teaches that those who look at the mirror of God’s Word and walk away forgetting what they look like are fooling themselves. Rather, we are to look at the Word and put it into practice. James wants us to be hearers of the word and doers of the word (James 1:22–25). So, there is room in the Christian life for healthy self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:5). We should regularly ask ourselves: *As a disciple, am I a hearer and a doer of the Word?*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, as quoted in Tony Reinke’s “The Purifying Power of Delight in Christ,” *Desiring God*, August 7, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-purifying-power-of-delight-in-christ>.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy* (La Grange, KY: 10Publishing, 2012).

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## HOW TO USE *GROUNDWORKS*

### **The Structure of *Groundworks***

*Groundworks* is divided into six parts. First is the gospel of Christ, followed by five parts that cover the identities of a disciple.

#### *The Gospel*

*Groundworks* begins with the gospel because the gospel is of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Without the gospel of Christ, there is no hope of any of us becoming disciples. Without the gospel, we remain enemies in rebellion against God. But through the gospel, God takes rebels and turns them into his joyful followers. At the heart of the gospel is Christ suffering in our place to bring us back into relationship with God. As Peter writes, “... Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God ...” (1 Peter 3:18).

God not only turns rebels into disciples through the gospel, he also grows disciples in holiness through the gospel of Christ. The grace of God saves us (Titus 3:7), and it is by his grace that we grow in godliness (Titus 2:11–13). The faith that brings us to Christ is also the same faith that keeps us in constant relationship with him. This is why at The Summit Church, we say, “The gospel is not just the diving board; it’s the pool.” So as you begin to study the five identities, do not move away from the gospel, but stand firm in it (1 Corinthians 15:1). We will never move beyond our need for God’s grace to us in the gospel of Christ.

#### *The Five Identities of a Disciple*

Every disciple of Jesus is permanently united to Jesus in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:1–6). When God unites us to Christ, he makes us into a new person: “... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 CSB). We have structured this book around five identities as a way of representing God’s new work in us through Christ.

We focus on identities because discipleship is not merely about what we do, but who we are. God is not just changing our behaviors, he is changing us from the inside out by his Spirit. There

is nothing magical about the five identities. They are not even all the ways the Bible presents disciples. The Bible also presents disciples as learners, holy ones, followers, living stones, priests, etc. We have chosen just five of the many possible identities as a way of summarizing all that the Bible teaches us about following Jesus.

The five identities of a disciple are:

- + **Worshiper:** A disciple seeks to know, love, and obey God above all else.
- + **Family Member:** A disciple is a member of God's family, the local church.
- + **Servant:** A disciple gladly gives of themselves for the good of others.
- + **Steward:** A disciple manages God's gifts for God's purposes.
- + **Witness:** A disciple proclaims Christ in word and deed.

In our discipleship, we want to grow in these five identities and lead others to do the same.

### **Weekly Layout**

The six parts of Groundworks are divided into six weeks. Each week has one day devoted to Bible study, and three days of reading and reflection. For example, the week where we cover the worshiper identity looks like this:

- + **Bible Study:** Ephesians 1:3–14
- + **Reading 1:** Scripture
- + **Reading 2:** Prayer
- + **Reading 3:** Corporate Worship

The goal is for individuals to complete the Bible study and readings on their own, then come together with their study partner to pray and discuss the material. The bulk of the meeting time should focus on the Bible study portion. We have included a meeting guide for each week as a suggested outline for your meeting.

The Bible study portion may take up to 45 minutes of individual study. The readings and reflec-

tions should take about 25 to 30 minutes. Each person is different, so you may choose to go at a different pace. If it takes you two weeks to cover one identity, that's OK! There is no need to rush through the material. Figure out, with your study partner, what is an ideal rhythm for you.

### **Bible Study: The HEAR Method**

The Bible study portion in *Groundworks* will follow the HEAR method. HEAR is an inductive Bible study method that looks closely at what the Bible says in order to discover what it *means* so that we can faithfully *apply* it to our lives.

HEAR stands for:

- + **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage carefully.
- + **Examine:** Based on your observations, discover what the passage means in its context.
- + **Apply:** Determine how the meaning of the passage applies to your life.
- + **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's Word back to him.

The Bible study sections in *Groundworks* will lead you through some basic observations and interpretation. They may seem too simplistic at times, but practicing these fundamentals of Bible study will go a long way.

We have included an in-depth explanation of the HEAR method in the Appendix. Our hope is that once you finish *Groundworks*, you will feel more confident in doing inductive Bible study on your own, without a need for a guide.

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## THREE IMPORTANT REMINDERS

***Groundworks*** is a relational discipleship tool.

While individual study is helpful, discipleship happens in relationships. *Groundworks* is not merely an individual study, but it's a tool for cultivating relational discipleship. Once you finish *Groundworks*, our hope is that you will continue cultivating relationships that help you and others grow in Christ.

***Groundworks*** is Bible-saturated.

God gives us new life through his Word (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23), and he sustains and matures us through his Word (Matthew 4:4). Disciples grow by regularly reading the Bible, treating it as if it were food. There is a lot of Bible in *Groundworks* because we want you to dig into God's words. When you use this book, also use a copy of your own Bible! This book will eventually be thrown out and decay, "but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25 CSB). After you finish *Groundworks*, we want you to feel equipped in using the Bible for discipleship. This book is a tool to help you gain skills to study the bible without a guide!

***Groundworks*** is designed to transform your affections, beliefs, and practices.

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30 CSB). *Groundworks* is designed to shape all of your life: affections, beliefs, and practices. Your affections, because God wants to inflame your heart with a passion for his glory. Your mind, because God wants to inform your mind with his Word. Your practices, because God wants to transform your habits for a life of obedience to him. Our prayer is that God would transform all of your life as you pursue walking with him.



# THE GOSPEL

“... Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the  
unrighteous, that he might bring us to God ... “

- 1 Peter 3:18 -

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## INTRODUCTION

The word “gospel” simply means “good news.” But to fully understand the great and wonderful news of the gospel, we first need to understand the bad news of how our relationship with God became broken. You see, God created us to love him and glorify him above everything else on earth (Isaiah 43:6–7). To glorify God simply means to honor him by making him first in our hearts. When we put something in that first place position, we are saying that it is the most valuable to us. It is worth our complete devotion and all of our love.

But instead of loving God, we “... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Sin is simply putting anything ahead of God in our hearts, whether it is ourselves or some other thing that God created for us to enjoy. Can you imagine how God must feel about us valuing the gifts he has given us more than him, the giver of those gifts? When we worship any created thing instead of the Creator God, we are belittling and dishonoring him. We are saying that he does not matter. None of us has loved, trusted, or obeyed God as we should. And the really bad news is that we can do nothing in our own power to turn our hearts back to him.

This bad news gets even worse because our sin has not only turned our hearts away from God but has also led to God’s righteous judgment against us. Because God is good, perfect, and loves justice, he must judge and punish everyone who disobeys him or hurts other people. And, if we are honest, we have all disobeyed God or have hurt someone else. For this reason, we deserve God’s punishment of eternal separation from him (2 Thessalonians 1:6–9). Nothing we do can bring us back into a relationship with God.

But the good news of the gospel is that God the Father, in his great love and mercy, sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to bring sinners back into relationship with himself (John 3:16). On the cross, Jesus took God’s anger and punishment in place of anyone who trusts in him. Jesus wasn’t punished for his own sins, since he did not have any. He died on the cross to take the punishment that we deserved (1 Peter 3:18). When we believe that Jesus died in our place, he gives us a new heart through the Holy Spirit so that we are enabled to love God more than created things.

All who will trust in Jesus Christ are brought back into relationship with God (Acts 16:31). Those

who trust Jesus for forgiveness, God declares to be righteous because of Jesus' death (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we put our trust, or faith, in Jesus, God adopts us, rebellious sinners, into his family. Faith in Jesus isn't just having a head knowledge about who Jesus is. Faith is crying out, "Jesus I need you, I trust you to help me." from the deepest level of our hearts (John 6:35).

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# THE GOSPEL

**1. BIBLE STUDY:**

**EPHESIANS 2:1–10**

**2. FROM DEATH TO LIFE**

**3. BY GRACE,**

**THROUGH FAITH**

**4. A NEW WALK**

## ⊕ THE GOSPEL: DAY 1

### **Bible Study: Ephesians 2:1–10**

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ...”*

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

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Like we mentioned in our intro, the word *gospel* means good news. Christ’s death and resurrection are at the center of the gospel. *Groundworks* begins with this good news because as Paul says above, it is of first importance for our lives (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3). This entire study is built on the amazing good news of Jesus Christ. Without the gospel, there is no hope of anyone becoming a disciple. Without it, we remain God’s rebellious enemies. But through the gospel, God takes rebels and turns them into his joyful followers.

Notice that when Paul says, “Christ died *for our sins*” (1 Corinthians 15:3), he is saying that Christ substituted himself for us. Christ died for *our* sins, not his own, because he didn’t have any sins. He didn’t deserve any punishment, but he “loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2).

As Pastor J.D. says, “The key word in all the gospel is ‘substitution.’” At the Summit, we say that the gospel in four words is “Jesus in my place.” Jesus went to the cross, not merely to die *for you* but to die *instead of you*. He took your burden of sin so you could be declared righteous. That’s the good news of the gospel: *Jesus lived the life we were supposed to live and died the death we were condemned to die.*

As we begin this study, we want to remind ourselves of this gospel. Not only that, we want to obey Paul's command to remember our condition before God rescued us (Ephesians 2:12). Ephesians 2:1–10, our main passage for this week's study, guides us as we remember.

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### **Ephesians 2:1–10 (NASB)**

**1** And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, **2** in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. **3** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

**4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), **6** and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

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## HIGHLIGHT

1. Highlight the phrases that describe our condition before Christ in verses 1–3.
2. Highlight the phrases that speak to God’s character in verses 4–7.
3. List out all the verbs that speak of **God’s actions toward us** in verses 4–7.
4. Underline all the instances where Jesus Christ is referred to by name, title, or pronoun (like “he” or “him,” but be careful, as not every “he” and “him” refers to Jesus) in this passage.
5. Three times in this passage, you’ll see the words “so that.” Each use communicates a result or purpose for God’s actions. In the space below, write down God’s actions and the purpose given. The first one is done for you.

+ vv. 5–7

+ *God’s actions: God made us alive, raised us up, and seated us with Christ (vv. 5–6).*

+ *God’s purpose: “**so that** in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (v. 7 NASB)*

+ vv. 8–9:

+ God’s action:

+ God’s purpose:

- + v. 10:
  - + God's action:
  - + God's purpose:

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## EXPLAIN

6. Below is the list of all the phrases we highlighted in question 1 about our condition before Christ.

Before Christ we:

- + Were dead in our trespasses and sins (v. 1).
- + Walked in trespasses and sins (vv. 1–2).
- + Walked according to the course of this world (v. 2).
- + Walked according to the prince of the power of the air (v. 2).
- + Were sons of disobedience (v. 2).
- + Lived in the lusts of our flesh (v. 3).
- + Indulged the desires of the flesh and of the mind (v. 3).
- + Were by nature children of wrath (v. 3).

What impression does this list make on you?

In your own words, describe our natural condition apart from God's work.

Now, let's put together some of our observations about God's character (question 2), God's actions (question 3), and how Jesus Christ is the center of God's work (question 4).

**God's character.** Consider how God is described in this passage:

- + Rich in mercy (v. 4)
- + His great love (v. 4)
- + His grace (vv. 5, 7)
- + He is powerful; he is able to raise the dead (v. 6).
- + His kindness (v. 7)

**God's actions.** Look at the verbs describing God's work:

- + Loved us (v. 4)
- + Made us alive together with Christ (v. 5)
- + Saved us by his grace (v. 5)
- + Raised us up with Christ (v. 6)
- + Seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (v. 7)

**Jesus Christ.** Consider the emphasis on Christ in this passage:

- + Made us alive together **with Christ** (v. 5)
- + Raised us up **with him** (v. 5)
- + Seated us with him in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus** (v. 7)
- + His grace in kindness toward us **in Christ Jesus** (v. 7)
- + Created **in Christ Jesus** (v. 9)

7. From the texts above, we learn that God's character drives God's actions. And Christ is central to God's work in saving us. Using your own words, try to write a one-sentence answer for each of the questions below.

**What do you think God is like?**

**What has God done to save you?**

**What is Christ's role in your salvation?**

God performs several actions in this passage. But what is his purpose? Why does God do what he does? In question 5, we observed some helpful “so that” phrases that clued us in.

**God's actions:** God made us alive, raised us up, and seated us with Christ (vv. 5–6).

**God's purpose:** “... **so that** in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (v. 7 NASB)

**God's action:** God saved us by his grace (vv. 8–9).

**God's purpose:** “... **so that** no one may boast.” (v. 9 NASB)

**God's action:** God re-created us in Christ (v. 10).

**God's purpose:** “... for good works, which God prepared beforehand **so that** we would walk in them.” (v. 10 NASB)

8. Looking at the verses above, what can we learn about God's purposes for himself and for us?

9. Read through verses 4–10 again. How would you describe the relationship between salvation and good works?

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## APPLY

10. In question 6, we learned a lot about our natural condition. How have you seen this play out in your own life? Why was it necessary for God to act in order to save you?

11. Everyone has an idea in their mind of what God is like. Too often, our ideas of God don't match how the Bible presents him to be. Look over the verses from question 7 again. What are some habits you can put into practice that would help you view God as he really is?

Sometimes we are tempted to neglect obedience altogether, claiming "salvation is not based on my actions or what I do, so I can do whatever I want." Other times, we are tempted to pursue good works with a heart that says, "I need to do this in order to earn God's approval."

We know from this passage that salvation is a gift of God's grace, not of our works. We cannot earn salvation, God graciously grants us salvation through faith in Christ's work on the cross. Ephesians 2:10 also teaches us that God makes us new in Christ so that we would walk in the good works that God has prepared for us. These good works aren't the reason God saves us, but they are the fruit of God saving us.

12. If you are honest, do you tend to do good things to gain God's approval, or do you neglect obeying God because you are forgiven? What does this look like in your life?

13. What are some wrong motivations you struggle with in how you pursue doing good things for God? What are some habits to put in place to help you have the right motivation when you do good things for God?

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## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise God for being a God of mercy, love, grace, and kindness (vv. 4–7).

**Confession:** Confess any sins you have walked in, even within this last week (vv. 1–2).

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for Jesus Christ! Thank him that Christ took all the punishment that we deserved on the cross. Thank God for his resurrection (vv. 4–9).

**Supplication:** Ask God to give you the Holy Spirit as you strive to walk in good works (v. 10). Pray that he would keep you from boasting, always dependent on his grace (v. 9).

## ⊕ THE GOSPEL: DAY 2

### From Death to Life

*“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”*

***Ephesians 2:1–3 NASB***

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Dead. This is how verse 1 describes our condition before God makes us alive in Christ. However, as we study this passage, we find that a person can be very active in this “dead” condition. Here we find a dead person who is:

- + *walking* in trespasses and sins (vv. 1–2).
- + *living* in the lusts of their flesh (v. 3).
- + *indulging* the desires of the flesh and of the mind (v. 3).

Walking, living, and indulging—that’s a very active dead person! What Paul means by “dead,” then, is not that we are physically dead, but dead toward God. Our hearts were actively pursuing sinful desires, and we had no desire for God. That desire was not alive in us. It did not exist. We were “separate from Christ” and were without “hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). “Without God” is what made us dead and hopeless. But when God made us alive (Ephesians 2:5), we were given Jesus’ perfection and brought into relationship with God.

In today’s reading, Pastor J.D. explains how reconciliation with God is the primary goal of the new life we have been given in Christ.

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## WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE? <sup>1</sup>

### **J.D. Greear**

“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ.” - John 17:3 CSB

John 17:3 encapsulates the essence of eternal life.

**First, eternal life is essentially the knowledge of God. Jesus’ work in salvation was not simply forgiving us of our sins. Jesus’ prime objective was to reunite us and God.**

Have you ever seen that bumper sticker, “Christians are not perfect; they’re just forgiven?” Christians aren’t perfect yet, that is true; but they are not “just forgiven.” Christians have been restored to God. God has resumed again his rightful place as our master, our joy, and our security. Jesus came not just to free people from hell but to bring people back to God.

This is one of the things that separate the message of Jesus from that of other religions. The gospel’s prize is not eternal safety in paradise, it is God himself.

**Second, eternal life comes through knowing Jesus Christ.** Jesus, whom the Gospel of John teaches was both fully God and fully man (John 1:1–14; 2:19–22; 8:58), was uniquely able to accomplish our salvation. As man, he could be our substitute, living the life we should have lived and dying the death we had been condemned to die. As God, he had the right to forgive our sin, the power to overcome death, and the ability to restore us to the fellowship of the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from J.D. Greear’s “Defining the Gospel,” Summit Life With J.D. Greear, January 11, 2011, <https://jdgreear.com/blog/what-is-salvation/>. Used with permission.

Jesus Christ suffered the full fury of God's wrath in our place. On the cross, every ounce of punishment due unto us was unleashed upon him. For those who have trusted Jesus as their Savior, no more punishment remains. God cannot hold us accountable for our sin, because it would be unjust for God to demand two payments for the same sin.

The Bible teaches us that God accomplishes salvation all by himself (John 1:12–13). This also distinguishes the gospel from other religions. We can essentially classify all religions in two categories. In one type of religion, man earns his salvation. "If you obey enough, you will be accepted." This is the approach of every religion in the world—whether through Islam's five pillars, Buddhism's eight-fold path, or Hinduism's scheme of karma and reincarnation. The gospel flips them on their heads. The gospel teaches us that our acceptance is given to us as a gift. God has done the work; ours is only to believe and receive. Our obedience to God is done in grateful response to what he has done for us, not to earn favors from him. Religion is spelled "D-O;" the gospel is spelled "D-O-N-E" by Jesus Christ.

**Lastly, eternal life is our present possession.** In the book of John, "eternal life" functions as both a duration of time and a quality of living. Not only did Jesus' work guarantee us safety in the future, it gives us God in the present. God's presence in our lives is the abundant life (John 10:10)—or, as Jesus says here, "eternal life." The one who has God has everything.

## Questions for Reflection

As you think of your life through the lens of Ephesians 2, write a few sentences that describe each of the three stages below.

### **Before Following and Trusting Jesus:** “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ...” (v. 1)

- + What did your life revolve around the most before Christ? Where did you get your security or happiness from?
  
- + How did those areas let you down?

### **Putting Your Faith in Jesus:** “But God ...” (v. 4)

- + When was the first time you heard the gospel?
  
- + What led to your decision to trust Christ? When did your attitude begin to turn around? Why?
  
- + What were the final struggles that went through your mind just before you trusted Christ?

### **After Putting Your Faith in Jesus:** “For by grace you have been saved through faith ...” (v. 8)

- + What happened after you trusted Christ? What changes did you see in your life (character, attitudes, etc.)?
  
- + What does your pursuit of knowing God look like right now?

## ⊕ THE GOSPEL: DAY 3

### By Grace, Through Faith

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (**by grace you have been saved**), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**”*

**Ephesians 2:4–10 NASB**

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Ephesians 2:4–10 tells us three things about our salvation through Jesus:

- + We are not saved as a result of our works (the things we do) (v. 9).
- + We are saved by God’s grace (vv. 6, 8).
- + We are saved through faith (v. 8).

In today’s reading, we will explore what each of these phrases mean for our lives.

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## NOT BY WORKS, BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH <sup>2</sup>

### R. Kent Hughes

#### Not By Works

How is one saved? We answer first with Paul's negative affirmation in verse 9: "not by works, so that no one can boast." It is absolutely essential to understand and believe this if one is to be saved. *Salvation does not come by works!*

To accept the Bible's teaching that salvation is "not by works" means to go against the notions of our culture ... "Just keep on keeping on and you'll be alright" — "I'm a good person, not perfect, but there are a whole lot of people worse than I" — "God knows I'm not perfect, but I'm doing my best." ...

Our text gives us one reason salvation is not by works — "so that no one can boast." If salvation came by works, eternity would spawn a fraternity of rung-dropping, chest-thumping boasters — an endless line of celestial Pharisees: "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers" (Luke 18:11). In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, the goats on his left do all the boasting and are sent to judgment (Matthew 25:46; cf. 7:22). The sheep on his right (the saved, who go on to their heavenly reward) cannot even recall their good deeds (Matthew 25:37–39; cf. vv. 40–46), *for salvation does not come by works*. No one who is saved will have grounds to boast before God — or will even want to.

Important as this reason is, there are even deeper reasons why salvation is not by works — namely, the utter sinfulness of humanity contrasted with God's transcending standard of righteousness. God is radically righteous (Romans 1:17; 3:21).

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from R. Kent Hughes' *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 72–76.

His righteousness of being is his standard, and no human can attain this because we are all radically sinful beings. The word *radical* comes from the Latin word *radix*, which means “root.” The very root of our being, every part of our person, is tainted with sin. This is the foundation of the Apostle Paul’s devastating litany of condemnation in Romans 3:10–18 where Paul employs the rabbinical technique of *charaz* (Hebrew for “string of pearls”) in putting together an overwhelming list of evidences which prove the universally corrupt *character* (vv. 10–12) and *conduct* (vv. 13–18) of man. He concludes there that the entire human race — Jews and Gentiles, religious and irreligious, pious and pagan — suffers from a radical inner corruption. Even our very best works are colored by sin and can never approach the radical righteousness which God demands. No matter how high we climb our moral ladder, it is not high enough. Salvation is “not by works.”

... Suppose I went to a close personal friend and said, “You are a terrific person, but I don’t believe a thing you say.” How would he feel? Yet this is the way some people treat God. “God, I believe you are great. I believe that Jesus is real. I simply can’t believe your Word that salvation is *not by works*.”

No one has that option. Whoever truly believes salvation is not by works is right at the door, for Jesus says, “Blessed are those who realize that they have nothing within themselves to commend them to God, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (author’s paraphrase of Matthew 5:3).

### **By Grace**

If we are not saved by works, how are we saved? The answer from the Bible is, by grace: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (v. 8).

What is grace? It is unmerited favor — the love of God going out toward the utterly undeserving. It has reference here to forgiveness of sin and the riches which Christ brings. It is a lavish, sumptuous, joyous word. But the great and transcending emphasis of our text is that grace is a free gift. The idea of, “and this not from yourselves” is that “By God’s grace you are people who have been saved through faith, and this whole event and experience is ... God’s free gift to you.”

How contrary to the spirit of our age this is — especially American culture (“We make our money the old-fashioned way. We earn it!”). Such a mentality is proper to its realm, but in regard to salvation it is deadly! “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (v. 8). It is all of grace.

Paul reinforces this in Romans 11:6 — “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” The fact is, as soon as there is a mixture of even the smallest percentage of works, grace is debased and perverted. No one will be saved except for God’s unmerited grace.

Pascal said, “Grace is indeed required to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts this does not know what either a man or a saint is.” He is so right ...

### **Through Faith**

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (v. 8).*

If there is no faith there is no grace and no salvation. In Scripture, faith/belief is the thing that God honors more than any single quality: “*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). “Yet to all who received him, to those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). “Through him everyone who *believes* is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). “[T]o the man who does not work but *trusts* God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). No one has sins forgiven, no one goes to Heaven, no one has peace until there is faith in Jesus Christ.

What, then, is faith? Faith is not the mere intellectual reception of Christian truth, nor is it belief alone. *True faith is belief plus trust.*

A story which comes from the last century makes this clear. During the 1900s Jean Francois Gravalet, better known by his stage name, Blondin, was a world-famous acrobat. Born in France in 1824, Blondin became well-known while still a child. As he grew older, his skill and showmanship brought him fame throughout Europe and America. Once in London he played the violin on a tightrope 170 feet off the ground and then did a somersault wearing stilts. His most spectacular feats were the crossings of Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. On one occasion he took a stove onto the tightrope and cooked an omelette above the roaring falls. *“Bon appétit!”* On another occasion he pushed a wheelbarrow across while blindfolded. On still another he stood on his head on the precarious wire. That is why today in London there are Niagara and Blondin Avenues.

Once, in an unusual demonstration of skill, Blondin carried a man across Niagara Falls on his back. After putting his rider down he turned to the large crowd and asked a man close by, “Do you believe I could do that with you?” “Of course,” the man answered, “I’ve just seen you do it.” “Hop on,” said Blondin, “I’ll carry you across.” “Not on your life!” the man called back. *There is no real faith without trust.*

To be truthful, I would not have hopped onto Blondin’s back either. In fact, I would not do it if the rope was more than ten feet off the ground, for three reasons: There is the *me factor*. What if I “lost it”? Down we would go. There is the *chance factor*. What if the rope broke? There is the *Blondin factor*. What if the only time he made a mistake in his whole life was with me? I *believe* with all my heart he could do it, but I just would not *trust* him with my life!

But it is a universe of difference between the tightrope walker and Jesus! He cannot drop me. I cannot even drop myself. And there is no such thing as chance. Do we *believe* Jesus is who he says he is? Do we *believe* he died for our sins? Do we *believe* he was resurrected and lives today? Have we *trusted* him to save us?”

## Questions for Reflection

1. What questions do you have based on the reading? Discuss them with your study partner.

2. Write out a prayer to God below. Praise him that your salvation is not based on your works (Ephesians 2:9). Thank him for his amazing grace (Ephesians 2:7). Ask him to help you trust in his faithfulness.

## ⊕ THE GOSPEL: DAY 4

### A New Walk

*“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly **walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would **walk** in them.”*

**Ephesians 2:1–10 (NASB)**

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As we saw yesterday, salvation is not a result of the things we do, it is a result of God's grace toward us through Jesus dying in our place. God gives us a new identity as "his workmanship" and his children (Romans 8:14), not based on anything we have done, but as we trust in his free gift of unearned grace. When we become disciples of Christ, God causes a radical change in our life. God gives us both a new identity and a new activity to go along with our identity. We can see the difference between our old activities by looking at how Paul describes the different "walks" of non-Christians and Christians in Ephesians 2:1–2 and 2:10.

- + We **walked** in trespasses and sins (vv. 1–2).
- + We **walk** in good works (v. 10).

"Walking" in the Bible is a metaphor for the way a person lives their life. "Walk" describes everyday decisions you make as little steps that take you in a direction either toward God or away from God. The rest of the book of Ephesians describes in detail this new walk of a Christian.

- + "Therefore I ... urge you to **walk** worthy of the calling you have received" (4:1 CSB).
- + "Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer **walk** as the Gentiles [**walk**], in the futility of their thoughts" (4:17 CSB).
- + "And **walk** in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us ..." (5:2).
- + "... for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of light ..." (5:8).
- + "Look carefully then how you **walk**, not as unwise but as wise ..." (5:15).

Paul encourages Christians to turn away from their old way of walking to a new walk. The way they live after meeting Christ should not look the same as the way they lived before Christ. Repeatedly, Paul discourages Christians from continuing their old activities and encourages them to do new activities based on their new identity. Ephesians 4:25–32 reads:

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

In short, Paul wants them to turn away from sin and walk in holiness. But how should we pursue this new walk, these new activities? How exactly does a disciple of Jesus follow him? That's what we want to address below.

God saves us by his grace, not by our activities. God also regularly commands us to turn away from sinful activities and embrace walking in new habits. God commands us to put off our old self, our old activities and habits, that are corrupted by sin (Ephesians 4:22). He tells us to replace those old activities and put on the new self by pursuing habits and activities that will grow us closer to God. Some examples of these activities are reading God's Word, hanging out with other Christians, helping other Christians grow in their faith, sharing the gospel with non-believers, and worshiping God daily (Ephesians 4:24). So, does this mean that the Christian life starts with faith, but after that, we grow in holiness by working hard? Do we get saved by trusting God, and then become more obedient by relying on ourselves? The short answer is **no**.

So, how are we to grow in obedience? Our lives as followers of Jesus begin when we put our trust in God, and we grow as we continue to put our faith and trust in God. We don't replace our old activities with new activities through willpower and determination. Instead, we thank God for freeing us from our old desires and place our faith and trust in God to help us begin and continue our new activities.

Let's look at what living a life of obedience looks like through the life of Abraham as we see how God transforms his life. Romans 4:20–21 says:

No distrust made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (RSV)

We see in this passage that faith does not distrust the promises of God (v. 20). Instead, faith trusts that God is willing and able to do what he has promised (v. 21). This belief in God's ability to come through on his promises is essential in turning away from our sinful desires. Why? All sin springs from our unbelief in God's promises. An unbelieving heart says to God, "I don't trust you, and I don't think you are able to deliver on your promises." John Piper explains it like this:

... All the sinful states of our hearts are owing to unbelief in God's super-abounding willingness and ability to work for us in every situation of life so that everything turns out for our good. Anxiety, misplaced shame, indifference, regret, covetousness, envy, lust, bitterness, impatience, despondency, pride — these are all sprouts from the root of unbelief in the promises of God.<sup>3</sup>

He explains this through showing how a heart that loves money more than God is a heart that trusts money more than God. Piper continues:

Now what does it mean to love money? It doesn't mean to admire the green paper or the brown coins. To know what it means to love money, you have to ask: What is money? I would answer that question like this: Money is simply a symbol that stands for human resources. Money stands for what you can get from man, not from God! ...

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<sup>3</sup> From John Piper's "Battling Unbelief at Bethlehem," *Desiring God*, September 11, 1988, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/battling-unbelief-at-bethlehem>.

So the heart that loves money is a heart that pins its hopes, and pursues its pleasures, and puts its trust in what human resources can offer. So the love of money is virtually the same as faith in money — belief (trust, confidence, assurance) that money will meet your needs and make you happy.

Therefore the love of money, or belief in money, is the flip side of unbelief in the promises of God. Just like Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 — you cannot serve God and money. You can't trust or believe in God and money. Belief in one is unbelief in the other. A heart that loves money — banks on money for happiness, believes in money — is at the same time not banking on the promises of God for happiness.<sup>4</sup>

Basically any time we pursue a sin rather than God, we are believing that fulfilling that desire is going to give us something that God can't give us. So, how do we fight the sinful desires that led to our old way of walking, our old activities? We actively put our trust in God that he can make good on his promises and appropriately fulfill our desires. For example, if we love money because it is a resource that makes us feel like we are in control, we put our trust in God's promise to be in control and provide for us (Joshua 1:9). If we love and trust in our friend's approval more than God's approval, we must stop and recognize that God loves us more than our friends (or family) ever will! We trust that just like he loved Jesus and called him "my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17) he now looks at us and calls us his beloved child, with whom he is well pleased." The heart of fighting our desires is seeing that God's love for us is better and more satisfying than any of our sinful desires being fulfilled.

The life of a disciple is not a walk of perfection, but a walk of perseverance—a long walk of obedience in the same direction. To resist our desires and sin, we put our eyes on Jesus and his amazing love, and we run after him (Hebrews 12:1–3). Anything that stands in the way, we cut out of our lives and replace with a new activity. We look to God's past faithfulness in Christ and

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<sup>4</sup> Piper, "Battling Unbelief at Bethlehem."

trust him to be faithful to his promises in the future. The God “who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (past), how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (future)” (Romans 8:32). As we look back at Jesus dying in our place, his sacrifice encourages us to trust his love and his grace in the future. The power and temptations of the old, sinful walk will not hold power over us because we will see through sin’s deceitful promises. Our new walk of obedience will be one of actively putting faith in the God who is always willing and able to help us.

As you continue in Groundworks, it is important to remember these truths. As we grow in our maturity as disciples, we don’t grow through self-reliance, but by trust in God. All the things you will put into practice in these studies are to be done in the strength that God supplies (1 Peter 4:11).

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How would you describe your walk with God right now? What’s most exciting to you about participating in this study?
  
2. What are some old, sinful habits that you want to put off? What are some new, holy habits that you want to put on?
  
3. What would it look like for you to grow as a disciple by trusting in God instead of relying on your own power?



## THE GOSPEL

### Review

Here's what we covered this week:

- + **Bible Study:** Ephesians 2:1–10
- + **From Death to Life:** We know that God is at the heart of our salvation.
- + **By Grace, Through Faith:** Our salvation is not based on our works but God's grace. We don't work for our salvation; we trust God.
- + **A New Walk:** When we become disciples of Christ, God radically changes our lives.

### Habits To Cultivate

**Reflect on the gospel:** The gospel of Christ is “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:1–3). As you continue in this study, keep returning to the gospel. Meditate on God's kindness to you in Christ (Ephesians 2:4–5). Make it a habit to rehearse the gospel daily.

### Next Steps

**Become a disciple:** If you've never personally put your trust in Christ, this is a great time to do so! Talk to your study partner about what that means for you.

**Get baptized:** Water baptism doesn't save us, but it's an outward profession that we've been united to Christ by faith in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:1–11). If you've never been baptized, talk to your study partner about it.

**Assurance:** If you've put your trust in Christ but struggle with assurance of salvation, share your struggles with your study partner.

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code.



## **THE GOSPEL: MEETING GUIDE**

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of *Groundworks* to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read Ephesians 2:1–10 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + Reflect on the gospel daily

### **Next Steps**

- + Become a disciple
  
- + Get baptized
  
- + Assurance



# **WORSHIPER**

A disciple seeks to know, love, and obey God above all else.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of being a disciple is worshiping God through Christ. When Jesus calls us to follow him, he is calling us to worship him. Jesus called us to worship because God is seeking people who will worship him with all of their heart. This is what Jesus told the woman at the well:

‘But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ (John 4:23–24)

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a worshiper of Jesus.

We all worship something. Whatever we put first in our hearts and our lives is the thing we worship. And often, if we are honest, we put things other than God first in our lives. The Bible calls this idolatry—worshiping anything other than God. Without Jesus transforming our hearts, we can’t honor God through worship, but we dishonor him through idolatry (Romans 1:21–23). Because we worship idols instead of God, we deserve to be punished. But God sent Christ to turn idolators into worshipers. Jesus died in our place to take the punishment we deserve for worshiping idols (Romans 3:25). All who trust in Christ, are united to him by faith. God’s Holy Spirit gives us new eyes and hearts to see that worshiping Christ is more glorious than idolatry (2 Corinthians 4:4–6).

As disciples, we have the awesome privilege of worshiping God. What does it mean to worship? John Piper says, “... true worship is a valuing or a treasuring of God above all things ... In fact, the English word ‘worship’ comes from *worth ship*. That is, worship is showing, displaying the worth of God.”<sup>1</sup>

As we learn more about the identity of worshiper, we should remember that all outward expressions of worship are meaningless without *inner* affections for God. Jesus criticizes those who

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, Episode 848: “What Is Worship?” April 29, 2016, *Ask Pastor John*, produced by Desiring God, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-worship>.

only pay lip-service to God saying, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8–9).

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# **WORSHIPER**

**1. BIBLE STUDY:  
EPHESIANS 1:3–14**

**2. SCRIPTURE**

**3. PRAYER**

**4. WORSHIPING TOGETHER**

## ✝️ WORSHIPER: DAY 1

### Bible Study: Ephesians 1:3–14

Ephesians 1:3-14 is the longest sentence in the Greek New Testament. It's so long that it has to be broken up into six sentences in our English translations! One writer comments on the sentence saying:

Paul's blessing of God is unusually long—one sentence containing 202 words ... Paul weaves this together into a beautiful, artistic, and smooth-flowing declaration of praise to God for his indescribable work on our behalf. It is expressed with emotion and is designed to profoundly move all who hear it or read it.<sup>2</sup>

As you read this passage, may Paul's words and the Holy Spirit help you comprehend God's amazing power and beauty and move you to worship God!

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### Ephesians 1:3–14 (NASB)

**3** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, **4** just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love **5** He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His

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<sup>2</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 72.

will, **6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

**7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace **8** which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight **9** He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him **10** with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him **11** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, **12** to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. **13** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, **14** who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

## HIGHLIGHT

1. In the chart, write out all the verbs that describe what God does and what we do from the passage.

<b>What does God do?</b>	<b>What do we do?</b>

2. Write out the similar phrase that is repeated in the following verses.

+ v. 6:

+ v. 12:

+ v. 14:

3. In the passage, underline all the times you see Jesus referred to by name or pronoun (like “his” or “him”, but be careful as “his” or “him” could also refer to God).

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## EXPLAIN

From question 1, it’s obvious that God is responsible for the work of salvation. Take a minute to read the list below and be amazed at all that God does to redeem us.

- + He blesses us with the gift of Jesus dying in our place for our sins (v. 3).
- + He chooses us to be a part of his family (vv. 4–5).
- + He freely gives grace to us (v. 6).
- + He pours out the riches of his grace and forgiveness on us. Every time we sin, we are able to be forgiven (v. 8).
- + He makes known the mystery of his will—that he wants to forgive us (v. 9).
- + He is kind toward us (v. 9).
- + He chooses us according to his plans (v. 11).
- + He works all events and circumstances out according to his plan (v. 11).
- + He confirms that we are a Christian by giving us the Holy Spirit (v. 13).
- + He gives us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that we will be with God forever (v. 14).

All of our actions are simply in response to God’s blessings in Christ. We listen to God’s Word, believe it (v. 13), and we put our hope in Christ (v. 12).

4. In these verses, why does Paul emphasize that God is the main actor in our salvation?

As we saw in question 2, Paul repeats God's ultimate goal for all his actions three times in this passage:

- + "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ ... **to the praise of the glory of His grace** ..." (vv. 5–6 NASB).
- + God "works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be **to the praise of His glory**" (vv. 11–12 NASB).
- + God seals us in Christ "with the Holy Spirit of promise ... **to the praise of His glory**" (vv. 13–14 NASB).

5. According to these verses, what is God's ultimate goal in all his actions? Why is this ultimate goal so important to remember?

Based on what we saw in question 3, it is clear that Jesus Christ is central to God's work of salvation.

- + God blesses us with every spiritual blessing "in Christ" by forgiving our sin (v. 3).
- + God chooses us to be a part of God's family "in Him" (v. 4).
- + God chooses (predestines) us to adoption as God's sons "through Jesus Christ" (v. 5).
- + God freely gives his grace to us "in the Beloved" (v. 6).
- + We have redemption "in Him ... through His blood" (v. 7).

- + God's kindness toward us is revealed "in Him" (v. 9).
- + God is summing up all things "in Christ" (v. 10).
- + We obtain the inheritance of life with God forever "in Him" (vv. 10–11).
- + Our hope is "in Christ" (v. 12).
- + He confirms that we are a Christian by giving us the Holy Spirit "in Him" (v. 13).

6. Why do you think Jesus plays such a central role in all of God's work? How does Jesus' role in our salvation impact the way we should worship God?

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## APPLY

7. Where in your life do you typically look to get good things or blessings (v. 3)? Do you look for them in Christ? How can you grow in seeking more of Christ in your everyday life?

It's clear from questions 2 and 5 that God is after the praise of his glory. This aligns with what we know from the rest of the Bible. God's ultimate aim in doing all that he does is his own glory. That God is so focused on his own glory might be difficult for us to grasp, so it is helpful to see this in our Bibles. Consider the following.

### **God created us for his glory.**

"... bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory ...*" (Isaiah 43:6–7).

**God defers his anger for his glory.**

“*For my name’s sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another*” (Isaiah 48:9–11).

**God showed mercy to Israel in the wilderness for his glory.**

“*... I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out*” (Ezekiel 20:14).

**Jesus commands us to do good works for God’s glory.**

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

**Jesus answers our prayers so that God would be glorified.**

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son*” (John 14:13).

**Jesus died to glorify God.**

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? *But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again*” (John 12:27–28).

**God forgives our sins for his glory.**

“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions *for my own sake*, and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

“For *your name’s sake*, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great” (Psalm 25:11).

**Jesus wants us to see his glory.**

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

**Jesus is coming back to be glorified.**

“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day *to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed ...*” (2 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

God has a passion for his own glory. If God valued anything other than his own glory, he would be an idolator. There is no one more worthy than God, so God must love God above all things.

This is why the Bible tells us that our ultimate purpose should match God’s ultimate purpose. God’s glory should be the goal of everything we do: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Even when we serve, we are to serve in a way that glorifies God: “... whoever serves, [let him do it] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11).

It would be cruel of God to command us to seek satisfaction in anything other than himself. There is nothing in this universe of more value than God. So, when God asks us to glorify him by putting him first in our hearts, he is lovingly telling us, “Don’t waste your love on lesser pleasures, enjoy the best pleasure in the universe—me!” At great cost to himself, God freed us so that we would make much of him. Christ was willing to suffer, to the point of death, so that we might enjoy God forever. He loves us so much that he wants us to share in *his* ultimate delight!

We give glory to whomever or whatever we put as number one in our hearts. We give worth to whatever we worship (*worth-ship*). That is why when Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest

commandment?” he answers without hesitation: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

8. What things in your life compete with God for your affections? How do these desires affect your life?

9. Prayer is a great indicator of our heart’s desires, and sometimes, prayer can also reveal the things we want more than God. What do you pray for most? What do you regularly ask God to do?

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## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise God for being an incredibly gracious God to us in Christ (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

**Confession:** Confess the idols in your heart that compete with your joy in God.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

**Supplication:** Ask God to give you the Holy Spirit so that you can glorify him with all of your life (1 Corinthians 10:31).

## ✝️ WORSHIPER: DAY 2

### Scripture

*“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

#### **2 Timothy 3:14–17**

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To worship God is to treasure him above anyone and anything in the universe. And those who treasure God, treasure his Word (Psalm 119:10–11). After all, how can you say you love someone and not want to listen to their voice? Listening to God’s voice in Scripture is one of the greatest joys of being a disciple.

Paul’s words to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14–17 also instruct us to value and adore God’s Word.

What do we learn about the Bible from these verses? All Scripture is ultimately from God, it is God-breathed (v. 16). The Bible is able to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ (v. 15). God speaks to us in the Bible in order to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in righteousness (v. 16). If we want to be thoroughly equipped for every good work, we will devote ourselves to God’s word (v. 17).

In today’s reading, we’ll learn how to worship God by making God’s Word a priority in our lives.

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## READ FOR BREADTH, STUDY FOR DEPTH <sup>3</sup>

### David Mathis

There is some science to good Bible reading. It's important to know the fundamentals of language and communication, of subjects and verbs and objects and conjunctions. Much can be gained from boning up on some basics of English or doing some reading about reading.<sup>4</sup> It's helpful to have good Bible study aids, like overviews, introductions, and reliable commentaries (especially for the Old Testament prophets), and to have a good sense of how the Scriptures are put together as a whole.

And just like we learn to ride a bike with training wheels, it can help to have someone spell out some simple method of "inductive Bible study" with the dance steps of observation, interpretation, and application. Rudimentary, memorable approaches like this abound in Christian circles serious about the Bible. They are a gift to help us get going and come to an otherwise dauntingly large book with some idea of what to do next.

But the point of learning the little bits of science behind it all is to be ready to dance when the music begins to play. And the best of dancing isn't just taught in classrooms, but caught in practice.

Good Bible reading is no mere science; it is an art. The Bible itself is a special compilation of great artistries. And the best way to learn the art of reading the Bible for yourself is this: *Read it for yourself.*

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from David Mathis' *Habits of Grace*, © 2016, 43–47. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (New York: Touchstone, 1972) and Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

### **Ask an Old Saint**

Ask an old, weathered saint who's been reading the Scriptures for himself for decades. See if he has a nice, clean formulation for how he goes about his daily reading. Does he have three or four simple, memorable steps he walks through consciously each day? The answer likely will be no; he's learned over time there's more art to it than that.

Or more generally, just ask, How do you go about reading the Bible? You might see it on his face that it's a tough question to answer. Not because there aren't some basic, little "scientific" things, like the basics of reading and comprehension, or the various patterns and methods he's developed for feeding his own soul over the years, but because he's learned that so much of good Bible reading is an art. It's a skill learned in engaging the task, not mainly sitting under formal instruction. And those who have read their Bibles most are the ones who have learned the craft best.

### **Learn the Art through Practice**

No biblical author gives us any nice, clean acrostic for how to go about daily Bible reading. And you won't find one in this chapter. That may feel daunting for the beginner who wants assistance, but in the long run it proves wonderfully freeing. It can be a great help to have training wheels for a season, but once you learn to ride the bike, those extra things sticking out the side are terribly constrictive and limiting.

At the end of the day, there is simply no replacement for finding a regular time and place, blocking out distractions, putting your nose in the text, and letting your mind and heart be led and captured and thrilled by God himself communicating to us in his objective written words.

If you feel uncomfortable in the Scriptures and inadequate in the art of Bible reading, the single most important thing you can do is make a regular habit of reading the Bible for yourself. There is no substitute for a few focused minutes each day in the text. You may be surprised how much the little bits add up over the long haul.

As much as we want a quick fix, some fast lesson that makes us near-experts in just a few short minutes, the best of Bible reading isn't learned overnight or even after a semester of lectures, but day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, imbibing the Bible, having God's words inform our minds, inspire our hearts, instruct our lives. It is then that we slowly see the lights going on everywhere as we walk through life, and keep walking through the texts.

### **Discover the Art of Meditation**

One piece of counsel for any Bible reading plan, however ambitious, is this: Don't let the push to check boxes keep you from lingering over a text, whether to seek to understand it ("study") or to emotionally glory in what you understand ("meditation").

Think of your Bible reading as a regular surveying of the biblical landscape to find a spot to settle down for a few moments to meditate, which is the high point and richest moment of Bible intake (more on meditation in the next chapter). Go for breadth (in reading) and depth (in study), where you stop at something you don't understand, pose questions and give answers, consult resources, and perhaps capture a brief reflection in words or a diagram. There is a place in Bible reading for "raking" and gathering up the leaves at a swift pace, but when we "dig" in Bible study, we unearth the diamonds. In meditation, we marvel at the jewels.

Bible reading is like watching the film in real time. Study is like going through a clip frame by frame. Meditation, then, along with Scripture memory (chap. 5), is for lingering over particular frames and pressing the significance to our hearts and into our lives.

### **Grow in Finding Jesus**

One final thing to say about Bible reading as art, not just science, is that Jesus taught his apostles to read the Scriptures in what we might describe as an artistic way. The science part of Bible reading is essential, but it doesn't necessitate reading so rigidly, narrowly, and modernistically that only the most explicit and specific of prophecies apply to Christ, or that the text is always "for the original readers" and never really for us.

Jesus himself read the Scriptures with much more flair—not in any way making things up, but seeing with the eyes of faith what’s really there to be seen below the surface, out of sight to the natural mind. Such deep reading is a kind of acquired taste, through regular practice, not an easily transferred skill; it’s developing the apostolic palate for finding Jesus throughout the Scriptures, by tracking the trajectory of God’s grace, in its many textures and tones, without falling into either unbelief or make-believe. It is learning with the apostle John that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

And so “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,” Jesus himself “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). He claimed, “Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). He said Moses “wrote of me” (John 5:46), and that “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). And so he opened their minds—beyond their narrow, fallen rationality—to truly understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

As we learn to read the Bible not only with our left brains but with our whole minds and hearts, we see more and more how the apostles heard the whispers of the Scriptures—and how they saw pointers to Jesus everywhere.

### **Resolved: To Read the Bible**

Whether you feel like a beginner or the grizzled old veteran, one of the most important things you can do is regularly read the Bible for yourself.

It is a remarkable thing that we have Bibles we can read personally, whenever we want. For most of church history, and still today in many places in the world, Christians have not had their own personal copies of the Bible. They had to gather to hear someone read it to them. “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13) was all they had, other than memory, for Bible intake.

But now, with printed Bibles and electronic options galore, we have priceless access to God's very words to us, words that we are so tragically tempted to take lightly. Reading your own copy of the Bible daily is not a law that every believer must abide; most Christians have not had this option. But the habit of daily Bible reading can be a marvelous means of God's grace. Why miss this bounty and blessing?

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Describe your Bible intake habits. Do you regularly read the Bible, study the Bible, or meditate on the Bible? Why or why not?

2. Where are you growing in your Bible reading and where do you want to grow? Write out your next step for how you want to grow in your Bible reading.

3. What excites you about the possibility of getting to know God more through his Word?

## ✝️ WORSHIPER: DAY 3

### Prayer

To worship God is to love the Creator God more than all of his creation. Can you imagine loving someone but not wanting to talk to them? As disciples, we have the privilege to speak with God in prayer. Listen to how one author describes prayer:

Prayer, simply put, is talking to God. It is irreducibly relational. It's personal—he is the Absolute Person, and we are the derivative persons, fashioned in his image. In a sense, prayer is as basic as persons relating to each other, conversing, interacting, but with this significant caveat: in this relationship, we don't chat as peers. He is Creator, and we are creatures. He is the great Lord, and we are his happy servants. Yet because of his amazing love and extravagant grace, he invites us to interact. He has opened his mouth and spoken to us. Now he opens his ear to hear us.

Prayer, for the Christian, is not merely talking to God, but responding to the One who has initiated toward us. He has spoken first. This is not a conversation we start, but a relationship into which we've been drawn. His voice breaks the silence. Then, in prayer, we speak to the God who has spoken. Our asking and pleading and requesting originate not from our emptiness, but his fullness. Prayer doesn't begin with our needs, but with his bounty. Its origin is first adoration, and only later in asking. Prayer is a reflex to the grace he gives to the sinners he saves. It is soliciting his provision in view of the power he has shown.<sup>5</sup>

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But have you ever wondered, “But, practically, how should we pray?” Thankfully, in the New Testament, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and even provides a model prayer. It is known as the Lord’s Prayer, and it is found in Matthew 6:7–13. One author writes:

There is so much to be learned about praying; most of us are little more than novices. One of the most profitable studies of the Scripture is the examination of the prayers recorded in its pages. Then, of course, the student needs to practice what he has discovered. But, regardless how many riches he finds, he will not come across a prayer more all-encompassing, more pointed, more exemplary, than the Lord’s Model Prayer.<sup>6</sup>

Let’s walk through the prayer in Matthew 6.

### **Matthew 6:7–13**

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.’”

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6 D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 77.

Notice that Jesus does not say, “This is *what* you should pray” or “Pray this.” He says, “Pray *like* this” or “This is *how* you should pray.” (v. 9). The Lord’s Prayer is a model for us to follow, not merely words for us to repeat. In this passage, Jesus contrasts how *not to* pray (vv. 7–8) with how to pray (vv. 9–13).

The Lord’s Prayer has six requests. The first three requests are centered on God, and the last three requests concern us directly. Notice the very first petition is asking God to hallow his own name (“hallow” means to “set-apart,” to “make holy”). D.A. Carson’s comments on the beginning of this prayer are helpful in understanding how to pray:

In a way, to pray, ‘Hallowed be your name’ is to pray, ‘Make me holy. Grant that I may reverence you. Work in me and in other men so that we will acknowledge your unsurpassed and glorious holiness always.’ But the petition as Jesus teaches it is framed not so much in terms of what must happen to us for the prayer to be fulfilled, as in terms of the goal itself. The highest goal is not that we be made holy; the highest goal is rather that God’s name be hallowed. This removes man from the center of the picture, and gives that place to God alone. Man—even transformed man—is not the chief goal of this universe. Man’s chief *raison-d’être* [reason for existence] is indeed, as the theologians have told us, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. This one brief petition has so much meat in it for profitable meditation, so many implications about how we are to think about God, that it is sufficient in itself to drive us to our knees.<sup>7</sup>

Consider all the things that we learn about God in this passage:

- God knows all our needs, even before we ask him (v. 8).
- God is portrayed as a Father (vv. 8–9).

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<sup>7</sup> D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 70.

- God the Father’s name is exalted and his reputation made high; he is “in heaven” (v. 9).
- We can infer from the kingdom language that God is a King (v. 10).
- God hears our prayers.
- God is able to perform and answer these requests. He is the one who gives bread, forgives, etc.

After the first three requests centered on God, Jesus moves to the last three requests concerned directly with man. In these last three requests, Jesus addresses not just our spiritual needs but our physical needs as well (vv. 11–13). We can go to God with all of our requests, even the seemingly insignificant requests, because we know the greatness of God’s character and our desperate need for him. God is so powerful, and we are so limited that we need his help. But God is so loving that he is willing to listen and intervene on our behalf. Jesus wants us to talk to God the Father, so much so, that he teaches us how to do it.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What are some barriers that keep you from prayer? List as many as you can below.

2. What are the truths in this passage that make you want to spend time with God in prayer?

3. Relating to God involves talking to God (through prayer) and listening to him (through reading the Bible). What are some practical ways for you to grow in these two habits?

## **Praying the Lord's Prayer**

As we learn to pray through Scripture, sometimes it is helpful to write out our prayers. In the space provided, pray in your own words, using the six petitions in the Lord's prayer as your guide.

**"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." (v. 9)**

**"Your kingdom come ..." (v. 10a)**

**"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (v. 10b)**

**"Give us this day our daily bread ..." (v. 11)**

**"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (v. 12)**

**"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (v. 13)**

## ✝️ WORSHIPER: DAY 4

### Worshipping Together

*“... be filled with the **Spirit**, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

**Ephesians 5:18–20**

*“Let **the word of Christ** dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

**Colossians 3:16**

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When God makes rebellious enemies into worshipers, he changes the way they live, their walk through the gospel (Ephesians 2:2,10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). These two passages are one description of the new walk of a disciple. Notice these points of emphasis in the verses above:

- **The Spirit and the Word**
  - “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18)
  - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16)
  
- **Vertical: Toward God**
  - “Making melody to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19)
  - “Thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16)
  
- **Horizontal: With one another**
  - “Addressing one another” (Ephesians 5:19)
  - “Admonishing one another” (Colossians 3:16)

- **Heart**
  - “With your heart” (Ephesians 5:19)
  - “In your hearts” (Colossians 3:16)
  
- **Singing**
  - “In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing” (Ephesians 5:19)
  - “Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16)

We see again that the life of a disciple is a life of heartfelt worship toward God. Our worship is fueled and enriched by both God’s Word and Spirit—which then leads us to break out in song.

We also notice that our singing is not only directed vertically toward God but horizontally toward fellow believers. The way we worship God encourages others to worship God! Worshipers of God love to worship together with God’s people. In today’s reading, we’ll learn more about how the habit of worshipping together, worshipping God with other believers at a house gathering or church service, fuels our love for God and each other.

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## KINDLE THE FIRE IN CORPORATE WORSHIP <sup>8</sup>

### **David Mathis**

We were made for more than private devotions. As nice as it can be to tuck ourselves away in some nook and cranny, all by our lonesome, and read the Scriptures we want to read, pray the prayers we prefer, play the songs we like, memorize the verses we pick, and fast from food when it's convenient—as important as it is to pursue a regular rhythm of “private worship” in these personal disciplines—this is not the pinnacle of our Christian lives.

We were made to worship Jesus *together*. Among the multitude. With the great horde. Swallowed up in the magnificent mass of the redeemed. God didn't fashion us to enjoy him finally as solitary individuals, but as happy members of a countlessly large family.

When the fog of everyday life clears and we catch a glimpse of heaven's bliss, we don't find ourselves sequestered at a study desk or hidden alone in a prayer closet in paradise, or even standing alone before the great Grand Canyon or mountain peak of God's majesty, but joyfully part of the worshipping throng of Christ's people from every tongue and tribe and nation.

We were made for *corporate* worship.

### **Cheerfully Part of the Crowd**

Heaven will be more spectacular than we can dream—and the new earth, even better than heaven—but it might be surprising to hear that perhaps the best foretaste we can get on this side is with the gathered church, worshipping Jesus together. This doesn't mean that eternity will

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from David Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, © 2016, 155–159. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

amount to an unending church service, but that we will be wonderfully immersed in a joy-multiplying multitude of fellow worshipers.

And in heaven's adoration, we join not only "many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11; cf. Heb. 12:22), worshiping Jesus with "innumerable angels" (Heb. 12:22), but also the innumerable communion of the ransomed:

A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ... and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10)

While the corporate worship of Jesus by the church *universal* is an essential element in our great destiny, it is the corporate worship of Jesus by the church *local* that is a vital means of God's grace in getting us there.

### **The Most Important Means of Grace**

Corporate worship is the single most important means of grace and our greatest weapon in the fight for joy, because like no other means, corporate worship combines all three principles of God's ongoing grace: his word, prayer, and fellowship. It is corporate worship, with its preaching and sacraments and collective praises, confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, which most acutely brings together the gifts of God's voice, his ear, and his body.

And so, according to Donald S. Whitney, "There's an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in 'meeting together' with other believers."<sup>9</sup>

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9 *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 111.

Perhaps your own experience of corporate worship as a means of grace has, at times, echoed that of Martin Luther: “At home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Worship Is No Means**

But talking about worship as a means of grace is tricky because, as John Piper cautions us, true worship is not a means to anything.

Worship is an end in itself. We do not eat the feast of worship as a means to anything else. Happiness in God [which is the heart of worship] is the end of all our seeking. Nothing beyond it can be sought as a higher goal. ... True worship cannot be performed as a means to some other experience.<sup>11</sup>

What, then, do we mean when we say that corporate worship is an essential means of God’s grace? Can it really be such?

### **The Secret of Joy: Self-Forgetfulness**

One important distinction to make is between the essence of worship as joy in God and the context of corporate worship as the gathered assembly. While praising Jesus together is its greatest specific expression, worship in general is bigger than just the gathered church—it is not just for Sunday mornings, but for everyday life (Rom. 12:1). And related to this is the distinction between how we think about corporate worship (and the various motivations for it and benefits from it) and how we experience it in the moment.

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10 Quoted in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 159–160.

11 *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, rev ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 90.

There is more to be said (and will be below) about the “graces and blessings that God gives only in ‘meeting together’ with other believers,” which can inspire our faithful engagement and help us appreciate the irreplaceable role corporate worship plays in our Christian health and growth. But first, the question is, where should we turn our hearts and minds collectively *in the moment* of corporate worship to experience this grace from God?

The answer is that we should not be self-consciously preoccupied with how we’re being strengthened or what grace we’re receiving. Rather, our focus together is the crucified and risen Christ and the incomparable excellencies of his person and work (which illumines all the means of grace and various spiritual disciplines, not only corporate worship—and is why the subtitle of this book begins with “enjoying Jesus”). Corporate worship is a means of grace not when we’re caught up with what we’re doing, but when we experience the secret of worship—the joy of self-forgetfulness—as we become preoccupied together with Jesus and his manifold perfections.

See, then, the pregnant application to corporate worship in this summary by Piper:

All genuine emotion is an end in itself. It is not consciously caused as a means to something else. This does not mean we cannot or should not seek to have certain feelings. We should and we can. We can put ourselves in situations [like corporate worship] where the feeling may more readily be kindled. ... But in the moment of authentic emotion, the calculation vanishes. We are transported (perhaps only for seconds) above the reasoning work of the mind, and we experience feeling without reference to logical or practical implications.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, corporate worship, which in one sense is no means to anything else, is a powerful—even the most powerful—means of God’s grace for the Christian life.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 92. Emphasis added.

So come to corporate worship for the many blessings, and then let the calculations vanish as you lose yourself in the Blessed. Get yourself there on a slow day with a reminder about how good it will be for you if you do, and as the gathering begins, go hard after the goodness of God and seek to forget yourself as you focus on his Son.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What do you love most about attending worship gatherings (a church service) and worshipping with other believers? What are some challenges for you as you gather with other believers?

2. How often do you attend a church service to worship with other believers? What are some reasons why attending is an important priority?

3. What would you say to someone who felt like they didn't really need to be "in church" every weekend, that it was OK to just listen to sermons online and hang out with Christians throughout the week?



## WORSHIPER

### Review

Below is a helpful outline of what we covered this week.

- + **Bible Study:** Ephesians 1:3–14
- + **Scripture:** Worshipers of God love to listen to him.
- + **Prayer:** Worshipers of God love to talk to him.
- + **Worshipping Together:** Worshipers of God love to praise him together.

### Habits To Cultivate

**Studying the Bible:** As disciples, we want to grow in our ability to not merely read but also study the Bible. Talk with your study partner about what personal Bible study looks like for you.

**Prayer:** Praying through the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:7–13 is a great way to grow in the habit of daily prayer. Discuss prayer habits with your study partner.

**Worship Together:** Gathering together with God's people is foundational to our growth as disciples. Share your thoughts on worshipping together with your study partner.

### Next Steps

**Bible Reading Plan:** Talk to your study partner about a Bible reading plan. Pick out a plan you can follow to regularly listen to God through his Word. Check out the reading plan available at [summitprayer.com/reading](http://summitprayer.com/reading).

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code.



## **WORSHIPER: MEETING GUIDE**

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of *Groundworks* to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read Ephesians 1:3–14 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + Studying the Bible
  
- + Prayer
  
- + Corporate worship

### **Next Steps**

- + Bible reading plan

# NOTES



# **FAMILY MEMBER**

A disciple is actively committed to our aspiring multiethnic family.

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## INTRODUCTION

What is the church? The Bible uses various images to communicate what the church is: the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of God, and many others. One of the most endearing images is that of a family, “a household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). God the Father adopts us into his own household through his Son (Ephesians 1:5). Jesus tells us to call God our Father (Matthew 6:9). And the writers of the New Testament refer to other believers as brothers and sisters in the Lord over a hundred times. Why is there so much family language? Well, it’s because the church is designed to be a family. Our physical families give us a small picture of the greater reality of our spiritual family. We become a part of God’s family when we trust that Jesus died in our place. Not only do we receive forgiveness but we are also adopted into God’s family. God now counts us as one of his children! Being a member of God’s family is an incredible privilege with wonderful benefits, but we are not only children. With our new identity as a child of God comes incredible relationships with many new brothers and sisters in Christ, our new family—the church.

As members of God’s family, our actions and behavior give the world a picture of what God is like. For this reason, we are called to imitate him and be his representative to the world. We want to represent our Father well since we now have his family name. This is no easy task, and we cannot represent God well on our own. We need God’s help and the help of his family!

When we commit to being a part of God’s family, we have the opportunity to enter into a beautiful community. The church family gives us a place to belong, a family to receive from, and the opportunity to use our gifts to bless others. And while there are many church gatherings throughout the world, we are called to commit to one gathering of God’s family in our community—the local church. The church also has incredible family rhythms as we worship God together and spend time with other family members. It is an amazing community that God himself is in charge of leading, protecting, and growing. As disciples, we are family members, united to one another through Jesus’ death in our place.

# **FAMILY MEMBER**

**1. BIBLE STUDY:  
EPHESIANS 2:16–22**

**2. PROTECTION FROM SIN**

**3. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

**4. LIFE TOGETHER**

## ⊕ FAMILY MEMBER: DAY 1

### **Bible Study: Ephesians 2:16–22**

We were created to live in a close-knit community with God and with other people. This community was meant to be as tight as family and as close as best friends. Originally, God and man lived together in the garden of Eden (Genesis 1–2). But when Adam and Eve sinned against God, they chose to define right and wrong for themselves. As a result, they could no longer live in God’s presence (Genesis 3:23–24). Not only did our sin break our relationship with God, it damaged our relationship with each other. Cain, the first child ever born to Eve, killed his own brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Sin turns brother against brother. Throughout the Bible and even in our time, we find hatred, disunity, and strife even among family members. Sin breaks apart God’s good creation.

God’s plan is to reunite his broken creation through the work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10). As we studied Ephesians 2:1–10 in week 1, we saw God bringing sinners back into relationship with himself through Christ’s death in our place. If we continue reading in Ephesians 2:11–22, we see God uniting sinners to each other in Christ. Paul specifically highlights two groups of sinners, Jews and Gentiles, two groups that really disliked each other. Yet these two groups are brought together through the death and resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 2:11–16). Christ took both Jews and Gentiles, and created a new people group, “resulting in peace” (Ephesians 2:15 CSB). Why did Christ do this? “He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross” (Ephesians 2:16). Christ brings two very different people groups back into relationship in one body, and that body is the church. And what is the church? The church is the family of those who trust in and follow God.

Ephesians 2:16–22 describes the church in four different ways—a body, a city, a family, and a temple. In today’s study, we’ll walk through this passage and learn more about God’s work of uniting us into one family through Christ. We will begin reading in verse 13 so we can study verses 16–22 with context.

### **Ephesians 2:13–22 (CSB)**

**13** But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, **15** he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace.

**16** He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. **17** He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

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## HIGHLIGHT

1. Underline every time the passage above refers to God, including pronouns. *Hint: Look for “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit.”*

2. List the contrast presented in verse 19 between who we were and who we are.

+ Who we were:

+ Who we are:

3. The church is described in verses 16–22 through imagery. Circle all the imagery you can find in the passage above and list the images below.

4. In the space below, list out every phrase that describes something about God’s new family in verses 20–22.

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## EXPLAIN

5. According to verse 18, Jews and Gentiles, “both have access” through Jesus Christ in one Spirit to the Father. This is a reference to the Trinity: one God in three persons. What is the significance of mentioning the Trinity when talking about the church?

6. Those who are united to Christ are “no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens ... and members of God’s household” (v. 19). Explain this transition in your own words. In what way were we foreigners and strangers? What’s different now?

The church is referred to as a body (v. 16), a city (v. 19), a family (v. 19), and a temple (v. 21). Additionally, each of the phrases below describe God’s new family, the church.

- + The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (v. 20).
- + “Christ Jesus himself” is the cornerstone of the church (v. 20).
- + The church is like a building “being put together” in Christ (v. 21).
- + The church grows into a “holy temple in the Lord” (v. 22).
- + The church is a dwelling place for God’s Spirit (v. 22).

7. The images of the church are described by these phrases. Putting all the descriptions of the church together, what can we learn about the local church from these images and descriptions?

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## APPLY

Two weeks ago, we saw in Ephesians that the gospel should transform our walk. Ephesians 4:1–6 specifically ties our new walk to unity within the family of God:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to *walk* in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and **one Spirit**—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—**one Lord**, one faith, one baptism, **one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

Notice the diversity and unity within the Trinity. One God in three persons: Father (v. 6), Son (v. 5) and Holy Spirit (v. 4). God’s unity and diversity is reflected through the church. The church has the privilege of reflecting something about the very essence of God.

This is how one commentary on Ephesians 2:15–22 describes God’s plan to create a new community through Christ:

*Jesus has created a new community.* Jesus came not only to die on the cross for our sin, but also to form a new community of people bought by his blood. Paul speaks of this new community as the body of Christ (2:16a) or as ‘one new man’ (2:15b). He also refers to

believers as fellow citizens ... (2:19c), as members of the household of God (2:19c), and as living stones that comprise the new temple where God dwells (2:21 – 22). This new community has the potential for being perfectly unified because Christ has taken away the principal source of enmity and has created the conditions for peaceful coexistence. ...

The contemporary church is built on the same foundation and worships the same Prince of Peace. It is the heart and passion of Jesus Christ for his church to transcend the cultural and economic barriers that separate and divide. Jesus longs for his church to overcome the cultural barriers of racism, nationalism, and economic pride and to embody in a practical way what he created it to be: an attractive, yet countercultural, family of people very different from one another who love each other deeply and display the presence of the God who is near.<sup>1</sup>

8. What are your thoughts on the church? What role does church play in your life right now?

9. All three persons of the Trinity have worked to establish unity in God's new family. As a church, we are called to maintain this unity (Ephesians 4:3) and mature in it (Ephesians 4:13). Obeying Ephesians 4:1–5 is a great way to apply the truths from Ephesians 2:11–22. What would it look like for you to pursue obedience to Ephesians 4:1–5 in your life?

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 176–177. For more information on how the Summit is pursuing racial reconciliation, visit [summitchurch.com/core](http://summitchurch.com/core).

Commenting on the family imagery in Ephesians 2:16–22, one author writes:

The whole of verse 19 reads: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household ...” — his family. As wonderful and soul-satisfying as our citizenship is, being “family” — “members of God’s household” — represents a far deeper intimacy. All who are part of the reconciled third race have the same Father. Later, in 3:14, 15, Paul will say in recognition of this, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” The opening line of the Lord’s Prayer also celebrates our mutual pater-  
ternity: “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). As “family” we automatically mouth the same patronym — “Abba” — because we have the same “Spirit of sonship” (Romans 8:15; cf. Galatians 4:6). All God’s children call him by the same intimate name.

As members of God’s household we are in satisfying and tender relationship to one another. Paul tells Timothy that in the Church we are to relate to older men as fathers and says, “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters ...” (1 Timothy 5:1, 2). Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers — that is what those in the reconciled third race are. These are terms of endearment. It is profitable to think of fellow members of the Body of Christ and then silently say their names, attaching “brother,” “sister,” “father,” or “mother” in recognition of this eternal truth.

The horizontal relational implications of our being God’s family are beautiful. Family is the place where you can be yourself and be assured you are accepted.<sup>2</sup>

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2 R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 99.

10. Describe your relationship with your close family, then compare it to your experiences with the church. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

God desires to create a new community (v. 16) that is free from enmity, or bitterness, (v. 16), united around Christ (v. 20), and built on the teachings of the apostles and prophets (v. 20). God dwells in this new community for his glory (v. 22). The local church is a spiritual greenhouse of growth for every member because God's Spirit is present among us (v. 22). We grow in our love for God, and each other, as we are empowered to walk together as family members. Not only that, we put God on display for the unbelieving world by being his family. Ephesians 3:10 goes as far to say that the church is central to God's plan of putting his wisdom on display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

God is invisible, but one of the main ways he puts his glory on display is through the local church. Our love for each other is the way the world knows we are his disciples: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Our holiness as a church puts on display God's holiness. This is why, at The Summit Church, we say that the local church is God's "Plan A" to reach the world. We reflect God's character to the world through the character of our congregation.

11. What are some steps you can take to grow in your commitment and love for God's family, the local church?

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## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise God for his holy triune nature: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Confession:** Examine your life to see how sin has fragmented your relationship with God and with others. Confess these sins to God, trusting that he is ready to show you mercy in Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God that you have access to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). Thank him that we are reconciled to him and to each other through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:16–22).

**Supplication:** Ask God to give you a love for his family, the local church. Pray that God would make our church a holy dwelling place for his Spirit (Ephesians 2:22) and build us up in maturity (Ephesians 2:18–19).

## ⊕ FAMILY MEMBER: DAY 2

### Protection From Sin: Hebrews 3:7–14

In today's reading, we'll learn why God's family, the local church, is essential for a true disciple. The local church is God's way of protecting his people from sin's deception.

First, we'll learn about God's ability to protect all those who are truly his disciples from falling away. Next, we'll consider the role of God's Word in protecting us. Lastly, we'll walk through Hebrews 1–3 to see how each member plays an essential role in protecting God's family.

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#### God Saves and Sustains His Sheep

If God has saved you, he will sustain you and help you continue to walk out your faith until the end. Paul assures us of this in an amazing encouragement in Philippians 1:6. He says, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). And Jesus himself promised that no one could take one of his followers, his sheep, out of his hands. In John 10:27–28 Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (NASB). Once God saves you, he will keep you and protect you.

Our confidence in God's ability to keep his followers should not lead us to think that everyone who professes to be a disciple *is* a real disciple, for Jesus plainly says:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and

in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21–23 NASB)

There will be those who initially claim to follow Jesus and later turn away (Matthew 13:1–23). The defining mark of a true disciple is not perfection but persevering in their trust of Jesus till the end of their lives (Matthew 24:13). It is not our perseverance till the end of our lives that makes us a true disciple. On the contrary, being a true disciple is what sustains our trust in God to the end. Hebrews 3:14 affirms this saying, “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end ...” (NASB). One author explains this verse saying:

[N]otice the wording carefully. It does *not* say: ‘We will become partakers of Christ in the future if we hold fast to our assurance.’ It says, ‘We have become partakers [in the past] if we hold fast our assurance.’ In other words, the holding fast to our assurance verifies that something real and lasting has happened to us, namely, we became partakers of Christ. We were truly born again. We were truly converted.<sup>3</sup>

### **God Saves and Sustains Through His Word**

God saves and sustains us, but he doesn’t do it without using specific tools in our lives. His main tool for our salvation and perseverance is his Word. Our spiritual life begins with the Word of God and is sustained by the Word of God. God gives us new life through his Word: “... you have been born again ... through the living and abiding word of God ...” (1 Peter 1:23). And God sustains our lives through his Word: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Believing God’s Word is what grants us life (John 20:31), and our faith in God is utterly dependent on believing his Word, “... faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Thus, one of the key marks of a true disciple is a continuing trust in God’s Word.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “Eternal Security Is a Community Project,” *Desiring God*, August 18, 1996, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/eternal-security-is-a-community-project>.

Below, we'll walk through Hebrews 1–3 in order to see three important truths.

1. Hearing and believing God's Word is essential to our perseverance as believers (Hebrews 1:1–2:4).
2. The deceitfulness of sin hardens the heart against God's Word (Hebrews 3:7–14).
3. The local church is God's gracious protection against the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12–13).

**Hearing and believing God's Word is essential to our perseverance as believers.**

**Hebrews 1:1–2:4**

*“Long ago **God spoke** to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, **he has spoken** to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him.”*

**Hebrews 1:1–2 CSB**

At the very beginning of the book, the author emphasizes that God has spoken. First, God spoke by the prophets and in different ways (Hebrews 1:1), and now he has spoken by his Son, Jesus (Hebrews 1:2). The author spends much of chapters 1 and 2 emphasizing how this Son, through whom God has spoken, **is greater** than all past revelations of God through angels, prophets, and Moses. And since this Son is so much greater, God's Word spoken through him is weightier, according to Hebrews 2:1–3:

For this reason, **we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard**, so that we will not drift away. For if the message **spoken** through angels was legally binding and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, how will we escape **if we neglect** such a great salvation? This salvation had its beginning when it was **spoken** of by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those **who heard him**. (CSB)

If God has spoken, then we must hear him. Hebrews 1:1–2 emphasized how God has spoken through the Son. Now we see in Hebrews 2 that because God has spoken, we must be diligent **to hear**. Hebrews 2:1 says, “we must pay attention *all the more* to what we have heard,” because God’s speech through the Son is greater (CSB).

But, what’s at stake in our hearing God’s Word? We listen to God’s Word “so that we will not drift away” (Hebrews 2:1). If we fail to pay attention to what we have heard, the danger is that we will drift away. The question verse 3 is essentially asking is: If the people who neglected God’s speech through angels received a punishment, how will we escape punishment if we neglect God’s Word spoken through Jesus? Listening and obeying God’s Word is essential to our faith lasting to the end of our lives. One of the greatest challenges to listening to the Word of God is a heart that is hardened, or has become resistant, toward God’s Word.

### **The deceitfulness of sin hardens the heart against God’s Word. Hebrews 3:7–14**

The author of Hebrews continues to warn us about disobedience from the story of Israel’s past failures. Many Israelites started off well when God brought them out of Egypt, but not many made it to the promised land. Their hearts became resistant against God’s Word, so they did not make it until the end. God spoke, and they all heard, but not all of them *believed*. Instead they believed that there was a path that led to a better life than following God. This is the definition of a hardened heart: when our hearts say, “My way is better than God’s way.”

In Hebrews 3:7–14, the author teaches us by quoting Psalm 95. Read the passage below carefully.

#### **Hebrews 3:7–14**

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

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

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

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

According to this passage, what prevents us from listening to and believing God's voice? What leads us to turn away from God? A hard *heart*. We see this phrase repeated in the verses above: "do not harden your *hearts*" (v. 8). The author warns against "an evil, unbelieving heart," which will lead us to "fall away from the living God" (v. 12). When we disobey, rebel, or go astray, it is an issue of our *hearts*. As a church family, we should not just be concerned with each other's actions or knowledge, but most importantly, we should be concerned about the state of each other's hearts.

What causes a person's heart to be hardened? Hebrews 3:13 gives the answer: our hearts are "hardened by the *deceitfulness of sin*." Sin is powerful because it lures us away with the promise that its way of life is easier, better, more rewarding, or more fun than God's way of life. The more our hearts begin to believe sin's lies, the more hardened they become against God's truth. We have to protect our hearts from sin's lies if we have any chance of following Jesus till the end of our lives.

### **The local church is God's gracious protection against the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12–13**

One of the ways God protects us from sin's deceitfulness is through other believers. Look back at Hebrews 3:12–13. It says, "take care." Some translations have, "see to it" or "watch out." No-

tice the author uses the plural (brothers/sisters), so this command to “watch out” is for everyone. What is all of God’s family watching out for? They are watching for the threat in “any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (v. 12). The author is essentially saying: “All of you guys, watch out for each one of you.” The author is not saying to the group: “Erica, watch out for yourself. David, watch out for yourself.” The author is saying: “All of you, watch out that not a single one of you has an evil, unbelieving heart.” The entire family is responsible for each individual person’s heart. The spiritual health of each individual is a matter of concern for the entire church family.

Look at Hebrews 3:13, The author says the church family is called to exhort, or encourage, one another, to protect each other from sin’s deceitfulness. The church family is God’s provision to help us endure to the end. We don’t fight against sin’s deceitfulness alone. We wage war together against anything that hardens our hearts toward God’s Word. When sin is screaming powerful lies in our ears, we need our brothers and sisters to remind us of God’s true words.

The author comes back to this point regularly throughout the book of Hebrews. Notice all the words emphasizing togetherness in Hebrews 10:23–25:

*Let us* hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And *let us* consider how to stir up *one another* to love and good works, not neglecting to meet *together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

As we saw at the beginning, God is faithful. He will not lose any of his followers that he died for (John 10:27–28). And as tools to protect us from sin’s decisiveness, God has given us his Word and his family, the local church. All those who have truly been saved by Jesus will enter into heaven with Jesus. But the path from salvation to heaven is not without dangers, and that is why God’s family, the local church, is so important and essential for our lives.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What are some examples from your life of how the local church has protected you from a hard heart and encouraged you to listen to God's Word?

2. List three people who have loved you by speaking God's Word to you when you were in danger of being deceived by sin. Choose one person and take a minute to write a note thanking them for the encouragement.

3. If we're going to guard one another's hearts from sin, we have to know what's going on in one another's hearts. What are some ways that you can get to know other believers better? How can you be more open with others about what is going on in your life at the heart level?

## ⊕ FAMILY MEMBER: DAY 3

### Church Membership

*“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

*Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

*The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

**1 Corinthians 12:12–27**

God didn't save us to follow him by ourselves. As we saw yesterday, we need our few, a family of people around us to help fight sin and follow Christ. We need the church family! As Christians, we are a part of God's family that is scattered across the world in every nation. But we are also called to belong to a particular group of Christians—a local church family. A helpful way to think about it is if your last name is Smith, you have some family connection to all the Smiths throughout the world. But even though you have that connection, you were meant to belong to one family of Smiths that lives in the Triangle. You didn't get to pick your family, and your life is forever bound to their lives. In the same way we belong to our family, we are meant to belong to a particular church family.

The way to become a part of a local church family is to become a church member through pursuing membership. The idea of membership finds its roots in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. Paul describes the local church in Corinth as one human body made up of many body parts. There are arms, legs, hands, mouths, and more. Paul's metaphor is helpful in understanding membership because in older English translations, the word “body part” is translated as the word “member.” So, the word “membership” literally means “to be numbered among the body parts.”<sup>4</sup> Based on 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, church membership is the formal process of telling your church family, “I belong to you,” “I want to receive from you,” and “I want to bless you.”

### **I Belong to You**

In verses 12–14, Paul highlights an encouraging fact: there is one body with many different parts. Our local church family is one family pursuing God together. But it is made up of people from all types of different backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, and giftings. No matter what our background, age, ethnicity, or contribution to the church family, we were called to equally belong to each other.

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4 “Membership | Origin and Meaning of Membership by Online Etymology Dictionary,” accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/membership>.

Look at what Paul says in verse 16, “And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body” (NIV). Our lack of similarities to other family members should not prevent us from committing to belonging to the church. Because we trust that Jesus died in our place, we have a new, shared identity as children of one amazing God. Our brothers and sisters in our church family help to encourage us in our identity as we learn to relate to God as our Father. Often we take our siblings for granted. But we can’t because every time “you” is used in the New Testament, the writer is actually saying “y’all.” For example, in verse 27, when Paul says, “you are the body of Christ,” it actually means you all are the body of Christ, each and every one of you who believes. Paul is telling us, “You all need each other, so commit to being a part of the local family of God!” You can’t follow God by yourself. That would be like a hand cutting itself off from the rest of the body. It isn’t going to survive on its own for very long, it’s only going to wither, rot, and die! When we trust that Jesus died in our place, we should find a local family of believers to belong to as a member.

### **I Want to Receive From You**

When you become a church family member, you are also telling the other family members, “I need the gifts you have, and I am willing to receive from you.” We see Paul explain this in verses 21–22, as he explains that different parts of God’s family need the gifts that other family members can provide.

When you commit to being a part of the body of the church family, you are committing to receive from others. What are you committing to receive? As we pointed out yesterday, we receive protection from sin and encouragement to follow Christ. We also receive from the church family as they mourn with us, celebrate with us, help us, feed us, and walk alongside us. When an older, wiser Christian lovingly points out an area of sin in your life, you can’t just say, “I don’t need you, I don’t need to hear that.” When declaring you want to belong to the family, you commit to receiving the family’s encouragements as well as their rebukes. We embrace receiving both encouragements and rebukes because we need them to grow in following Jesus.

## **I Want to Bless You**

As Paul talks about the church family as a body, he points out that the members of the church have gifts to bless others with. Some of these gifts we naturally have, but we grow in them as we own our trust in Jesus for ourselves. It isn't our parents' faith. It is our own responsibility to grow in Christ. And as we grow, we get to contribute to our family through being generous with our time, talent, and treasure.

Giving your time to your church family might look like serving on Sunday mornings or at a student gathering. Being generous with your talents means that you use the talents that God has given you to encourage and grow the church family. Talk with your parents or your small group leader to determine what your gifts are, then get creative with how you can bless your church family with them! Church members also support the church family through being generous with their treasure. This might look like giving some of your hard-earned money (or birthday money!) to meet the needs of the church family. This sounds difficult at first, but as you understand what it means to be a part of God's family and receive from the church, blessing them becomes a natural response to how God uses the church in our lives.

Receiving from and blessing our church family members is reflected all throughout the New Testament through the phrase "one another." Receiving from and blessing are so important in the life of the church body that "one another" is used over 100 times in 94 verses. Here are just a few examples of the blessing and receiving that should happen in the church family:

Love one another. (John 13:34)

Through love, serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another. (Ephesians 4:32)

Confess sins to one another and pray for one another. (James 5:16)

Bear one another's burdens. (Galatians 6:2)

Encourage and build up one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

As God's family, we need each other. And church membership is an incredible opportunity for you to belong to, receive from, and bless God's family. If you have put your trust in the fact that Jesus died in your place, you should talk to your student director about what it looks like to become a member of the church family. We are excited for you to commit to the church family!

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What are some of the advantages of becoming a church member?
2. What are your fears or concerns about becoming a member of a local church family?
3. Based on what you have read above and what you already know, why do you need other believers to play a role in your life?
4. From your reasons in question 3, which ones are most compelling to you as you think about what it means to be a church member?

## ⊕ FAMILY MEMBER: DAY 4

### Life Together

*“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

#### **Acts 2:41–47**

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These verses give us a picture of the life of the earliest church family. As we walk through them, we can make some important observations. We see at both the beginning and the end (vv. 41, 47), the Lord was the one who added to the group of believers. Verse 42 particularly highlights four elements that the believers were devoted to: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The rest of the text is a wonderful summary of what family life looks like for the church.

In the space below, list out all the activities you see mentioned above.

## Questions for Reflection

As you consider the list of activities from the passage, it becomes clear that the church was totally devoted to each other in fellowship. In our culture, and even in our own hearts, there are a lot of barriers to this kind of commitment to community. Some of the common barriers could include:

- + **Selfishness and individualism:** We prioritize personal desires and goals above the community.
- + **Busyness:** We prioritize our career, hobbies, responsibilities, and other things that squeeze out the church in our schedules.
- + **Aversion to commitment:** We prioritize flexibility and freedom over church commitment.
- + **Fear of being known:** We have a fear of participating in genuine and transparent relationships.

1. What are the biggest barriers that keep you from living deeply with your church family?

2. What are some steps you can take to fight against these barriers?

3. What are some ways that people close to you can come around you and encourage you as you strive to live together in community?

## FAMILY MEMBER

### Review

Below is a helpful outline of what we covered this week.

- + **Bible Study:** Ephesians 2:16–22
- + **Protection From Sin:** The local church is God’s means of protecting us from a hard heart that would lead us to walk away from him.
- + **Church Membership:** In the New Testament, we see that churches distinguished between those who were inside the church from those on the outside.
- + **Life Together:** Acts 2:41–47 paints a beautiful picture of the life of a church.

### Habits To Cultivate

**Regular attendance at church and small group:** The New Testament has 59 distinct one-another commands. Acts says believers were meeting together daily. The Christian life is meant to be lived together, and for that, we have to see each other regularly. Commit to regularly gathering with other believers throughout the week.

**Accountability:** Find a tight group of Christians with whom you can get into all the nitty-gritty of life. For more resources on developing accountability relationships, see the Appendix.

## Next Steps

**Join a local church:** If you haven't committed to membership at a local church, do it now! Talk with your study partner about this decision. For information about membership at the Summit, visit [summitchurch.com/connect](http://summitchurch.com/connect).

**Find a small group:** If you're not part of a small group, talk to your study partner about how you can find one to attend regularly.

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code..



## **FAMILY MEMBER: MEETING GUIDE**

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of *Groundworks* to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read Ephesians 2:16–22 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + Small group attendance
- + Accountability

### **Next Steps**

- + Join the local church
- + Find a small group



# **SERVANT**

A disciple gladly gives of themselves for the good of others.

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## INTRODUCTION

Being a servant is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Paul was an important leader in the early church and wrote a large chunk of the New Testament. However, he still regularly identified himself as a servant of Jesus (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). Other leaders like Peter, and even Jesus' brothers James and Jude, identified themselves as Jesus' servants (2 Peter 1:1; James 1:1; Jude 1:1). This is because Jesus called his disciples servants who were to eagerly obey his instructions for living (John 13:13–16; Mark 10:35–40). To be a disciple of Christ is to be a servant of Christ.

But, we are not naturally wired to be God's servants. We are instead servants of sin. Without Jesus changing our hearts, we are slaves to our sinful, selfish desires, doing whatever they tell us to do (Romans 6:15–19). But when we believe Jesus died in our place, God makes our spiritually dead hearts alive, and he releases us from our slavery to sin. And it is then we become God's servants (Romans 6:22). So the question is not whether we will be servants but whose servants we will be—God's or something else's (Romans 6:15–23)? Also, disciples are not reluctant servants of God. They love to serve him because of the love he has shown them (Romans 12:1–2).

Eager, joyful obedience to God is essential to being a servant of God. So naturally, part of making disciples is teaching other people to obey God's commands. Jesus instructed his disciples to do this saying, "... make disciples ... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). Earlier in Matthew, Jesus commands the disciples to serve one another:

"... But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26–28 RSV)

Disciples don't seek to be served. Rather, they sacrificially serve others, the way that Christ served them. Christ gave his life as a ransom for us, and that is why servants of Christ gladly give of themselves for the good of others.

# **SERVANT**

**1. BIBLE STUDY:**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11**

**2. REAPING THE REWARD**

**3. FREED TO SERVE**

**4. SERVANTS OF ALL**

## ⊕ SERVANT: DAY 1

### Bible Study: Philippians 2:1–11

As a disciple, we serve Jesus and others because Jesus first served us. We see this in Philippians 2:1–11, which is one of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In our study today, we will focus particularly on how this passage teaches us to live out our servant identity as we follow Christ's example.

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#### Philippians 2:1–11

**1** If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, **2** make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. **4** Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

**5** Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,

**6** who, existing in the form of God,

did not consider equality with God

as something to be exploited.

**7** Instead he emptied himself

by assuming the form of a servant,

taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man,

**8** he humbled himself by becoming obedient

to the point of death—

even to death on a cross.

**9** For this reason God highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

**10** so that at the name of Jesus

every knee will bow—

in heaven and on earth

and under the earth—

**11** and every tongue will confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

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## HIGHLIGHT

1. In the passage above, underline every command Paul gives the reader.
2. Put a box around all the verses that describe Christ.
3. In studying the Bible, it's often helpful to write verses out by hand. Writing them forces our eyes to slow down and notice things we would have otherwise missed. Write out the verses that describe Christ's divinity.
4. Write out the verses that describe Christ's incarnation and death.
5. Write out the verses that describe God's exaltation of Christ.
6. In this passage, which verses specifically connect the commands Paul gives the reader with Christ's work?

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## EXPLAIN

7. In your own words, describe the contrast between Christ's equality with God (v. 6) and what Christ did while living on earth (vv. 7–8).

8. Why did God highly exalt and celebrate Jesus? What do you think “for this reason” in verse 9 referring to?

9. Paul commands us to “adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus” in verse 5. In your own words, how would you describe Christ's attitude?

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## APPLY

Jesus Christ is God (vv. 6, 9, 11), and yet he takes an attitude of a servant (vv. 5–7). He is presented in this passage as one who was infinitely high, yet stooped low to serve sinners. It is important for us to pause and marvel at just how amazing Christ is. **Reread verses 5–8, focusing on what Jesus gave up to save you from your sin.**

10. In what ways is your attitude toward serving others different from that of Christ Jesus?

After Jesus' humble obedience unto death, God highly exalted him (v. 9). To "exalt" simply means to "celebrate and give honor to someone." Jesus himself taught that humility leads to exaltation: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). There is nothing wrong with wanting to be exalted, but we should seek God's exaltation, not the praise of other humans. "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10 NASB).

11. In what ways does your desire to be exalted, celebrated, and honored play out in your life?

12. What are some ways you can grow in obeying the command to "adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus" (v. 5 CSB)?

13. Verses 3 and 4 say: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (CSB). In what areas of your life, do you see evidence of selfish ambition or conceit? How can you grow in looking out for other people’s interests above your own?

## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise Jesus for loving us so much that he gave up everything he deserved to save us. Celebrate and praise his name along with God for how great he is.

**Confession:** Confess to God how you have failed to have a servant mindset with people around you, your family, and your community.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank Jesus for dying on the cross in your place, for your sins (v. 8).

**Supplication:** Ask God to give you a heart like Christ’s. Pray his Spirit grants you the ability to love going low in serving others. Pray that God would grow our church in unity as we seek to live like Christ.

## ⊕ SERVANT: DAY 2

### Reaping the Reward

*“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”*

**Colossians 3:23–24**

Disciples are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and everything we do, from chores and homework to playing sports, is in order to serve him. In everything we do, we serve with all our heart, doing it for the Lord, not for men (v. 23). We do this, knowing the reward we receive for our serving is not what other people can give us, but what the Lord will give us (v. 24). In today’s reading, we’ll learn what it looks like to serve the Lord in all our serving.

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## THE GREAT REWARD IN THANKLESS SERVICE <sup>1</sup>

### Betsy Childs Howard

It’s Wednesday night. I’ve cooked dinner for the Bible study we host each week in our apartment. The meal is ready on time. As members arrive from their jobs around the city, they exclaim how “amazing” dinner smells, and it turns out to be tasty. The men help themselves to seconds, and the women again announce that it was “amazing.”

*I think silently, I love to serve!*

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<sup>1</sup> Betsy Childs Howard, “The Great Reward in Thankless Service,” The Gospel Coalition, July 22, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/great-reward-thankless-service/>. Used with permission.

It's Thursday night. I've cooked dinner for my husband and myself. I got a late start because I forgot to buy fresh garlic at the store and had to go back. I turn the oven up, hoping the meal will cook faster. The kitchen is hot, and I'm a bit sweaty, but we sit down to eat not too many minutes after I had planned. As I cut into my chicken breast, I see the sickening pink of an uncooked middle. I look over at my husband, who is silently cutting around the center of his chicken breast.

I start a passionate internal monologue of self-defense: *He has no idea how much I do for us. He takes me for granted. Our oven is not reliable. I do too much for our church. The fact that our chicken is raw is not my fault!*

These two scenarios encapsulate my love/hate relationship with serving. When serving makes me look good, it's rewarding. When my service is deficient (e.g., raw chicken) I get angry and want to blame someone. When my service is overlooked, I feel resentful and unappreciated.

### **Serving the Master**

Most of the Christians I know take for granted that serving others is a good thing. After all, Jesus said, "But whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). Moreover, in some relationships we have no choice but to serve others, as when caring for small children or aging parents. But it's difficult to move from knowing you should serve to joyfully serving those who take you for granted.

It helps me to remember that, in terms of spiritual service, my only master is God. He has given me neighbors to serve for his sake. Pleasing other people is a good thing, but when I serve for their approval rather than God's, I put them in the place of the Master and forget my true identity: a servant of God.

### **Serving for God's Reward**

There's a reason why it's so much harder to serve when people overlook our service or don't appreciate it. God designed us to seek approval. He created us to desire a reward for all our hard work. When we try to psych ourselves up to live sacrificially without any hope of recognition,

we aren't thinking the way God thinks. The scriptural motive for service is the hope of blessing (John 13:12–17). Our problem is not that we seek reward, but that we expect it to come from the wrong people.

One of the best articulations of the biblical motive for serving others is addressed to actual servants in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:22–24)

Imagine you're a first-century indentured servant. Day after day, you wash your mistress's clothes in the river. You dry them in the sun to bleach the natural fibers. You hope she will notice the care you take to please her, but she never notices. In fact, she takes out her bad moods on you by mocking you and speaking harshly.

In this situation, you're faced with a choice. You could stop trying so hard, since you're never going to be appreciated. Or you could choose to do your best, because you know the Lord of all the earth will see your efforts and be pleased by them. You may discover ways to serve and benefit your mistress that she will never know. If so, you can take secret joy in your unrewarded excellence, because you know the Lord will repay you.

What sort of reward can we expect from our Master? We've already read in Colossians 3 that we will receive an inheritance. We will be God's heirs. Furthermore, Jesus promises that those who serve him will be with him and honored by his Father: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:25–26). Isn't honor what we crave when we serve? That's how God designed us, but we look for that honor from people who can't satisfactorily give it.

Jesus warned, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1). Buried in this warning is the glorious news that in the life to come, our Father will celebrate good deeds that go unnoticed on earth. Looking forward to this promised reward helps us embrace our identity as servants—and heirs—of God.

### **Serving like Jesus**

What might it look like to live out a transformed identity as a servant of God? To serve in the hope of honoring God rather than rising in the estimation of others?

- + It might look like washing the coffee pot at work, week after week, even though your coworkers have never noticed or wondered how it stays clean.
- + It might be cheerfully visiting a relative with Alzheimer’s even though she doesn’t recognize you and bitterly complains her family has forgotten her.
- + It might mean serving a store-bought dessert to dinner guests, even though no one was ever impressed by the ability to buy a dessert.
- + It might look like volunteering on the cleanup crew for a fundraiser even though you know the decorating crew is more fun and earns more recognition.
- + It might mean gladly agreeing to watch your neighbor’s child even though the last time you kept her, the child came down with a stomach virus, and your neighbor didn’t think it was a big deal or even seem appreciative.

Once we know we’re serving the Lord rather than men and women, we can stop worrying about whether we are under-appreciated. We can stop focusing on whether our efforts enhance our image and start concentrating on how we can best meet the needs of our neighbors.

What of those times when our service is warmly appreciated by those we serve? When your child tells you you’re the best mommy in the world, or your coworker sends an email of commendation to your supervisor after you’ve gone the extra mile on a project? We can’t live for these

moments of being seen and appreciated, and we can't count on them to fuel our service. But we can rejoice in the glimpse they offer of the joy God takes in our service.

Jesus gave up the glory of heaven to become the servant of men by saving us from our sins. He was despised and rejected by those he came to serve. Yet he loved us to the end, and he received his reward: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name . . ." (Phil. 2:9). Whether we are applauded or despised by those around us, we too can serve for the joy of our Master and enter into his great reward.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In what way does the stature or importance of the person you are serving affect your attitude in serving them?

2. What happens in your heart when you are serving others but rarely get noticed or appreciated? How does the reading address this issue?

3. Do you ever think certain things are “beneath” you? Do you internally grumble and complain in serving? How can you fight these tendencies by doing everything “as for the Lord, and not for men” (v. 23)?

## ⊕ SERVANT: DAY 3

### Freed to Serve

*For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.*

**Galatians 5:13 CSB**

Paul's statement above may strike us as contradictory at first. If we are free, why do we need to serve one another? Paul says things like this often: "Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone ..." (1 Corinthians 9:19 CSB). Even though Paul has one person he answers to, God, he seeks to serve everyone so that they might become Christians.

In today's reading, we'll learn how disciples of Christ are the freest of all people in order to be the servants of all.

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## THE FREEST PEOPLE ARE SERVANTS OF ALL <sup>2</sup>

### **John Piper**

The word *simplistic* exists because there are kinds of guidance and kinds of explanations that are too simple to account for the real complexities of life. They are simplistic. We don't admire such counselors or preachers or teachers. They just don't seem to be living in the real world where things are often very messy. In all my reading of Paul over the years, he has never struck me as *simplistic*.

A good example is the way he deals with our submission to authority in this world, and the way he treats Christian freedom.

### **Citizens of Heaven**

It is a fundamental Christian reality that “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). Or another way to say it is that, because Christians are united to Christ, there is a real sense in which we have already died with him and been raised with him and are already secure in heaven with him.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1–3)

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “The Freest People Are Servants of All,” 2019, © Desiring God Foundation, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-freest-people-are-servants-of-all>.

Paul draws out the radical implication:

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21)

A simplistic inference from this reality would be that Christians have no responsibilities to this world or her institutions. That is not Paul's view. Instead, it seems that, in this freedom from the world, we are sent by God back into the world to be subject to its institutions "for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13) — or as Paul says, "out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

### **Earthly Authorities**

For example, though your citizenship is in heaven, nevertheless assume the role of a responsible citizen in your own country: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1). See the hand of your heavenly Father behind the hand of human government, and submit for his sake.

Similarly, in the socioeconomic sphere, submit to human authorities in a way that turns your service of them into the service of Christ:

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, *as you would Christ*, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but *as bondservants of Christ*, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will *as to the Lord* and not to man. (Ephesians 6:5–7)

Is it not amazing how interwoven allegiance to Christ is with allegiance to the earthly authority? This is not simplistic. It is complex and will sooner or later result in tensions, even to the breaking point.

Similarly in the home: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, *as to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:22). And “children, obey your parents *in the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:1).

### **For the Lord’s Sake**

To be sure, the new reality in the world, since Christ has come and died and risen to reign, is that our absolute allegiance to him relativizes all other allegiances. That is, we serve in all other relationships at his bidding, not because of their intrinsic authority over us. Which means that wherever those relationships contradict what he calls us to do, his authority takes precedence.

In a real sense, we are free from these institutions, even while submitting to them. Here’s how Paul expressed this to the Corinthians:

Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant *is a freedman of the Lord*. Likewise he who was free when called is *a bondservant of Christ*. You were bought with a price; *do not become bondservants of men*. (1 Corinthians 7:21–23)

And again in an earlier chapter of the same book: “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Christ purchased us by his own blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, he owns us. Therefore, all other claims on our lives are secondary. We stay in them at Christ’s bidding, and for his sake, not because there is any intrinsic right that they have over us.

### **Slaves No More**

This Christian freedom goes right to the heart of who we are as Christ’s people. It goes deeper than freedom from institutions. It is also freedom from the law of God as a way of getting right with God. When Christ died for us, he paid the penalty that the law of God demands for our guilt (Romans 5:8–9; 8:3). And he fulfilled all the obedience that the law demands for our righteous-

ness (Romans 5:19). Therefore, we are free. And we dare not return to law-keeping as a way of getting right with God. When we do what God commands, it is because we are already right with God through faith in Christ, not because we need to get right. So Paul says,

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision [i.e., law-keeping], Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (Galatians 5:1–3)

So we are free from God’s law and free from God’s institutions (e.g., state, business, home). Christ owns us, and we are his. He is our absolute commander and protector. If he calls us to submit to any law or any institution, we do it. Not because the institution is absolute. And not because law-keeping makes us right with God. We do it because we believe Christ knows the way of love better than we do. This is what’s behind Paul’s amazing word: “Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them” (1 Corinthians 9:19).

### **Freest Life of All**

Perhaps this gives you a taste for what I mean when I say that Paul is not simplistic. Christians are free in Christ. Gloriously free. To the world our lives may look very much like the lives of mere servants — constantly subordinating our own comforts to the needs of others. But in God’s eyes, this life of love is the freest of all.

Which is not a simplistic reality. But it is beautiful, flowing directly from the cross of Christ. And I love Paul for helping me taste the beauty.

## Questions for Reflection

Christ has set us free so that we can gladly serve him by serving others. Let's try to apply this concept to every area of your life. Pastor J.D. often reminds us that in every relationship in our life, we should ask this one important question: *How can I serve you?*

Today, we'll start with the family. What if, in every family interaction, you were to ask the question, "How can I serve you?" How would that change your attitude?

**List all your relationships with others in your house. It could be mother, father, son, daughter, grandparent, brother, sister, etc. Then, next to each one, thoughtfully write out what it would look like for you to be a servant in each of these relationships.**

## ⊕ **SERVANT: DAY 4**

### **Servants of All**

In the last reading, we applied the idea of disciples as servants to family life. Today, we'll do the same with the church, the neighborhood, and the family. What would change in each of these areas if we made it a habit to ask the question, "How can I serve you?"

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## Serving Your Church

*“Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, **especially for those who belong to the household of faith.**”*

### **Galatians 6:9–10 CSB**

Paul commands Christians to serve everyone, but he puts priority on “those who belong to the household of faith” (v. 9 CSB). This means that as disciples, we should make serving our local church a priority in our life. The local church is our “household of faith.” No husband would regularly neglect his duties to his wife or children in order to serve those outside his home. Similarly, we should make Christ’s bride and God’s family a priority in all our serving.

**Write out what it would look like for you to be a servant to the local church family. What regular habits can you cultivate to grow as a servant in your local church family?**

## Serving Your Neighbors

In the Gospels, Jesus regularly highlights the importance of loving our neighbors. We see this exemplified in Jesus' interaction with a lawyer who came to question him in Matthew 22:35–40:

And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: 'Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?'

He said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.' (CSB)

**Write out what it would look like to be a loving servant to your neighbors. What regular habits can you cultivate to grow as a servant in your neighborhood?**

## Serving Your Family

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’”*

### ***Ephesians 6:1–3***

Often we don’t think of ourselves as our parent’s servants. “After all” we think, “we are their children! If they love us, they will do things for us.” Yet God wants us to approach our parents with an attitude of servants. Serving our parents isn’t always enjoyable. But it is an act that has a promise attached to it. If we serve our parents and family, then life will go well for us! How do we serve? First, we serve through obeying what our parents ask us to do (v. 1). Second, we treat them with respect, or honor, like we are serving someone extremely important (v. 2).

**Write out what it would look like to be a servant to your family. What regular habits can you cultivate to grow as a servant to your parents and family?**

## ⊕ SERVANT

### Review

Below is a helpful outline of what we covered this week.

- + **Bible Study:** Philippians 2:1–11
- + **Reaping the Reward:** We don't serve for the praise and admiration of others, but the reward of the Father.
- + **Freed to Serve:** Disciples of Christ are the freest of all people in order to be the servants of all.
- + **Servants of All:** We serve others in every area of life.

### Habits To Cultivate

**How can I serve you?:** Make it a habit to regularly ask this question in every area of your life.

**Attend one, serve one:** Find a place to serve at church. Talk to your study partner about what would be a good fit for you.

**ServeRDU:** Find a way to regularly serve your neighbors and community. Scan the QR code for information and opportunities.



## Next Steps

**Sign up to serve:** Talk with your study partner about possible opportunities, and then take the plunge and sign up to serve somewhere, whether at church or in the community. Invite someone else to serve alongside you—your friend or someone from your small group.

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code.



## **SERVANT: MEETING GUIDE**

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of Groundworks to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read Philippians 2:1–11 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

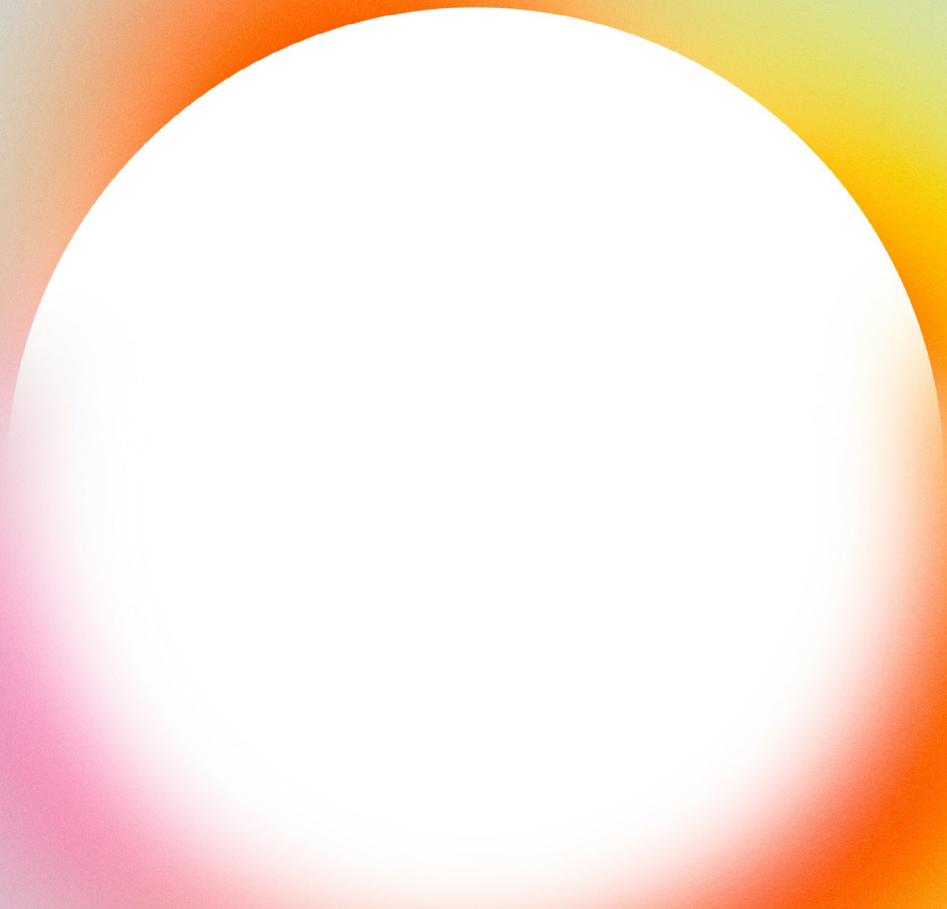
Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + How can I serve you?
- + Attend one, serve one
- + ServeRDU

### **Next Steps**

- + Sign up to serve somewhere this week!



# STEWARD

A disciple manages God's gifts for God's purposes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Everything on the earth is God's, including us. Why? We are his creation! As one Psalm writer says, "The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the LORD ..." (Psalm 24:1 CSB). As the creator and owner of all things, he needs nothing from us. God says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and everything in it is mine" (Psalm 50:12 CSB). Since God is the owner of everything, all that we have, we possess as stewards.

A steward is a person who manages a property or resource for the owner. Jesus uses the word steward in a parable he tells in Luke 12:35–48. There, he teaches that we are like stewards, whom God (the property owner) has left in charge while he is away. On his return, the owner judges the stewards according to how they managed the property they were given (Luke 12:42). Jesus is teaching that God's people should remember that the owner of all things is returning, and we will give an explanation to God of how we managed what he entrusted to us.

The writers of the New Testament also saw themselves as God's stewards. For example, Paul saw himself as a steward of the good news of the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:2). Peter tells us that we should also be good stewards of God's different gifts of grace. This means that we should use every gift that God gives us for his glory and the good of others. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:10–11:

Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (CSB)

We can apply this truth about stewardship to all of our life since everything we have is a gift from God. Our existence, our bodies, our relationships, our time, our talents, our treasures, our jobs, everything. None of it is really ours, they are all his. We are stewards, and he is the owner. For this reason, a disciple is a steward who manages God's gifts for God's purposes.

# **STEWARD**

**1. BIBLE STUDY:**

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–11**

**2. TITHING**

**3. THE BLESSEDNESS OF  
POSSESSING NOTHING**

**4. STEWARDING ALL OF LIFE**

## ⊕ STEWARD: DAY 1

### **Bible Study: 2 Corinthians 9:6–11**

As we just read, a steward manages God's gifts for God's purposes. When it comes to money, what does it mean to manage God's money for God's purposes? Jesus spoke strongly against putting a love of money first in our lives saying: "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24 CSB).

Jesus speaks to us about money, not because he is dependent on us financially, but because he is after the passion of our hearts. As Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Jesus recognized that what we do with our money shows what we love most in our lives. If we spend all of it quickly, we love material things or experiences. If we save all of it for ourselves, we love security more than anything else. Paul also regularly warns us against the love of money:

For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:7–10 CSB)

Good stewards of God's gift of money are joyful in their generosity as they trust God to provide them with enough money to give to others and use for their own needs. In today's Bible study, we'll look at a passage from 2 Corinthians, where Paul motivates his readers toward cheerful generosity that comes from the heart.

## **2 Corinthians 9:6–11**

**6** The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. **7** Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. **9** As it is written:

‘He distributed freely;  
he gave to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever.’

**10** Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **11** You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.

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## HIGHLIGHT

1. Write out all the verses in this passage that tell us something about God.
2. In the passage, underline everything that describes a way of giving.
3. Circle all the words that connect truths about God to our giving. Like the word “since” in verse 7 or “able” in verse 8.

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## EXPLAIN

4. The following verses/phrases tell us something about God. Beside each one, write out in your own words what you can learn about God from them.

“... God loves a cheerful giver.” (v. 7):

“... God is able to make every grace overflow to you ...” (v. 8):

“Now the one who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness.” (v. 10):

“You will be enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us.” (v. 11):

5. What kind of giving is discouraged in the passage? What kind of giving is encouraged? Why?

6. Explain the connections between our giving and God.

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## APPLY

Take a moment to consider the truths about God we find in this passage.

- + God doesn't merely care that we give, he cares about our hearts' inclinations in our giving. He delights in cheerful giving (v. 7).
- + God is a God of grace, and he overflows in his grace toward us (v. 8).
- + God is involved in the process of generosity from start to finish. God provides us with seeds for sowing. God provides us with bread for food. It is God who multiplies the seeds when we sow. And God increases the harvest of our righteousness (v. 10).
- + God enriches us in every way for all generosity. And God is ultimately to be thanked for any acts of generosity (v. 11).

7. How do you perceive God when you consider what he has given to you in your life? For example, do you think of him as generous or stingy toward you? Why?

Sowing generously leads to reaping generously, and sowing sparingly leads to reaping sparingly (v. 6). This passage discourages us from giving reluctantly or out of compulsion (v. 7). Instead, we are to give as we have decided in our heart, and we are to give cheerfully (v. 8). Paul quotes Psalm 112 in verse 9 as he describes the giving of a righteous person, reminding readers that the generous person gives *freely* to the poor, not under compulsion.

8. What is your heart toward giving? What desires or fears make it difficult for you to be cheerful in generosity? What desires make you give reluctantly or under compulsion?

Consider how our giving relates to God's character and his work.

- + We should give generously, as we have decided in our heart, and not reluctantly or out of compulsion. Why? Because "God loves a cheerful giver" (v. 7). God doesn't delight in giving that comes from a reluctant heart or from compulsion. God loves it when his children are happy as they give. God rejoices at our joy in living generously.
- + All of our giving flows out of God's first giving to us. We are dependent on God to give us grace in every way (v. 8). We look to him to give us everything we need for us to excel in good works, and thus, we are enabled to give cheerfully.
- + God is the one who provides us with anything that we sow and give (v. 10). God is the one who enriches us for all generosity (v. 11). So, in our giving, we should look to God as the one who gives to us so that we have something to give to others. We should also look to God as the one who will make up any lack that we experience from giving. Additionally, we should rejoice at the thought of thanksgiving abounding toward God in other people's hearts through our generosity (v. 11).

9. What about God in this passage is prompting you to live a life more dependent on him instead of money? As you consider your own heart, why do you want to live generously?

10. Write out a prayer to God asking him to give you direction on what it would look like for you to “excel in every good work” (v. 8). Write out anything else you would like to discuss with your study partner.

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## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise God for being a God who generously gives grace to you in Christ (v. 8).

**Confession:** Confess to God how you have given reluctantly or under compulsion, and without cheerfulness in your heart (vv. 6–8). Ask him for forgiveness for the ways you’ve neglected the poor (v. 9).

**Thanksgiving:** Thank God for the forgiveness we have in Christ. Thank God for all the gifts he has given you for giving generously (v. 10). Thank God for other people in your life who have modeled cheerful generosity (v. 11).

**Supplication:** Pray that the Holy Spirit would help your heart become more and more cheerful in your giving.

## ⊕ STEWARD: DAY 2

### Tithing: How Much Should I Give?

*“Every tenth of the land’s produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. If a man decides to redeem any part of this tenth, he must add a fifth to its value. Every tenth animal from the herd or flock, which passes under the shepherd’s rod, will be holy to the LORD.”*

#### **Leviticus 27:30–34 CSB**

Yesterday, we saw that we should be generous with our resources of time, talent, and treasure. The question most people have is, “If everything that we have is God’s, then how much of our time, talent, and treasure do we give?” To answer this question, we have to go back to the Old Testament and look at God’s instructions to the people of Israel. God originally told them to dedicate around 10 percent of all their crops and livestock to generously giving to God and others in worship. But as Christians, we don’t follow Old Testament laws because Jesus followed all the laws in our place. Because he followed them for us, we don’t have to follow them. So, what does this mean for how much we should give to God? Well, Pastor J.D. is going to help us think through what this means for ourselves.

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## SOME QUESTIONS I GET ABOUT TITHING <sup>1</sup>

### **J.D. Greear**

Over the years I have gotten (and had myself) questions about whether or not the tithe (giving the first 10 percent of our income back to God as prescribed by the law) was biblical. Let me give you a brief answer to some of those questions that demonstrate how I have learned to approach them.

#### **1. Isn't tithing Old Testament law? Aren't we free of that?**

Yes and no.

A. Tithing is a part of the law, and Jesus has definitely fulfilled it all in our place so that we are free from its bondage. However, the purposes of the law were (generally speaking) threefold:

1. To show us what God was like;
2. To reveal how far short we fall of God's character;
3. To show us how to thrive in the creation God has placed us in.

None of those three purposes faded with the death of Jesus. If anything, Jesus' coming intensified them. We saw more of what God was like, what holiness was like, and what a man acting in perfect harmony with creation was like. As it relates to the tithe, the law reveals the unchanging character of God and how he expects us to view the money he provided for us. A minimum of 10 percent that he has given to us, whether we are rich or poor, is to go back into his work. This is how he set up the world order. This is why the "tithe" principle (the first 10 percent of income

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from J.D. Greear's, "Some Questions I Get About Tithing," Summit Life With J.D. Greear, June 7, 2012, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/questions-i-get-about-tithing/>. Used with permission.

going into God's work) is taught pre-law (Abraham); law (Moses); post-exile (Malachi); and even affirmed under Jesus (Matthew 23:23). God's purposes for creation haven't changed. We are no longer under the theocratic nation state of Israel, but how God has set up his economy for his people has not changed. God doesn't lay the financial weight of the entire world on any of our shoulders, but he has given his people a plan whereby they do their part. The law was given to help people live in the shalom of God. That's what gives the law (principles like taking a Sabbath and the tithe) an enduring effect. Thus, the idea that 10 percent of all that God gives to you is given for you to give back to him remains, I believe, as a good guide to our giving.

Now, let me be clear—Jesus left us under no **part** of the law, not the tithe or anything else! But the law, in that it reflects God's character and his ordering of creation, is still good, and still functions as a guide to how we are to live under God in this world. Men and women of God throughout the Bible, including Abraham and Jesus, seemed to recognize that. See John Piper for more on this.<sup>2</sup>

B. If anything, the gospel raises the level of our response to God's laws. True obedience, Jesus says, goes much deeper than the behavior standards the law requires. For example, the law said, "Don't murder;" yet, Jesus said the gospel demanded we love our brother always and not hate him, not even our enemies. The law said, "Don't commit adultery;" yet, Jesus said that the gospel demanded people not even "look on another woman with lust in our heart." So if the law says, "Give 10 percent," what kind of generosity does the gospel call for? Would it not be greater generosity than 10 percent, just as the other commands were also intensified in Christ? In other words, if the people who saw God's generosity in the Exodus responded with giving 10 percent, how much more should people who have seen the cross? This is why you see the early church giving far beyond 10 percent. So overwhelmed by the generosity of Christ, they wanted to pour out their possessions for those in need (2 Corinthians 8:9).

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2 See John Piper's "Toward the Tithe and Beyond: How God Funds His Work," *Desiring God*, September 10, 1995, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/toward-the-tithe-and-beyond>.

For gospel-touched people, tithing should never be the ceiling of their giving, but it should be the floor.

**Tithing, in and of itself, is not an iron-clad rule for Christians as it was for Israelites under the law.** That said, “giving our firstfruits to God” most definitely is a biblical principle, true of God’s people in all places and at all times. And 10 percent is a great place to start with that.

## **2. Should I give the tithe pre-tax or post-tax?**

In the Old Testament, God called the tithe a “firstfruit” (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2). This meant that their giving to God came first before anything else. That teaches pretty clearly that our giving to God comes before Uncle Sam takes his share. God gets the firstfruits, not the second ones.

## **3. When during the month should I give?**

The principle of “firstfruits” also shows you, in my opinion, that the tithe check should be written first, and not at the end of the month when you see how much leftover you have. If you do the latter, you will inevitably never have enough to give God 10 percent. You’re giving him your scraps. But if you do the former, you will inevitably adjust your lifestyle around what you have left. And God also will find a way to multiply his blessings to you. I’ve seen that happen in my own life multiple times. It’s pretty exciting.

## **4. Should we give to the church or other things?**

In the Old Testament system, the tithe went to the work of God’s institution, the temple. Caring for the poor beyond what the temple did, or funding an itinerant rabbi, etc, all came out beyond the tithe. I believe the implication is that tithing should go to God’s new institution, the local church. Hopefully you have a church that you feel good about how they spend their money (not all on buildings, entitlement perks for members and pastors, etc.) and you see them working in

the streets and unreached parts of the world. Give some grace here, of course. It's always easy to play armchair quarterback and talk about how you'd do it differently. I'd say if you trust your pastors, however, you honor God by giving to the institution he ordained. Then give like a gospel-touched fool beyond that to all the things God has put in your heart.

I hope this helps. I know some of you might think this is self-serving, as in when people tithe, my own means as a pastor are provided. I guess there's no way around that for me, but I can tell you that my passion in this area has little to do with that. We have enough people who believe in our church that I'm not worried right now about where my next paycheck will come from. In other words, if this bothers you, we don't need your money. Give it somewhere else, but I want you to experience the joy of obedience and faith in this area. I'd rather you obey the principle and give somewhere else (even if you come to our church) than I would miss out on this principle of trust and obedience because you think I'm being manipulative. God will take care of us. You focus on obeying him, and if this feels manipulative, give to someone else besides The Summit Church.

### **5. How does this work out for your family, J.D.?**

When Veronica and I first got married, we had to stretch ourselves unbelievably thin to tithe. As God has increased our income over the years, we have yearly increased the percentage of what we give. We now give way above the tithe to our church, and then beyond that to ministries blessing the poor and carrying the gospel to the world. We love it. Veronica last night said, "This is so fun ... giving." It really is more blessed to give than to receive. God really has multiplied what we have given to him and given it back to us "in every way,"—financially, in joy, in perspective, etc. (2 Corinthians 8–9). We love it.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Describe how you think through giving to the church. What has shaped your thoughts and actions?

2. Do you believe and accept what God's Word teaches about giving? Write down any thoughts or questions you have below.

3. What are the obstacles, if any, that keep you from being obedient in this area of your life? What would it look like for you to put Christ at the center of the money you earn?

## ⊕ STEWARD: DAY 3

### The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing

*“...If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. 36 For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? 37 What can anyone give in exchange for his life?”*

#### **Mark 8:34–37 CSB**

If we want to follow Jesus, saying no to the things we want must become an essential part of our lives. Many of us want a lot of things. Maybe you want a new phone, trendy clothes, or your dream car. But look at Jesus’ words. Would it be a win for you if you got all the things you wanted but lost your life? It is really tempting to only focus on getting the material things we want. But the risk is, if we focus on getting those things, we may totally miss Jesus.

Now, God gives us things as good gifts to enjoy and to use. But he doesn’t want us to only be focused on those gifts. He wants us to thank him for those gifts and recognize where they came from. As we’ve seen, part of being a steward is recognizing that God is the owner of all things, and we are just his managers. If we really believe this, then we won’t be tempted to let God’s gifts take the place of God in our life. In today’s reading, we’ll consider what it looks like to have a heart free from ungodly attachments to this world.

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## THE BLESSEDNESS OF POSSESSING NOTHING <sup>3</sup>

### **A.W. Tozer**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

### **Matthew 5:3**

Before the Lord God made man upon the earth He first prepared for him by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for his sustenance and delight. In the Genesis account of the creation these are called simply “things.” They were made for man’s uses, but they were meant always to be external to the man and subservient to him. In the deep heart of the man was a shrine where none but God was worthy to come. Within him was God; without, a thousand gifts which God had showered upon him.

But sin has introduced complications and has made those very gifts of God a potential source of ruin to the soul.

Our woes began when God was forced out of His central shrine and “things” were allowed to enter.

Within the human heart “things” have taken over. Men have now by nature no peace within their hearts, for God is crowned there no longer, but there in the moral dusk stubborn and aggressive usurpers fight among themselves for first place on the throne.

This is not a mere metaphor, but an accurate analysis of our real spiritual trouble. There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets “things” with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns “my” and “mine” look

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<sup>3</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Project Gutenberg, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25141/25141-h/25141-h.htm>.

innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. They are verbal symptoms of our deep disease. The roots of our hearts have grown down into *things*, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God's gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

Our Lord referred to this tyranny of *things* when He said to His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Breaking this truth into fragments for our better understanding, it would seem that there is within each of us an enemy which we tolerate at our peril. Jesus called it "life" and "self," or as we would say, the *self-life*. Its chief characteristic is its possessiveness: the words "gain" and "profit" suggest this. To allow this enemy to live is in the end to lose everything. To repudiate it and give up all for Christ's sake is to lose nothing at last, but to preserve everything unto life eternal. And possibly also a hint is given here as to the only effective way to destroy this foe: it is by the Cross. "Let him take up his cross and follow me."

The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the Kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. These are the "poor in spirit." They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem; that is what the word "poor" as Christ used it actually means. These blessed poor are no longer slaves to the tyranny of *things*. They have broken the yoke of the oppressor; and this they have done not by fighting but by surrendering. Though free from all sense of possessing, they yet possess all things. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Let me exhort you to take this seriously. It is not to be understood as mere Bible teaching to be stored away in the mind along with an inert mass of other doctrines. It is a marker on the road

to greener pastures, a path chiseled against the steep sides of the mount of God. We dare not try to by-pass it if we would follow on in this holy pursuit. We must ascend a step at a time. If we refuse one step we bring our progress to an end.

As is frequently true, this New Testament principle of spiritual life finds its best illustration in the Old Testament. In the story of Abraham and Isaac we have a dramatic picture of the surrendered life as well as an excellent commentary on the first Beatitude.

Abraham was old when Isaac was born, old enough indeed to have been his grandfather, and the child became at once the delight and idol of his heart. From that moment when he first stooped to take the tiny form awkwardly in his arms he was an eager love slave of his son. God went out of His way to comment on the strength of this affection. And it is not hard to understand. The baby represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenants, the hopes of the years and the long messianic dream. As he watched him grow from babyhood to young manhood the heart of the old man was knit closer and closer with the life of his son, till at last the relationship bordered upon the perilous. It was then that God stepped in to save both father and son from the consequences of an uncleansed love.

"Take now thy son," said God to Abraham, "thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." The sacred writer spares us a close-up of the agony that night on the slopes near Beersheba when the aged man had it out with his God, but respectful imagination may view in awe the bent form and convulsive wrestling alone under the stars. Possibly not again until a Greater than Abraham wrestled in the Garden of Gethsemane did such mortal pain visit a human soul. If only the man himself might have been allowed to die. That would have been easier a thousand times, for he was old now, and to die would have been no great ordeal for one who had walked so long with God. Besides, it would have been a last sweet pleasure to let his dimming vision rest upon the figure of his stalwart son who would live to carry on the Abrahamic line and fulfill in himself the promises of God made long before in Ur of the Chaldees.

How should he slay the lad! Even if he could get the consent of his wounded and protesting heart, how could he reconcile the act with the promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called"? This was Abraham's trial by fire, and he did not fail in the crucible. While the stars still shone like sharp white points above the tent where the sleeping Isaac lay, and long before the gray dawn had begun to lighten the east, the old saint had made up his mind. He would offer his son as God had directed him to do, and *then trust God to raise him from the dead*. This, says the writer to the Hebrews, was the solution his aching heart found sometime in the dark night, and he rose "early in the morning" to carry out the plan. It is beautiful to see that, while he erred as to God's method, he had correctly sensed the secret of His great heart. And the solution accords well with the New Testament Scripture, "Whosoever will lose for my sake shall find."

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

Then heaven opened and a voice was heard saying to him, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

The old man of God lifted his head to respond to the Voice, and stood there on the mount strong and pure and grand, a man marked out by the Lord for special treatment, a friend and favorite of the Most High. Now he was a man wholly surrendered, a man utterly obedient, a man who possessed nothing. He had concentrated his all in the person of his dear son, and God had tak-

en it from him. God could have begun out on the margin of Abraham's life and worked inward to the center; He chose rather to cut quickly to the heart and have it over in one sharp act of separation. In dealing thus He practiced an economy of means and time. It hurt cruelly, but it was effective.

I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, but *he possessed nothing*. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation. The books on systematic theology overlook this, but the wise will understand.

After that bitter and blessed experience I think the words "my" and "mine" never had again the same meaning for Abraham. The sense of possession which they connote was gone from his heart. *Things* had been cast out forever. They had now become external to the man. His inner heart was free from them. The world said, "Abraham is rich," but the aged patriarch only smiled. He could not explain it to them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.

There can be no doubt that this possessive clinging to things is one of the most harmful habits in the life. Because it is so natural it is rarely recognized for the evil that it is; but its outworkings are tragic.

We are often hindered from giving up our treasures to the Lord out of fear for their safety; this is especially true when those treasures are loved relatives and friends. But we need have no such fears. Our Lord came not to destroy but to save. Everything is safe which we commit to Him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.

Our gifts and talents should also be turned over to Him. They should be recognized for what they are, God's loan to us, and should never be considered in any sense our own. We have no more right to claim credit for special abilities than for blue eyes or strong muscles. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

The Christian who is alive enough to know himself even slightly will recognize the symptoms of this possession malady, and will grieve to find them in his own heart. If the longing after God is strong enough within him he will want to do something about the matter. Now, what should he do?

First of all he should put away all defense and make no attempt to excuse himself either in his own eyes or before the Lord. Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other; but let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself. Let the inquiring Christian trample under foot every slippery trick of his deceitful heart and insist upon frank and open relations with the Lord.

Then he should remember that this is holy business. No careless or casual dealings will suffice. Let him come to God in full determination to be heard. Let him insist that God accept his all, that He take *things* out of his heart and Himself reign there in power. It may be he will need to become specific, to name things and people by their names one by one. If he will become drastic enough he can shorten the time of his travail from years to minutes and enter the good land long before his slower brethren who coddle their feelings and insist upon caution in their dealings with God.

Let us never forget that such a truth as this cannot be learned by rote as one would learn the facts of physical science. They must be *experienced* before we can really know them. We must in our hearts live through Abraham's harsh and bitter experiences if we would know the blessedness which follows them. The ancient curse will not go out painlessly; the tough old miser within us will not lie down and die obedient to our command. He must be torn out of our heart like a plant from the soil; he must be extracted in agony and blood like a tooth from the jaw.

He must be expelled from our soul by violence as Christ expelled the money changers from the temple. And we shall need to steel ourselves against his piteous begging, and to recognize it as springing out of self-pity, one of the most reprehensible sins of the human heart.

If we would indeed know God in growing intimacy we must go this way of renunciation. And if we are set upon the pursuit of God He will sooner or later bring us to this test. Abraham's testing was, at the time, not known to him as such, yet if he had taken some course other than the one he did, the whole history of the Old Testament would have been different. God would have found His man, no doubt, but the loss to Abraham would have been tragic beyond the telling. So we will be brought one by one to the testing place, and we may never know when we are there. At that testing place there will be no dozen possible choices for us; just one and an alternative, but our whole future will be conditioned by the choice we make.

*Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is clinging to things such a harmful habit?

2. What are some things that are hard for you to give up? Why?

3. In light of the reading, what is one thing that God is prompting you to change in your life to be closer to him?

## ⊕ STEWARD: DAY 4

### Stewarding All of Life

A steward manages God's gifts for God's purposes, and everything in our lives is a gift from God. He is the owner, and we are the stewards. Today, we'll consider four areas of life—time, talent, treasure, and temple—as we ask how the Bible's teaching on stewardship practically applies to all of life.

#### Time

*“Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”*

#### ***Ephesians 5:15–16 CSB***

Paul tells us to make the most of the time. One 16th-century pastor commented on this verse saying, “Time is very precious, because when it is past, it cannot be recovered.”<sup>4</sup> God has graciously given each of us the gift of time. Are we using it for his glory?

1. How long have you been alive? Write it out in years, months, and days to get a sense of time that has passed.

+ I've been alive for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

+ I've been alive for \_\_\_\_\_ months.

+ I've been alive for \_\_\_\_\_ days.

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Preciousness of Time,” *From the Inheritance of Our Fathers*, 36, no. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Inheritance, n.d.), 14, <http://inheritancepublishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Edwards-The-Preciousness-of-Time-final-lo-res.pdf>.

## Time Audit<sup>7</sup>

We are given 168 hours every week. This time audit tool will help you see a snapshot of how you are spending your time. Fill it out as accurately as possible to know where your time is going.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
List all your activities in a given week.	How much time does each activity take?	What resources does each activity <b>use</b> ? <b>Gain?</b>	What changes need to be made?
<b>Family</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			
<b>School</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			
<b>Sports/Clubs/Music</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			
<b>Fun</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			
<b>Church Life</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			
<b>Other</b> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.			

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Brad Hambrick's Time Budget from "A New Year's Time and Priority Audit," Brad Hambrick, January 6, 2017, <http://bradhambrick.com/timebudget/>.

This survey gives you a realistic picture of where your time is going. As you look at it, what do you want to change? What do you want to prioritize that isn't getting much time? What is taking away more time than it should? Is there enough free time in your life to love God and other people in unanticipated ways?

Write down any thoughts you have about the time audit in the space below.

## **Talent**

*“The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since “love covers a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God’s words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. ...”*

### **1 Peter 4:7–11 CSB**

Each one of us has natural abilities and talents, along with spiritual giftings. God means for us to use these in ways that serve others and bring him glory.

**Write down the abilities and talents that God has gifted you with.**

**Ask your study partner, parents, and other close friends this question: “What do you think are the ways that God has gifted me?” Write down their answers.**

**What are some ways you can grow in stewarding God’s grace in your abilities in ways that can glorify him?**

## **Treasure**

We've already discussed the importance of stewarding material possessions and money for God's glory in our readings. Now, we'll consider three practical questions to help us grow in stewardship of God's treasures.

**Do you have a plan for how to save and use the money you earn? If not, consider talking to your parents about creating one. Do some research and see if you can find any tools or resources that can help you create a budget. Brainstorm some ideas of how you want to save and spend your money.**

**How do you normally spend your money? Do you put God first in your spending and saving, or do you put yourself first? Why? Talk to your study partner about your answers and pray together, asking for God to help you use your money wisely.**

**Write down any easy action steps you plan to take to grow in your faithfulness as a steward of the treasures that God has given you.**

## Temple

*“Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.”*

### **1 Corinthians 6:19–20 CSB**

God is the owner of your body, and you are the steward. The way we view and treat our bodies should be shaped by God. We can worship God in the way we take care of our bodies through getting enough sleep and eating well (some sweets are OK, but not all sweets every day). Also, we don’t want to be ashamed of our bodies—God created your body, and he thinks you are beautiful enough to live inside!

**God is to be honored in everything we do with our bodies. Write out how you can better steward God’s gift of your physical body when it comes to sleep, food and exercise.**

Sleep:

Food:

Exercise:



## STEWARD

### Review

Below is a helpful outline of what we covered this week.

- + **Bible Study:** 2 Corinthians 9:6–11
- + **Tithing:** Christians are no longer under the tithing law. They are free to give generously out of a cheerful heart.
- + **The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing:** Everything is safe which we commit to him, and nothing is really safe which is not so committed.
- + **Stewarding All of Life:** Disciples steward their time, talent, treasure, and temple for God's glory.

### Habits To Cultivate

**Give to the local church:** Decide in your heart what cheerful giving would like for you. Discuss your plan with your study partner. Learn more about giving to the Summit at [summitchurch.com/give](http://summitchurch.com/give).

**Redeem the time:** Examine your schedule regularly to make sure you are prioritizing God's time in God's ways.

**Take care of the temple:** Fight against sexual immorality. Pursue healthy rhythms of sleep, eating, and exercise to take care of the body God has given you.

## Next Steps

**Time audit:** If you have never carefully examined how you spend your time, use the time audit tool to help you.

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code.



## **STEWARD:** MEETING GUIDE

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of Groundworks to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–11 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + Give to the local church
- + Redeem the time
- + Take care of the temple

### **Next Steps**

- + Time audit



# **WITNESS**

A disciple proclaims Christ in word and deed.

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## INTRODUCTION

How do people learn the truth about Jesus? Only through a witness of Jesus' life and death sharing what they have seen with them. The good news is that God has not left us without witnesses. God the Father himself bears witness to the truth about Jesus (John 8:18). Jesus also shared his identity with those around him through his words and actions (John 8:14). Also, now that Jesus is in heaven, the Holy Spirit also bears witness that Jesus is God (John 15:26). The Bible bears witness about Jesus' identity (John 5:39), as do all of Christ's actions and miracles (John 10:25). So it's no surprise that Jesus' disciples also are witnesses who share the truth about who Jesus is with others (John 15:27).

Jesus wants his disciples to share what they have witnessed to every nation on earth. This truth is especially clear in Luke's record of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus Christ came into the world and died on the cross for the sins of all who would trust in him. God the Father raised him from the dead. The Gospel of Luke records the resurrected Jesus' encounter with his disciples:

He told them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He also said to them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.' (Luke 24:44–49 CSB)

Jesus tells his disciples that after they receive power from God (v. 49), they are to share what they witnessed to all the nations about Christ (vv. 46–48). Notice the same pattern in the last recorded words of Jesus before his ascension into heaven: "'... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 1:8 CSB).

In the rest of the book of Acts, the disciples bear witness to Christ's message and his actions, or deeds (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 26:12). God desires the nations to know the truth of who Jesus is, and he gives his disciples the Holy Spirit to help them be witnesses. For this reason, every disciple is to be a witness who proclaims Christ in word and deed.

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# **WITNESS**

**1. BIBLE STUDY:  
MATTHEW 28:18–20**

**2. EVANGELISM**

**3. GLOBAL MISSIONS**

**4. SHARING THE GOSPEL**

## ⊕ WITNESS: DAY 1

### Bible Study: Matthew 28:18–20

The final scene in the Gospel of Matthew portrays the resurrected Jesus speaking the following words to his disciples. These words are now commonly referred to as The Great Commission.

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#### Matthew 28:18–20 CSB

**18** Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

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## HIGHLIGHT

1. Underline everything Jesus says about himself in this passage.
2. Circle all the actions (verbs and participles) in verses 19–20.
3. How is verse 18 connected to verse 19? What are the words that connect the two?
4. Where in the passage do you see the Trinity (God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit) mentioned?

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## EXPLAIN

5. Jesus begins and ends with two truths about himself:
  - + “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18).
  - + “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v. 20).

What do these two truths tell us about Christ? Try and rewrite them in your own words below.

Verses 19 and 20 say: “Go, therefore, and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (CSB).

The original Greek makes it clear that the main command in the verses above is to “make disciples.” The going, baptizing, and teaching are participles (words formed from a verb). We can think of these participles as things that help accomplish the main verb (make disciples).

One translation renders the verses like this: “... having gone, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them—to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you) ...” (Matthew 28:19–20 YLT).

6. Jesus commands us to make disciples. What do we learn about that command from these verses? In your own words, what must we do if we want to make disciples?

7. The word “therefore” connects the statement in verse 18 to the command in verse 19. Explain what this “therefore” is doing. What does it tell us about the connection between these verses?

8. What do you think the importance of the Trinity is in verse 19? How does the Trinity relate to baptism?

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## APPLY

*“Go, therefore, and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”*

**Matthew 28:19–20 CSB**

Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations. The task is “make disciples,” and the range is global—“all nations.” Baptizing and teaching are both part of making disciples.

Baptism is an outward sign that represents the reality that Jesus’ death and resurrection in our place become ours when we trust in him (Romans 6:1–6). We also see that believers are baptized in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19 CSB).

Teaching is essential to making disciples. This is not surprising because the word “disciple” means “a follower” and “a learner.” In order to make disciples, we must teach. What are we to teach? Notice Jesus doesn’t say, “teach them everything I have commanded you.” He says, “teach them to observe everything I have commanded you” (v. 20a CSB). We are not merely after teaching information and facts. We want people’s lives to be transformed! We desire to make disciples who not only know everything Jesus commands, they also obey everything Jesus commands.

One commentator emphasizes the need for discipleship like this:

It is critical to note that the command is not to evangelize but to perform the broader and deeper task of ‘discipling’ the nations. Many denominations and mission groups misunderstand this and spend all their effort winning new converts rather than anchoring them in the Christian faith (in spite of the many studies that show that too few are truly converted in that initial decision). Jesus mandates that all mission activity emulate his pattern of discipling followers as exemplified in this gospel. They must be brought

to understanding and to that deep ethical commitment patterned in the Sermon on the Mount and the Community Discourse; then they will become ‘trained as disciples in the kingdom’(13:52)”<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on making disciples is the reason why at The Summit Church, we say, “We make disciples, not just converts.” We don’t mean that people who convert to following Christ are not disciples. Every true convert is a disciple of Christ. But our goal is to not only get people to say, “I am following Jesus.” Rather, we want genuine disciples whose lives reflect a desire to obey everything Jesus commands us.

9. How are you obeying Jesus’ command to make disciples? What are some challenges you face in making disciples? What excites you about making disciples?

10. The scope of the Great Commission is global. Jesus wants us to make disciples of all nations. Have you ever been on a mission trip outside of the country? If so, write down some thoughts on your experience. If not, what has prevented you from going on a short-term mission trip?

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<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 1080.

Jesus, who was resurrected, begins and ends the Great Commission with truths about himself. First, he proclaims his authority (v. 18) and then he proclaims his presence with us (v. 20).

The authority that Jesus claims is over everything. He says, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18 CSB). In the Gospel of Matthew, we see that Jesus does indeed have total authority over everything in heaven and earth. Matthew records that Jesus had the authority to heal the sick, authority over the spiritual world (like demons), authority to forgive sin as God’s representative, authority to judge, and authority to perform miracles.

Jesus’ authority over the whole world is the basis for his mission to the whole world. We know this because of the “therefore” in verse 19. Jesus is saying, “make disciples of all nations” because I have all authority in heaven and on earth. John Piper says:

There is not a culture or an ethnic group or a society or a religion or a language where Jesus does not have the right to be worshiped as Lord. He has authority to be king and Lord and Savior everywhere, to everyone. This is the reason he commands us to make disciples in all the peoples of the world. The authority and supremacy of Jesus over every other religion and culture and society and over all gods is the basis of world missions.

Jesus Christ, the living, all-authoritative Lord of the universe, has commanded us to call every nation, every people (Somali, Maninka, Sukumu) and every religion (Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, animist) to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of eternal life with the one true God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort,” *Desiring God*, November 1, 1998, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-lofty-claim-the-last-command-the-loving-comfort>.

11. How does the reality that Jesus has “all authority” give you confidence and power to obey Jesus and make disciples?

In the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is called Immanuel, meaning, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). As the Gospel closes, Jesus promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The One who has all authority in heaven and on earth is promising to be with us always. The Bible regularly emboldens believers with the promise of God’s presence. God says to us, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10 CSB). Hebrews 13:5 says, “Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, ‘I will never leave you or abandon you’” (CSB). How incredible is it that the all-powerful God and his all-powerful Son, Jesus, want to be with us?

12. How does the reality that Jesus will never leave you or forsake you give you confidence to tell others about Jesus?

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## RESPOND IN PRAYER

**Adoration:** Praise Jesus for having all authority in heaven and earth (v. 18).

**Confession:** Confess to God how you have not prioritized sharing about him with other people.  
Confess to him why making disciples has taken a back seat in your life.

**Thanksgiving:** Thank Jesus for being with us always (v. 20).

**Supplication:** Ask God to give us a heart that longs for the nations to worship and glorify Jesus.  
Pray that God would give us his Holy Spirit so that we can be disciples who are more faithful in making other disciples.

## ⊕ WITNESS: DAY 2

### Evangelism

“Evangelism” can be a scary word to a lot of people. What do we mean when we say “evangelism”? It comes from the Greek noun *euangelion*, which is found 72 times in the New Testament. *Euangelion* means “good news,” the gospel. And the Greek verb *euangelizesthai*, “to announce good news,” occurs 52 times in the New Testament.

Evangelism is the act of telling others about the gospel with the goal that they would also believe. Jesus wants his disciples to be his witnesses to all the nations. And if we are faithful witnesses, we will share the good news of Christ with others. Today, we’ll read an excerpt from Donald Whitney on Evangelism.

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## EVANGELISM FOR THE PURPOSE OF GODLINESS <sup>3</sup>

### **Donald S. Whitney**

#### **Evangelism is Empowered**

If it is so obvious to almost all Christians that we are to evangelize, how come almost all Christians seem to disobey that command so often?

Some believe they need months of specialized training to witness effectively. They fear speaking with someone about Christ until they feel confident in the amount of their Bible knowledge and their ability to deal with any potential question or objection. That confident day, however, never comes. What if the blind man whom Jesus healed in John 9 had thought that way? Would he ever have felt ready to witness to the scholarly, critical Pharisees? And yet within hours, perhaps minutes, of meeting Jesus, he bravely told them what he knew of Jesus.

Sometimes we fail to speak of Christ because we fear that people will think us strange and reject us. In law school I became friends with a fellow student. When I realized he was not a Christian, I became burdened to share the gospel with him. I did my best to model the character of Christ around him and prayed for opportunities to witness to him. One day near the end of the school year, just as the first bell rang he surprised me by asking, “Why are you always so happy?” Although class was about to start, I could have given my friend a clear testimony, even if it were only one sentence. I could have answered, “Because of Jesus Christ.” Or I might have said, “I’d like to tell you why after class.” But when the opportunity I’d prayed for finally came, I froze in fear that he might think less of me for my faith and said, “I don’t know.”

In some cases we can trace our evangelophobia to the method of witnessing we’re asked to use. If it requires approaching someone we’ve never met and striking up a conversation about

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from Donald S. Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 122–134.

Christ, most people will be terrified and indicate it by their absence. Although a few enjoy it, most people tremble at the thought of going door-to-door to share the gospel. Even methods that call for witnessing to friends or family, if they involve a forced, confrontational, or unnatural approach, fill us with fear at sharing the best news in the world with the people we love the most.

I've never heard it expressed, but I think the seriousness of evangelism is the main reason it frightens us. We realize that in talking with someone about Christ, heaven and hell are at stake. The eternal destiny of the person looms before us. And even when we rightly believe that the results of this encounter rest in God's hands and that we bear no accountability for the person's response to the gospel, we still sense a solemn duty to communicate the message faithfully, as well as a holy dread of saying or doing anything that might rise as a stumbling block to this person's salvation. Many Christians feel too unprepared for such a challenge, or simply have too little faith and falter at entering into such an eternally important conversation.

One researcher offers another explanation for Christians' fear of evangelism:

One dominant reason underlying the increasing reluctance of Christians to share their faith with non-Christians pertains to the faith sharing experience itself. In asking Christians about their witnessing activities, we have found that nine out of ten individuals who attempt to explain their beliefs and theology to other people come away from those experiences feeling as if they have failed. ... The reality of human behavior is that most people avoid those activities in which they perceive themselves to be failures. As creatures seeking pleasure and comfort, we emphasize those dimensions and activities in which we are most capable and secure. Thus, despite the divine command to spread the Word, many Christians redirect their energies into areas of spiritual activity that are more satisfying and in which they are more likely to achieve success.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Barna, as quoted in *Discipleship Journal*, issue 49, 40.

What is success in evangelism? When the person you witness to comes to Christ? Certainly that's what we want to happen. But if we measure evangelistic success only by conversions, are we failures whenever we share the gospel and people refuse to believe? Was Jesus an "evangelistic failure" when people like the rich young ruler turned away from Him and His message (see Mark 10:21-22)? Obviously not. Then neither are we when we present Christ and His message and people turn away in unbelief. We need to learn that sharing the gospel is successful evangelism. We ought to have an obsession for souls, and tearfully plead with God to see more people converted, but only God can produce the fruit of evangelism called conversion.

In this regard we are like the postal service. They measure success by the careful and accurate delivery of the message, not by the response of the recipient. Whenever we share the gospel (which includes the summons to repent and believe), we have succeeded. In the truest sense, *all* biblical evangelism is successful evangelism, regardless of the results.

The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. From the instant that He indwells us He gives us the power to witness. Jesus stressed this in Acts 1:8 when He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus expects evangelism of every Christian because the Spirit empowers every Christian to evangelize. But Christians often misunderstand this power. The Spirit does not empower all Christians to evangelize in the same way; rather, all believers have been given power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. And the evidence that you've been given the power to witness is a changed life. The same Holy Spirit power that changed your life for Christ is the power to witness for Christ. So if God by His Spirit has transformed you into a follower of Jesus, be confident of this: God has given you Acts 1:8 power. This means that in ways and methods compatible with your personality, spiritual gift, opportunities, and so on, you do have the power to share the gospel with people. Having Acts 1:8 power also means God will empower your life and words in the sharing of the gospel in ways you will often not perceive. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit may grant much power to your witness in an evangelistic encounter without giving you any *feeling or sense* of power in it.

The Holy Spirit not only empowers people who share the gospel, the gospel we share is itself embedded with the power of the Holy Spirit as well. “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” said the apostle Paul in Romans 1:16, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” That’s why people can be converted whether they hear the gospel from a teenage teacher of a vacation Bible school class or a seminary-trained evangelist with a PhD; whether they read it in a book by an Oxford scholar like C. S. Lewis or in a simple tract. It is the gospel God blesses like no other words.

That does not mean the gospel is a kind of magic wand we can wave over unbelievers and the power of God will automatically spring from it and convert all who hear. You are probably like me in that you heard the gospel many times before you were saved. Doubtless you can think of several people who have heard the gospel repeatedly and have not experienced the new birth. God must also grant faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) with the hearing of the gospel, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who *believes*” (emphasis added). Nevertheless, it is *through the gospel* that God gives the power to believe. That’s the meaning of Romans 10:17: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

When you speak the gospel, you share “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” Sharing the gospel is like walking around in a thunderstorm and handing out lightning rods. You don’t know when the lightning will strike or who it will strike, but you know what it will strike—the lightning rod of the gospel. And when it does, that person’s lightning rod will be charged with the power of God and he or she will believe.

That’s why we can be confident that some will believe if we will faithfully and tenaciously share the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation and not our own eloquence or persuasiveness. God has His elect whom He will call and whom He has chosen to call *through the gospel* (see Romans 8:29-30; 10:17). Otherwise we would despair when people reject the gospel, and their unbelief would convince us to stop evangelizing. But the power for people to be made right with God comes through the message of God’s Son. If we will give that message, we can be assured some will respond.

Living a life openly devoted to Christ also manifests a power that augments evangelism. This power, strange as it may sound, can be illustrated by one of my favorite barbecue restaurants. Its best advertising isn't the typical media variety aimed at the eye or ear. Its best advertising is directed to the nose. They barbecue the seasoned beef and pork where its tangy smoke can waft across the four-lane highway. Every day, people driving by become interested in the "message" of the restaurant simply because of its fragrant aroma.

Paul described the power of godliness that way in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17:

Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

The Lord empowers the life (see verses 14-16) and the words (see verse 17) of the faithful believer with a power of spiritual attraction, making them like a fragrant aroma that attracts people to the message about His Son.

The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word. A few years ago, Caffy started a women's Bible study in our home at the encouragement of two new believers. To the second meeting they brought Janet, a mutual friend who was very cynical about the whole thing. In a song about her spiritual pilgrimage, she later wrote, "Sex and drugs and rock-and-roll [were] my trinity." Her thinking had been further blurred by involvement in a cult. But something began that night that only Janet knew about. Months afterward, she said that from their initial meeting an aroma from Caffy's Christian living, especially in her own home, combined with the meat of God's Word in the Bible study made her want to taste more. She couldn't get enough of the aromatic message that had changed these

people's lives so beautifully. Today Janet is a fresh and living "aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

Because of the nature of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures, evangelism is empowered.

### **Evangelism is a Discipline**

Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life. Every Christian should be able to talk about what the Lord has done for him or her and what He means to him or her. But evangelism is also a *discipline* in that we must discipline ourselves to get into situations where evangelism can occur, that is, we must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." To "let" your light shine before others means more than simply, "Don't do anything to keep your light from shining." Think of His exhortation as more proactive, as in, "Let there be the light of good works shining in your life; let there be the evidence of God-honoring change radiating from you. Let it begin! Make room for it!"

Why, then, don't we witness more actively? As mentioned earlier, some place the blame on the lack of adequate training to share their faith. Indeed, I wish many more could enjoy the advantages of some good instruction about the specifics of sharing the gospel. But as we think again about the blind man Jesus healed in John 9:25, we realize that we cannot attribute our failure to witness to a lack of training. Though he had been a believer in Jesus only for a few minutes and obviously had no evangelism training at all, he was willing to tell others what Jesus had done for him ("One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see"). So any Christian who has heard biblical preaching, participated in Bible studies, and read the Scriptures and Christian literature for any time at all should have at least enough understanding of the basic message of Christianity to share it with someone else. Surely if we have understood the gospel well enough ourselves to be converted, we should know it well enough (even if as yet we know nothing else about the faith) to tell someone else how to be converted.

We should also acknowledge the common objection that people do not witness because of the lack of time. Between job, family, and church responsibilities, there simply isn't enough time to "go witnessing." Before we adopt this objection to evangelism, let's ponder this: Do we really want to say that we are too busy to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples (see Matthew 28:19-20)? Do we expect that at the Judgment Jesus will excuse us from the single most important responsibility He gave us because we say, "I didn't have time"?

Let's work from the assumption that God has given us most, even all, of our time-consuming responsibilities. And, for the sake of argument, let's accept as fact the statement that we don't have room on our calendar for one more regularly scheduled activity. Even if God did put everything on our to-do list, He is also the Author of the Great Commission. He still intends for each of His followers to find ways to share the gospel with unbelievers. In whatever context the Lord places us to live our lives, He calls us to find ways to fulfill the Great Commission there, however limiting the context might be. Raising children in the "discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) is one way of fulfilling the Great Commission. Supporting the work of a church and its missionaries financially is another. But what about those unbelievers outside our families? And who will do the evangelistic ministry of a church but people like you who comprise the membership of that church?

Isn't the main reason we don't witness the simple lack of disciplining ourselves to do it? Yes, there are those wonderful, unplanned opportunities God appoints to give the "reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Nevertheless, I maintain that apart from making evangelism a Spiritual Discipline, most Christians will seldom share the gospel.

As a minister, I could spend twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with Christians and never finish the work. With sermon preparation, counseling, committee meetings, Bible studies, hospital visits, and the like, I could invest all my time exclusively with professing believers (except for large group settings or in cases where unbelievers ask to meet with me privately). And since my ongoing ministry with God's people never finishes, I could "justify" as easily as anyone my lack of individual contact with non-Christians. But what potential for winning unbelievers to

Christ would I have if I was never with unbelievers? None. When would I share the gospel with a lost person except when it's part of my job? Never. That can't be right.

Ministers and others who work daily in churches and in Christian organizations and institutions aren't the only ones in this situation. The Christian homemaker, for example, who rarely has the opportunity to see anyone except her children and her friends from church, may live with the same dilemma.

"That's not my problem!" says someone. "At work I'm surrounded all day long by the most worldly people you can imagine." Assuming you don't try sharing the gospel with them on company time, when will you? The point is not so much how many unbelievers you see every day but rather how often you are with them in an appropriate context for sharing the gospel. Despite the important work-related discussions you may have throughout the day, how often do you have the kinds of meaningful conversations with coworkers where spiritual issues can be raised? If you never have an opportunity to talk about Jesus, it doesn't matter how many non-Christians you are around—your potential for evangelism is little better than mine might be.

That's why I say evangelism is a Spiritual Discipline. Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, we can easily excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone.

Notice in Colossians 4:5-6 the terminology indicating that disciplined thought and planning should go into evangelism: "Walk in *wisdom* toward outsiders, *making the best use* of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may *know* how you ought to answer each person" (emphasis added). We must think about evangelism whenever we talk with outsiders—wisely "making the most of the opportunity" (verse 5, NASB). Knowing how to respond to people as individuals implies reflection and preparation. These principles can be applied in as many specific ways as we have witnessing opportunities. But in general they support the idea that in addition to its spontaneous element, evangelism is a Spiritual Discipline.

For me that means I discipline myself to be with unbelievers. Sometimes Caffy and I schedule a

meal with neighbors who don't know Christ. We make sure to take food or a housewarming gift to the new family on the street and spend time getting to know them, or check in on a neighbor in crisis. I try to focus on outsiders at social events in our church, even though I have more in common with the Christians there and usually enjoy the conversations with them more. Again, the goal is not just to rub shoulders with unbelievers, but to dialogue with them in such a way that their hearts and minds might be opened to the gospel.

Disciplined evangelism might also involve having coffee or lunch with neighbors or coworkers periodically and learning to ask good questions about the personal side of their lives. The same kinds of opportunities might arise at company-sponsored athletic or social events, or during informal times while traveling on business with fellow workers. Through conversation and good listening, you will discover their felt needs and, hopefully, explore with them their deepest need, their need for Christ.

Whether with someone you're around frequently or with someone you've met for the first time, the best way I've found to turn the conversation toward spiritual matters is to ask the person how you can pray for him or her. Although such a question is common to the Christian, most non-Christians don't know of anyone who prays for them. I've often seen unbelievers deeply moved by this unusual (to them) expression of concern. I had a neighbor for more than seven years with whom I'd been unsuccessful in discussing the things of God. But the first time I told him I frequently prayed for him and wanted to know how I could pray more specifically, he began to disclose some family problems I never knew existed. I once went through my neighborhood asking for needs our church could pray for that night in a special service. At almost every home I was amazed by people's responses and their unprecedented openness to talk about spiritual issues. A few days or weeks afterward they were open to a follow-up inquiry about their prayer request, which in turn often led to an opportunity to share the gospel.

But the point in all these possibilities is that you will have to discipline yourself to bring them about. They won't just happen. You'll have to discipline yourself to ask your neighbors how you can pray for them or when you can share a meal with them. You'll have to discipline yourself

to get with your coworkers during off-hours. Many such opportunities for evangelism will never take place if you wait for them to occur spontaneously. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do their best to see to that. You, however, backed by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, can make sure that these enemies of the gospel do not win.

As mentioned earlier, I don't want to leave the impression that the Discipline of evangelism requires that we all share the gospel in exactly the same ways. Throughout this chapter you may have had a picture of certain methods of evangelism that seem terrifying to you. But the preconceived style of evangelism you fear may not rank among the best ways for you to help make disciples for Christ.

In his first letter, the apostle Peter divided all spiritual gifts into the two broad categories of serving gifts and speaking gifts (see 1 Peter 4:10-11). Some find that they evangelize better through serving, others more through speaking. Evangelistic serving might involve hosting a meal and living the gospel in front of your guests. As they see the distinctives in your home and family life, immediate or eventual opportunities to voice the gospel may arise. Perhaps you might cook a meal or grill some burgers to provide an open door for your spouse to share his or her faith. I'm told that every family averages a "crisis" once every six months. During that time of illness, job change, financial crunch, birth, death, and so on, being a Christlike servant to that family frequently demonstrates the reality of your faith in a way that piques their interest. Through serving, you may have a chance to give a Bible or some evangelistic literature, or to initiate a gospel conversation in some imaginative way.

I know a church well where people have hosted home evangelism meetings. They invite neighbors, coworkers, and friends into their homes for the expressed purpose of hearing a guest talk about Jesus Christ and answering their questions about Christianity and the Bible. The hosts may not feel confident about their ability to articulate the gospel, especially to groups of people, but by serving through hospitality, they provide an opportunity for evangelism by someone whose strength is a verbal presentation of the gospel. By opening their homes and working with

other believers, evangelism takes place that wouldn't have happened otherwise. But this kind of evangelistic serving still requires as much discipline as any other. It still requires the discipline to put the date on the calendar, to invite the people, to prepare the meal, to pray for the gathering, and so on. Without such discipline, evangelistic serving never happens.

On the other hand, some are more adept at communicating the gospel directly. As I've pointed out, if you're better at speaking than serving, you may be able to work with someone who specializes in evangelistic serving in ways that will provide more witnessing opportunities than you've had before. However, just as servers may need to serve in order to open a door for speaking the gospel themselves, so those whose strength is in speaking may need to discipline themselves to serve more so they will have chances to speak. In short, speakers often need to serve first so they can verbalize the gospel, and evangelistic servers must eventually speak the words of the gospel. Regardless of how shy or unskilled we may feel about evangelism, we must not convince ourselves that we cannot or will not verbally share the gospel under any circumstances.

I heard the story of a man who became a Christian during an evangelistic emphasis in a city in the Pacific Northwest. When he told his boss about it, his employer responded with, "That's great! I am a Christian and have been praying for you for years!"

But the new believer was crestfallen. "Why didn't you ever tell me you were a Christian? You were the very reason I have not been interested in the gospel all these years."

"How can that be?" the boss wondered. "I have done my very best to live the Christian life around you."

"That's the point," explained the employee. "You lived such a model life without telling me that it was Christ who made the difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could too."

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that “it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” Often it is the message of the Cross *lived and demonstrated* that God uses to open a heart to the gospel, but it is the message of the Cross *proclaimed* (by word or page) through which the power of God saves those who believe its content. No matter how well we live the gospel (and we must live it well, else we hinder its reception), sooner or later we must communicate the *content* of the gospel before a person can become a disciple of Jesus. The *example* of Christianity saves no one; rather it is the *message* of Christianity—the gospel—that “is the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16).

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## Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever been afraid to share the gospel? If so, when? And why were you afraid?

2. What are some ways you could begin to make evangelism a spiritual habit? What are some steps you can take this week to build relationships with unbelievers?

3. Write down the names of two people with whom you want to share the gospel soon. Write out a plan for how you might do that. A dinner or coffee meeting? Inviting them over to your home? Other ideas?

## ⊕ WITNESS: DAY 3

### Global Missions

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

#### **Matthew 28:18–20 CSB**

Jesus commands us to “make disciples of all nations.” The Great Commission is global in its scope because Jesus is worthy of global praise:

‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.’ (Revelation 5:9 CSB)

In today’s reading, we’ll learn more about God’s passion for his glory among the nations.

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## THE CALL TO GLOBAL MISSIONS<sup>5</sup>

### **John Piper**

In 1890, Bethlehem Baptist Church—at that time a 29-year old Swedish Baptist Church—sent members Mini and Ola Hanson to an unreached people group in Burma called the Kachin. These people were known as vengeful, cruel, and treacherous. The King of Burma declared to the Hansons when they got there, “So you are to teach the Kachins! Do you see my dogs over there? I tell you, it will be easier to convert and teach these dogs. You are wasting your life.”

The Kachin were completely illiterate, with no written language. Over the next 30 years, Ola Hanson identified and documented 25,000 of their words and published a Kachin-English dictionary. In 1911 he finished translating the New Testament into Kachin. On August 11, 1926 he completed the Old Testament.

In a letter dated August 14 of that year, Hanson wrote, “It is with heartfelt gratitude that I lay this work at the feet of my Master. Pray with us, that our divine Master may bless this work to the salvation of the whole Kachim race. Today . . . virtually all Kachin can read and write in their own language, as well as Burmese, the national language. And there are more than half a million Kachin Christians.

It has been one of the highest privileges of my life to be part of the effort to sustain and grow the legacy of missions at Bethlehem Baptist Church, a legacy at this point nearly 130 years in the making. While pastoring there I often thought: O Lord, if we falter as a church, if we stumble, if we drop the ropes, so many missionaries will fall. For we had hundreds of global partners who had gone down into the mines on ropes held by the church (this is still true at Bethlehem today).

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<sup>5</sup> From John Piper’s *Astonished by God: Ten Truths to Turn the World Upside Down* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2018), 101–113.

“Holding the rope” has long been a powerful image for missions work. It comes from William Carey, who blazed the trail to India in 1792 and saw his mission as that of a miner penetrating into a deep mine—one which had never been explored, and with no one to guide. He said to Andrew Fuller and John Ryland and his other pastor friends, “I will go down, if you will hold the rope.” And John Ryland reports, “He took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect: that ‘while we lived, we should never let go of the rope.’”(Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World* [Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster, 2003], 167.)

We are, all of us who believe, either goers, senders, or disobedient--those who drop into mines, those who hold the ropes, or those who think it's not their business.

Rejoice if you are part of a church that doesn't just support, but sends from your own number, families and singles to take the gospel to the peoples of the world.

### **Ten Biblical Convictions Regarding Global Missions**

Here are ten biblical convictions that have long driven my commitment to world missions. I pray that they will burn in your soul—for some of you as a God-given compulsion to go, and for others as a God-given compulsion to send.

#### ***1. God Is Passionately Committed to the Fame of His Name, and That He Be Worshiped by All the Peoples of the World And This Is Not Ego Mania, It Is Love***

Missions, global outreach, is about joining God in his passion to love the nations by offering himself to them for the overflowing joy of their praise.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:3).

Make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted (Isaiah 12:4).

God sends Jesus on his mission, “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Romans 15:9).

He does his mighty works in history, “that [his] name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Romans 9:17).

## ***2. Therefore, Worship Is the Goal and the Fuel of Missions; Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn't***

Missions is a way of saying that the joy of knowing Christ is not a private or tribal or national or ethnic privilege. It is for all. And that's why Christians go. Because we have tasted the joy of worshipping Jesus, and we want all the families of the earth included. “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you” (Psalm 22:27).

Seeking the worship of the nations is fueled by the joy of our own worship. You can't commend what you don't cherish. You can't proclaim what you don't prize. Worship is the fuel and the goal of missions.

## ***3. People Must Be Told about Jesus, Because There Is No Salvation and No Worship Where the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Son of God Is Not Heard and Believed***

There will be no salvation and no true worship among people who have not heard the gospel. Missions is essential for salvation.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4: 12)

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.  
(1 John 5:12)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:19)

#### ***4. God Is Committed to Gathering Worshipers from All the Peoples of the World, Not Just All the Countries of the World***

This is what “all nations” means in the Great Commission. Nations like Ojibwe and Fulani and Kachin, not like the United States and Japan and Argentina. This is what Jesus bought with his blood.

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

The gospel has already reached all the countries. But, according to the Joshua Project ([www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net)) there are more than 7,000 “unreached” or “minimally reached” peoples. That is why Bethlehem’s mission statement says, “We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples [plural!] through Jesus Ch. nst. “

#### ***5. Therefore, There Is a Critical Need for Paul-Type Missionaries Whose Calling and Passion Is to Take the Gospel to Peoples Where There Is No Access to the Gospel at All***

I am distinguishing Paul-type missionaries from Timothy-type missionaries. Timothy left his home and served cross culturally in a city (Ephesus) different from his own (Lystra). But Paul said in Romans 15:20, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named.”

There is still much to do where Christ has been named. But oh how badly we need to pray for an army of hundreds of thousands with Paul's passion to reach the utterly unreached and unengaged peoples of the world.

#### ***6. We Must Send Global Partners in a Manner Worthy of God***

This is why churches have a missions staff and a missions budget and a missions nurture program and support teams for missionaries. "You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God" (3 John 6). This is why senders are crucial, along with goers, because not everyone is a frontier missionary. Frontier missionaries cross cultures and plant the church where it's not. But if we are not a goer, there is a great calling: that of sender. And John says we are to do it in a manner worthy of God.

#### ***7. It Is Fitting for Us to Have a Wartime Mindset in the Use of Our Resources as Long as Peoples Are without the Gospel and We Have Resources to Send It***

In peacetime the Queen Mary was a luxury liner, but in the Second World War she became a troop carrier. Instead of bunks three-high they were stacked seven-high. Instead of 18-piece place settings, there were rations with fork and knife. You allocate your resources differently if it's wartime. And it is wartime. The battles are more constant than in any of our military conflicts, and the losses are eternal.

The Macedonians about whom Paul wrote are a model for us in the face of great need. "In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" (2 Corinthians 8:2). Oh, that we would deepen in our grasp of the urgency of the hour and remember that ultimately we don't own anything. God owns us and all we have. And he cares about how it goes with us, in our war effort to reach the nations with the gospel, the gospel that Jesus died to send.

### ***8. Prayer Is a Wartime Walkie-Talkie, Not a Domestic Intercom***

“I chose you and appointed you,” Jesus said, “that you should go and bear fruit ... so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” John 15:16).

God has given you a wartime mission, to go and bear fruit.

And he gave you prayer for the purpose of accomplishing that mission.

One of the reasons our prayer malfunctions is that we try to treat it like a domestic intercom for calling the butler when we want another pillow in the den. But prayer is mainly for those on the front lines of the war effort, so they can call into headquarters to send help. We are to treat prayer like a battlefield walkie-talkie for calling down the power of the Holy Spirit in the struggle for souls.

### ***9. Suffering Is Not Only the Price for Being in Missions; It Is God’s Plan for Getting the Job Done***

This is not just the price many must pay. This is God’s strategy for victory.

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Matthew 10:25)

They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. (Matthew 24:9)

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. (Matthew 10: 16)

God’s Son won the victory this way. So will we. “They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Reve-

lation 12:11). They conquered (not “were conquered”) by testimony and death.

### ***10. The Global Cause of Christ Cannot Fail, and Nothing You Do in This Cause Is in Vain***

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples.” (Matthew 28: 18-19). Not some authority--all. He cannot be defeated. “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16: 18). “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

He has ransomed a people for all the nations. And he will have them. There are more, but these are ten of the main biblical convictions that can powerfully drive a commitment to global outreach. And for some of you, I pray that as you have been reading these convictions have become, again, a confirmation that God is leading you into long-term, cross-cultural missions.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Out of the 10 points from the reading, which three were the most encouraging/convicting to you? Why?

2. God has given us prayer for the purpose of accomplishing his mission. At the Summit, we often say, “Prayer is our primary strategy for mobilization.” This week, visit [joshuaproject.net/resources/apps](http://joshuaproject.net/resources/apps) and download the “Unreached of the Day” app. This is a great way to grow in a daily habit of prayer for people groups that have yet to hear the gospel.

3. Visit [summitchurch.com/missions](http://summitchurch.com/missions) for a list of upcoming short-term mission trips. Look through the list and talk with your study partner about the possibility of going on a short-term trip in the next year.

## ⊕ **WITNESS: DAY 4**

### **Sharing the Gospel**

A disciple is a witness who proclaims Christ in word and deed. While sharing the good news is a privilege, it can be intimidating for us. In today's reading, we'll cover some helpful tips to keep in mind as you share the gospel.

We've also included a tool that can help you share the gospel easily and clearly. There are many great tools available online or on mobile apps. Become familiar with one of them to the point where you feel equipped and confident in sharing the gospel. We strongly suggest you use the one below for the sake of clarity and unity as a church.

**The bridge tool** includes:

- + **Five main truths**
  - + These five truths are critical to the gospel message. Each truth is briefly explained.
- + **Bible verses**
  - + These Bible verses can help you communicate each of the five truths through God's Word.
- + **Diagram aids**
  - + You will see a progression of the bridge diagram which can serve as a visual aid, to help you progress from one truth to the next.

## Tips to Keep in Mind as You Share the Gospel

### Pray

The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). God is ultimately the one who saves people through the message of the gospel. Rely on him and plead with him for souls.

### Listen

Jesus came to save individual sinners who struggled in many ways. The gospel of Jesus brings life to individuals. Feel the freedom to apply the good news to people's specific longings, struggles, and sins. For example, if someone struggles with loneliness, talk about Jesus' promise to always be with us forever.

### Be Clear

Try to be clear about what you mean with your words. Don't use church words (like "atonement" or "salvation") without explaining them. Also, avoid using ambiguous words (like "broken") that could mean different things to different people. It's best to use words the way the Bible uses them so that when others read Bible verses, they will know what it says.

### Ask Questions

Asking questions is a helpful way to make sure others are tracking with you. Ask clarifying questions, and then correct as needed. For example:

- + You: "How would you define sin, from what you know?"
- + Them: "I guess bad things like murder."
- + You: "Murder is definitely a sin. But shouldn't we wonder why it's a sin? The Bible teaches that at the heart of sin is our turning away from God and dishonoring him. Murder is wrong not only because it hurts others but because it's an offense to God because people are made in his image."

### **Be Honest**

At the Summit, we often say, “The gospel is offensive. nothing else should be.” The gospel is offensive, so don’t try to erase the offense of the gospel. Telling someone that they are God’s enemy sounds harsh (Romans 5:10), but communicating this truth to a hell-bound sinner is one of the most loving things we can do.

### **Be Compelling**

Paul uses words like “plead” and “urge” when sharing truth. The message of the gospel is urgent, and we must plead like a doctor who urges a dying patient to receive treatment.

### **Love the God of the Gospel**

The good news of Christ brings us home to God (1 Peter 3:18). The good news is good because it brings us back into a relationship with the good God. As you share the goodness of God, make sure you are falling in love with God yourself.

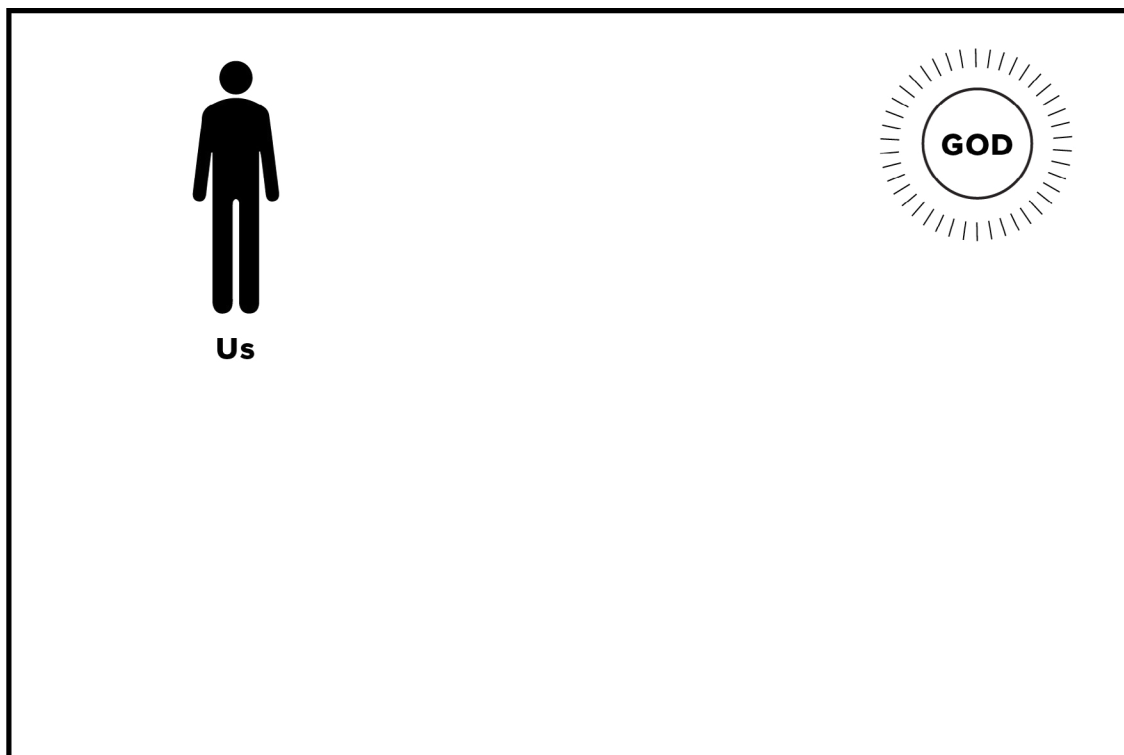
## The Gospel of Christ

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

**Romans 6:23**

### **1. God created us to be in relationship with him and bring him glory.**

God made us be in relationship with him and to love him and worship him above everything else in creation. To glorify God means to honor him by making him first in our hearts. Whatever we treat as the most valuable in our life, we glorify as the most worthy.



## 2. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

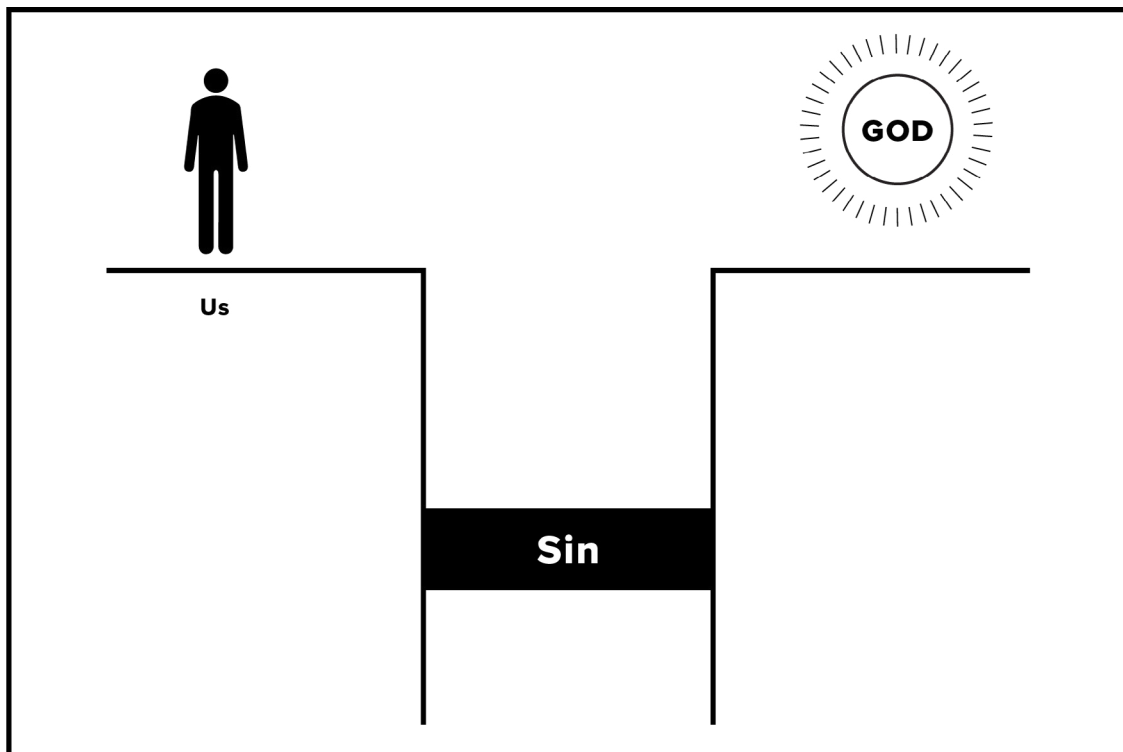
Look at the first part of Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death ..." and underline the key-words.

Now, let's define those words.

**"Wages":** Wages are what you earn for what you do.

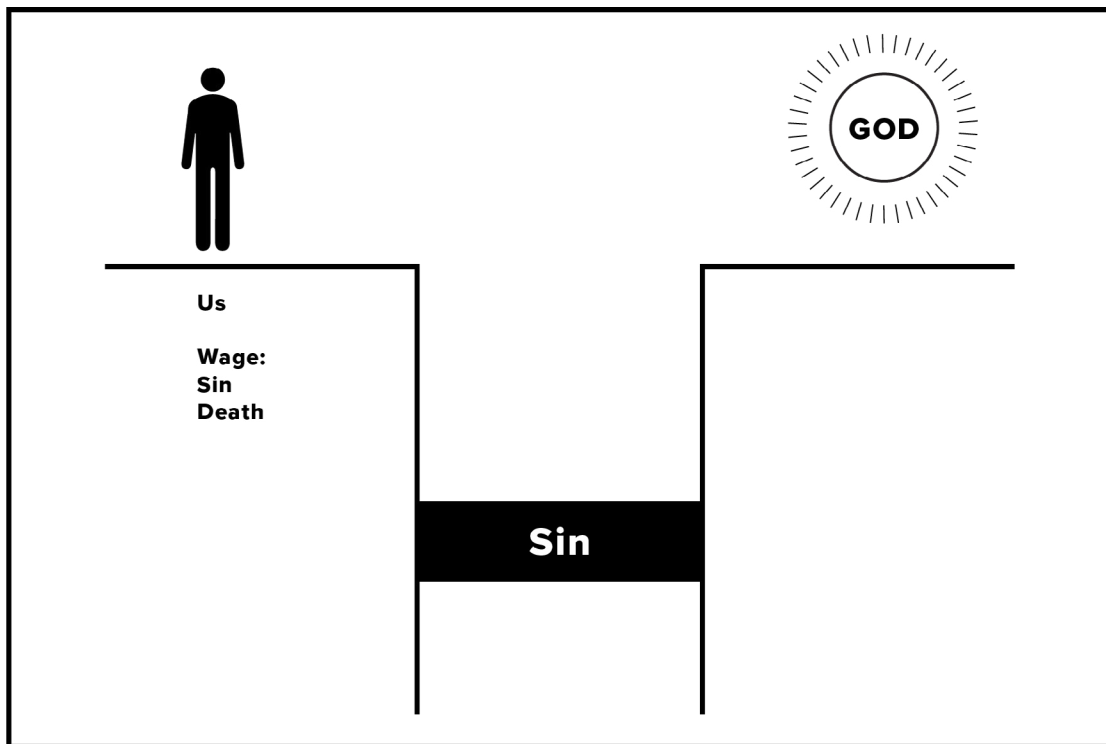
**"Sin":** Sin is simply putting anything ahead of God in our hearts, whether it's ourselves or some other thing that God created for us to enjoy. When we choose anything over God, we belittle him instead of bringing him glory. None of us has loved, trusted, or obeyed God as we should have. We can do nothing in our own power to turn our hearts back to God.

**"Death":** Separation from life



### 3. What we earn from sin is death and separation from God.

This bad news gets even worse because our sin has not only turned our hearts away from God, but it's also led to God's righteous judgment against us. Because God is good, perfect, and loves justice, he must judge and punish everyone who disobeys him or hurts other people. And, if we're honest, we have all disobeyed God or have hurt someone else. For this reason, we deserve God's punishment of death and eternal separation from him (2 Thessalonians 1:6–9). Nothing we do can bring us back into a relationship with God.



**4. God, in his mercy, sent Jesus to die in our place.**

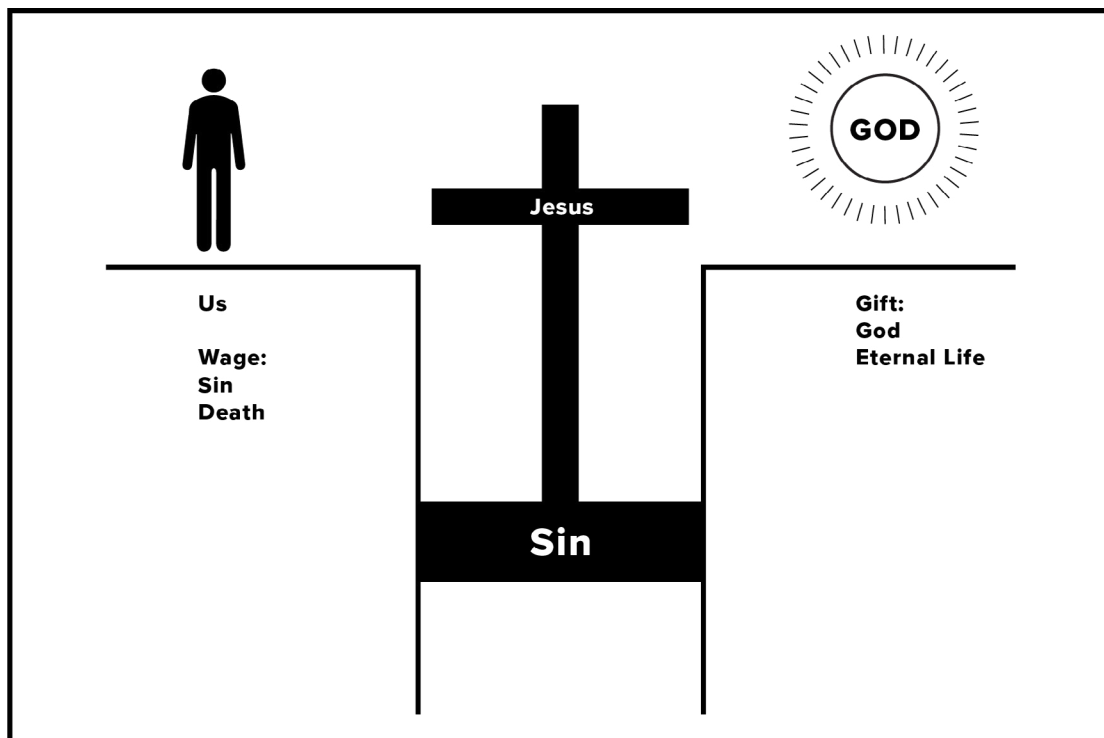
Now, let's look at the second part of Romans 6:23, "... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Underline the keywords and phrases in this part of the verse. Now, let's define those words and phrases.

**"Gift":** Something that is unearned and freely given

**"God":** Giver of the gift

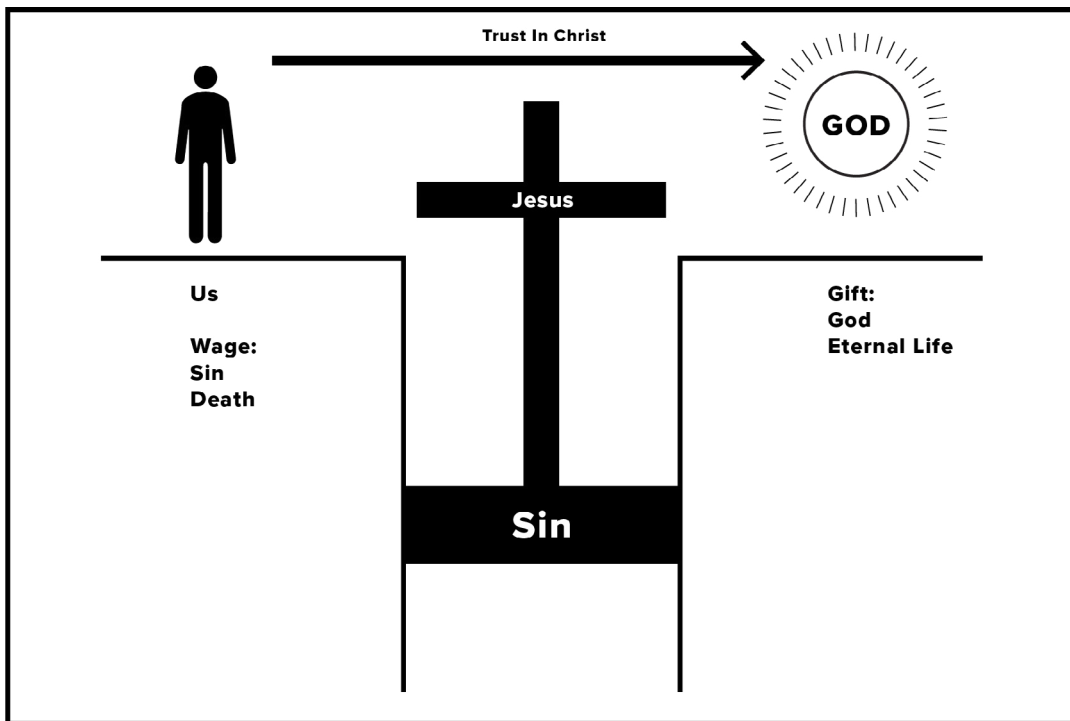
**"Eternal Life":** Life that does not end

But the good news of the gospel is that God the Father, in his great love and mercy, sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to bring sinners back into relationship with himself (John 3:16). On the cross, Jesus took God's anger and punishment in place of anyone who trusts in him. Jesus wasn't punished for his own sins, since he did not have any. He died on the cross to take the punishment that we deserved (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus dying in our place was a free gift from Jesus so that we would be brought back into relationship with God and enjoy life with him forever.



**5. All who will trust in Jesus Christ are brought back into relationship with God.**

All who will trust in Jesus Christ are brought back into relationship with God (Acts 16:31). Those who trust Jesus for forgiveness, God declares to be righteous because of Jesus' death (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we put our trust, or faith, in Jesus, God adopts us, rebellious sinners, into his family. Faith in Jesus isn't just having a head knowledge about who Jesus is. Faith is crying out, "Jesus I need you. I trust you to help me," from the deepest level of our hearts (John 6:35).



## WITNESS

### Review

Below is a helpful outline of what we covered this week.

- + **Bible Study:** Matthew 28:18–20
- + **Evangelism:** Evangelism is sharing the gospel with others with the aim of persuading them to believe in Christ.
- + **Global Missions:** Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations. The Great Commission is global in its scope because Jesus is worthy of global praise.
- + **Sharing the Gospel:** We shared some tips and a tool to help you share the gospel of Christ.

### Habits To Cultivate

**Cultivate relationships with non-Christians:** Discuss with your study partner how you can grow in the habit of cultivating relationships with those who do not know Christ.

**Share the gospel regularly:** When was the last time you shared the gospel? Discuss with your study partner how you can share the gospel more frequently.

**Pray for the nations:** Scan the QR code for the Joshua Project and download the “Unreached of the Day” app. Commit to praying for the nations regularly.



## Next Steps

Learn how to share the gospel: Learn the bridge tool so you are confident in sharing the gospel clearly and concisely with others.

Share the gospel with someone: Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with someone. Create a plan and share the gospel with someone this week.

## Resources

For more resources, scan the QR code.



## **WITNESS:** MEETING GUIDE

Discipleship happens in relationships, so cultivating relationships around the Bible is one of the main aims of this study. In your time together, your goal isn't merely to get through the material. Be sure to get to know one another. Asking good questions and being fully present will go a long way. This page is meant to be a guide, not a script to follow. Enjoy having a spiritual conversation centred around God's Word. Make sure to bring a hard copy of the Bible along with your copy of Groundworks to your meeting.

### **Pray**

Apart from God, we can do nothing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion. Throughout your time together, continue asking God for help.

### **Discuss**

#### **Read Scripture**

Read Matthew 28:18–20 together.

#### **HEAR Study**

The bulk of your time should be spent discussing God's Word together.

- + Walk through the HEAR study together and talk about what stuck out most to you in the passage.
- + Make sure to discuss the application section from your study.
- + Affections, beliefs, and practices: Make sure to apply the passage to all of your life.

#### **Reflection Questions**

Pick three to five reflection questions from the readings that you would like to discuss in your meeting.

## **Apply**

Review the habits and next steps listed in this week's review. Discuss how you'll put them into practice. Make a plan for how you'll hold one another accountable.

### **Habits**

- + Cultivate relationships with non-Christians
- + Share the gospel regularly
- + Pray for the nations

### **Next Steps**

- + Learn how to share the gospel
- + Share the gospel with someone this week

# NOTES



# APPENDIX

1. HEAR: Bible Study Method
2. Accountability
3. Groundworks: Leader Aid
4. FISH: Evangelism Training

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## HEAR

### **Bible Study Method**

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

#### **2 Timothy 3:16–17 CSB**

The Scriptures, meaning the very words and phrases of the Bible, are inspired by God. This is one of the big convictions that drives disciples to love, study, and obey the Scriptures. This is why men like William Tyndale gave their life so people could hear the Bible in their own language. This is why people like the Reformers were willing to stand up to the most powerful people of their day. They all believed that Scripture, and Scripture alone, is God-breathed.

Disciples have countless reasons to devote themselves to the Bible. The Word of God gives us spiritual life (James 1:18) and sustains it (Matthew 4:4). Our faith comes from hearing the words of Jesus (Romans 10:17). The Word of God restores and revives our souls (Psalm 19:7). God’s Word instructs us so that we might have hope (Romans 15:4). The truths of the Bible free us from sin (John 8:31–34). The Scriptures give us wisdom (Psalm 19:7–8), assurance (1 John 5:13), and strength against Satan (1 John 2:14). The Bible is not merely useful, but it’s like sweet honey to disciples (Psalm 119:6, 97, 111).

Our goal in studying the Bible is to be in relationship with God. We want to hear from him, relate to him, enjoy his presence, and be changed by him. Jesus said, “... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). So, Bible study should inform your mind with God’s truth, inflame your heart with a passion for God’s glory, and transform your habits for a life of obedience to God. As you learn and grow in studying the Bible, remember that God wants to address your affections, your beliefs, and your practices through the Scriptures.

The HEAR method is an inductive Bible study method. This method looks closely at what the Bible says in order to discover what it means so that we can faithfully apply it to our lives.

**HEAR stands for:**

- + **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage carefully.
- + **Examine:** Based on your observations, discover what the passage means in its context.
- + **Apply:** Determine how the meaning of the passage applies to your life.
- + **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God’s Word back to him.

Keep reading for details about what questions to ask and how to use this method to study the Bible.

**HIGHLIGHT**

The goal in this time is to slow down and observe everything you can about the passage. The great enemy of faithful observation is familiarity. Most of your time should be spent here. The more time you spend faithfully observing, the easier it will be to understand the meaning of the passage.

When we say “highlight,” we don’t mean for you to simply grab a highlighter and mark some words. We mean for you to observe everything about the passage. Notice every small detail, including every subject, verb, object, noun, participle, conjunction, etc. Notice the big things like genre, themes, structure, mood, etc. Below are some helpful tips that will slow you down, so that you can see what is really there in the text.

- + Underline the words that you think are important, put a star next to what you think is interesting, and circle things that you don’t understand.
- + Ask, What genre is this? A narrative, a poem, a letter, etc.
- + Look for particular characteristics of the genre. For example: If it’s a narrative, look for plot, dialogue, characterization, setting, narrative time, foreshadowing, irony, etc.

- + Write the passage out by hand, as it will prevent you from missing obvious things.
- + Say the passage out loud several times, but emphasize a different word each time. This way, you can clearly see what each word is doing in the sentence.
- + For example, “Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins.”
- + Ask this of each word: Is this word a subject, an object, a verb, a participle, a noun, an adjective, an adverb, etc.?
- + What are some words, phrases, or concepts that are repeated? Are these words, phrases, or concepts used in other parts of this book of the Bible?
- + Are there any logical connectors or conjunctions (“but,” “so that,” “therefore,” “if-”/”then,” etc.)?
- + Are there any quotations or allusions from other parts of the Bible?
- + How do other faithful translations translate this sentence?

If you think you’ve done enough looking, observing, and highlighting—do some more. The more data you have from this section, the easier it is to explain the text.

## **EXPLAIN**

The goal in this section is to understand the authorial intent in this text. Your main question is: How do these words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs construct meaning, and what is that meaning? When comparing different interpretations, strongly consider how all your observations from the highlight section above support or contradict a possible interpretation.

It is common for people to get derailed in this section by asking questions that the author never meant to answer. You might have a great question. However, if the author is not intending to answer that question in this text, your question will not help you explain this passage.

Some helpful questions to ask about all your observations from the highlight section:

- + Why did the author write that? Why would he write that? What's his point in writing that?
- + What does this word or phrase mean?
  - + Pro tip: If you are stuck on the meaning of a word or phrase, look at how the word is used in the rest of the book. You could even look up how the same author uses it in his other writings.
- + Who is it referring to? Who is doing the action?
- + Slowly trace the relationships as you zoom out from words to paragraphs: What is the relationship between these words? What is the relationship between these clauses? What is the relationship between these sentences? What is the relationship between these paragraphs?
- + If an event is being portrayed, ask if the author answers these questions: When did this happen? Where did it happen? Why did it happen? How did it happen?
- + Try to rewrite each verse in your own words.

There will always be questions about a passage you will have trouble answering. That is OK. Try to keep the main thing, the main thing. Sometimes our tendency is to focus on the 8 percent of the text that is ambiguous, while neglecting the 92 percent of the text that is clear. What are the big ideas that are communicated clearly by the author? What's the main emphasis? It's helpful to write down your explanation of the passage before moving to application.

## **APPLY**

Careful explanation of the text should lead to faithful application. God commands us to not merely be hearers of the word, but faithful doers (James 1:21–25). Without faithful application of God's Word to our hearts, our studying will do us little or no good. Below are some helpful questions to ask when applying the text.

- + What does this text teach me about God? How does this fuel my love for him?
- + What does this text teach me about myself, others, and the world?
- + What truths am I called to believe? How should I change the way I think?

- + What promises am I called to place my trust in?
- + What sins am I called to confess and repent of?
- + What commands am I called to obey (by relying on God's grace)?
- + What specific changes is God calling me to make right now in my life?
- + Remember to apply the text to your passions, beliefs, and practices.
  - + What affections is this text trying to stir up in you? Love, joy, hatred, jealousy, hope, anger, peace, etc.?
  - + How does it challenge my thinking and instruct my mind?
  - + What habits do I need repent of, and what habits do I need to pursue?

## RESPOND IN PRAYER

Talk to God about what he is teaching you in his Word. Pray his Word back to him. You could follow the ACTS model used in this study if it's helpful.

- + **Adoration:** Express awe and worship for how God is revealed in this text.
- + **Confession:** How does this passage convict you of sin? Confess those sins to God and ask him for forgiveness in Christ.
- + **Thanksgiving:** What are things in this passage that evoke thankfulness to God in your heart? His character, his actions, his gifts, etc.? Express your gratitude to him
- + **Supplication:** How can God help you obey this passage? Are you lacking in affections, understanding, or ability? Express all your needs to God and ask him for help.

Pray the passage for your family, friends, neighbors, and the nations.

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# ACCOUNTABILITY

## A Practical Guide to Developing Christian Accountability

### Seeking an Accountability Partner/Group

- + Begin with prayer, asking God for wisdom in whom you could ask—an individual or a small group of friends.
- + Consider those in your church or other biblically-grounded Christian friends or family.
- + Avoid one-on-one accountability with the opposite gender so that nobody is put in a weird or awkward situation.
- + If you sense that a particular individual or small group would be beneficial, ask if they would be accountability partners.

### How to Do Accountability

- + Develop a weekly rhythm of what you want to do with your group. Here are some suggestions as you plan:
  - + Study God's Word together and discuss how it applies (James 1:22).
  - + Share concerns and pray for each other together and during the week (Ephesians 6:18).
  - + Strive to make the best use of time with God, family, church, school, work, etc. (Ephesians 5:15–16).
  - + Share how each person is doing with regard to trials, temptations, and the spiritual disciplines (Proverbs 27:17).
  - + Spur each other on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).
  - + Memorize and review Scripture memory verses together (Psalm 119:9–11).
  - + Ask each other revealing questions that help expose heart issues (1 Samuel 16:7).

### **During Accountability You Should**

- + Be honest and humble about struggles.
- + Be patient and understanding, not condemning (Matthew 7:1–2).
- + Encourage when needed, but always do so in love.
- + Choose your words carefully and guard against gossip and being critical.
- + Be trustworthy—keep things confidential.
- + Be faithful and dependable.
- + Encourage and build up one another; do not tear one another down (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- + Practice love, not legalism.

### **Examples of Accountability Questions**

- + Have you spent daily time with God in Bible reading and prayer? If not, how do you plan on doing this?
- + What biblical principles impacted your life from your quiet times this week? How are you applying what you have learned?
- + Are you memorizing and reviewing Scripture memory verses consistently?
- + Have you given 100 percent effort in your school and home responsibilities?
- + How have you expressed encouragement, love, and praise to your family, friends, and others around you? If not, how will you?
- + What have you done to enhance your relationship with others?
- + How have you been tempted and how did you respond?
- + Have you had any flirtatious or lustful attitudes, tempting thoughts, or exposed yourself to any explicit materials? If so, what provisions need to be removed or precautions taken to prevent this from occurring again?
- + Have you had any unwholesome talk, told any half-truths or outright lies, exaggerated?
- + Have you made the most of every opportunity to share the gospel with unbelievers this week?
- + Have you allowed any person or circumstance to rob you of your joy?

- + Is your conscience clear? If not, how do you plan on attaining a clear conscience?
- + Have you offended anyone? If so, have you sought reconciliation, and how did you do so?
- + Are you being a good steward of the finances with which God has entrusted you? Are you investing in worldly pleasures or in heavenly treasures?
- + Are you exercising on a regular basis?
- + Are you practicing healthy eating habits?

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## GROUNDWORKS LEADER AID

*Groundworks* is a tool to help you show someone how to grow in their walk with Jesus. Our aim is to cultivate a bible-saturated culture of discipleship in our congregation. We long to see students helping each other grow in their walk with Christ. We hope that this book will help you use the Bible to build others up toward maturity.

### **Why *Groundworks*?**

One of the things we've realized through our conversations with leaders at the Summit is that when people think of "discipleship," they often think solely of specific environments like weekend worship, small groups, Bible studies, etc. While these play a vital role in discipleship, we want to help our members grow in their confidence and ability to make disciples through one-on-one relationships.

If we are a movement of disciple-making disciples, it's important that we resource our church to make disciples personally, without primarily relying on the structure of the church to do so. *Groundworks* aims to help create that culture of discipleship.

One verse that captures the heart behind our desire to cultivate relational discipleship is 1 Thessalonians 2:8: "We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (CSB). *Groundworks* is a tool to fuel you in sharing God's Word and your own lives with those you disciple.

*Groundworks* isn't the magical answer by which all of our church members will instantly become mature disciples; it's merely a tool to help us grow in relational discipleship.

### **Whom should I ask to do *Groundworks* with me?**

*Groundworks* is aimed at Christians who want to grow in their walk with Christ, so it's not designed to be used as an evangelism tool with non-Christians. However, it's OK to do this study

with a willing person, even if you are unsure where they stand in their relationship with Christ. The first week covers the gospel message. If you discover after the first week that your study partner isn't a Christian, feel free to re-evaluate and switch to an evangelistic study.<sup>2</sup>

So whom *should* you invite? Any Christian who wants to grow in Christ! It could be a new Christian, a believer who is young in their faith, a Christian who is disconnected, etc. We want *Groundworks* to connect these people to more mature believers and teach them the basics of being a disciple of Jesus. Even if the person has been a Christian for some time, it might still be good to revisit the fundamentals together.

### **How should leaders use *Groundworks*?**

You've already asked someone, and they are in. What now? If you don't already know the person well, meet with them before starting *Groundworks*. Get to know them and their story. Express to them your hopes for this study. It might be helpful to walk through the introduction of this book with them so that both of you can understand the layout of this study.

Ask your study partner to work through the Bible study first, followed by the three readings and reflection questions. Try to stay in touch with them throughout the week, checking in to see if they have any questions or prayer requests. We've included a meeting guide for each week as a suggested outline for your time together.

#### *Adjust the Pace*

Don't feel like you have to do everything at the suggested pace. Be sensitive to the person you're leading. If you feel like you need to take two weeks for each identity, that's OK! Figure out what an ideal rhythm is for both of you.

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<sup>1</sup> Two evangelistic studies we recommend to do with non-Christians are *Christianity Explored* ([christianityexplored.org](http://christianityexplored.org)) and *Christianity Explained* ([thegoodbook.com/christianity-explained](http://thegoodbook.com/christianity-explained)).

### *Prepare Diligently*

Your time in the text will be the main part of your meeting. So, as the leader, make sure you study the passage you'll discuss. Make sure you've read what they are reading and have picked out some reflection questions you want to focus on in your meeting.

### *Aim for Obedience and Accountability*

Each section contains possible next steps and suggested habits. Make sure you're helping them apply the material not only to their actions but also their heart and mind. Hold them accountable by regularly following up with them. Follow the Bible's lead so that you'll know when to challenge, instruct, correct, comfort, encourage, etc.

### *Pray*

We might plant and water, but God is the only one who can give spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:5–9). Pray for God to bless the study of his Word so that the Spirit would open hearts to see Christ as he really is. Pray that as participants behold Christ, God would transform them (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### *Enjoy Christ*

As you help others grow in their walk with Christ, don't neglect your own. Jesus says, "... apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). As we rejoice in Christ and abide in him ourselves, we'll be equipped by God to bear fruit for his glory.

For more leader resources, visit [summitchurch.com/groundworks](http://summitchurch.com/groundworks).

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# FISH

## Evangelism Training

We want to encourage you to be intentional in daily, personal evangelism. The acronym FISH provides the basic framework.

- + **F:** Build a friendship.
- + **I:** Initiate spiritual conversations.
- + **S:** Share the gospel.
- + **H:** Help them make a decision toward Christ.

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### F: Build a Friendship

*“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

**Colossians 4:5–6 NIV**

**Building a friendship is simple.** God has already brought many people into our lives (family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, baristas, etc.).

- + We fail to build new friendships because we either don’t see or don’t take advantage of the opportunities in front of us.
- + Building a friendship has (almost) everything to do with time and intentionality and much less to do with personality.

- + Remember, building friendships for the sake of the gospel is not about concentrating all of your effort onto one person, but, instead, making the most of every relationship.

**How do you build a friendship?** Look for opportunities. This may mean that you have to make changes if your current lifestyle limits or prevents your interaction with non-Christians.

- + Pray for God to provide opportunities to develop genuine friendships with non-Christians.
- + Be faithful at work, and love your neighbors.
- + Invite others over for dinner at your house.
- + Invite others to do something fun with your friends and small group.
- + Ask questions about others' lives, families, jobs, pasts, passions, and dreams.

## **I: Initiate Spiritual Conversations**

*"... in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."*

**1 Peter 3:15–16 NIV**

**Initiate spiritual conversations.** Spiritual conversations rarely form out of thin air; we should all think about the world through the lens of faith so that it's naturally integrated into our speech.

- + Spiritual conversations engage our faith with the people and circumstances God has brought into our lives.
- + A good conversation is two-sided and informal; the key is asking good questions.

**How do you initiate a spiritual conversation?** Ask intentional questions to initiate spiritual conversations.

- + Pray that others would be open to talking about spiritual things.
- + Remember that spiritual conversations are meant to open the door to gospel conversations.
- + Be a good listener. Never marginalize someone else's views.
- + Examples of questions to ask:
  - + What do you believe about God?
  - + Do you ever think about why you do that?
  - + How do you find the strength/resolve to love others/your spouse/kids?
- + Share with others how God is working in an area of your life.
- + Use Scripture and share with others how your faith influences the decisions you make.

## **S: Share the Gospel**

*“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ...”*

### **1 Corinthians 15:1–4**

**Share the gospel whenever you can, and trust God with the results.** Always invite someone to respond after hearing the gospel.

- + The more we think about the gospel, the more readily we can help others think about it.

**How do you share the gospel?** You can share the gospel however you want to and through whatever means suits the occasion. The key is to always be ready.

- + Pray for your friends to receive the gospel and respond in faith.
- + Become familiar with one of the many simple tools of sharing the gospel. We've included the bridge tool in this study ("Witness," Day 4).
- + Always conclude by inviting your friend to make a decision to repent and trust Christ.
- + There are many effective tools. Find one you like and use it!

## **H: Help Them Make a Decision Toward Christ**

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."*

**1 Corinthians 3:6–7 NIV**

**Help them make a decision toward Christ.** Everyone responds to the gospel when they hear it, whether by accepting or rejecting it. Help your friends know what their next step is.

- + Every small decision that moves someone toward Christ is significant.
- + Helping to clarify what decision has been made is important for identifying someone's next step.

**How do you help someone make a decision toward Christ?** Some potential next steps are:

- + Pray with and for your friends that, whatever decision they make, God would continue to draw them to himself in faith.

- + If your friend decides to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and desires to learn what it means to follow him:
  - + Offer to read the Bible and pray with them.
  - + Tell them the importance of being involved in a local church, and offer to help them find one.
  
- + If your friend decides they are not ready to trust Jesus yet:
  - + Continue your spiritual conversations and look for more opportunities to share the gospel.
  - + Invite them to begin reading the Bible and meeting with you to discuss what they've read.
  - + Invite them to your small group.

## NOTES

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*students*