

# Walk the Sacred Path

Learning to Be Alone with God



A **Next Steps** Resource of Mercy Hill Church



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Much of the content of this booklet has been adapted from two sermons delivered by Nick Weber at Mercy Hill Church entitled "The Sacred Path (Parts 1 and 2)." If you prefer listening to reading, you can find these sermons online at [mercyhillchurch.org](https://mercyhillchurch.org).



*Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*

Luke 10:38-42



# Contents

<b>One Thing Is Necessary</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Two Ladies and Their Lord .....	7
What Should We Be Doing?.....	7
How Do We Do It? .....	9
Why Don't We Do It?.....	10
The Sacred Path .....	11
<b>Step #1: Solitude</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Navigating the Extremes .....	13
Making a Case.....	15
Getting Practical .....	16
<b>Step #2: Silence</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Detox and the Devil.....	18
Making a Case.....	19
Getting Practical .....	21
<b>Step #3: Scripture</b> .....	<b>27</b>
A Low Whisper .....	27
Because of the Cross! .....	28
<b>Step #4: Sanctum</b> .....	<b>30</b>
The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.....	30
The DNA Method .....	31
Discover: <i>What Do I See?</i> .....	33
Nurture: <i>What Do I Believe?</i> .....	42
Apply: <i>What Do I Do?</i> .....	44
<b>Step #5: Solace</b> .....	<b>47</b>
The Natural Progression .....	47
Journey On!.....	48
<b>Want More?</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Need Help?</b> .....	<b>49</b>

**What's Next? ..... 50**

**Appendix 1: The Feelings Wheel ..... 51**

**Appendix 2: Four Practical Suggestions for More Productive Bible Reading ..... 53**

**Appendix 3: The Sacred Path Worksheet and Bookmark ..... 59**

**Appendix 4: The Hub Diagram..... 65**

**Appendix 5: The 3x3 Plan ..... 67**



# One Thing Is Necessary

## Two Ladies and Their Lord

Read the story of Mary and Martha printed on the opening page of this booklet (Luke 10:38-42). Read it carefully. Read it slowly. What do you notice? What stands out? What do you make of it?

I will tell you in a moment what I at least make of it. But before I do, you should know that my thoughts on these verses are really meant to be nothing but a brief introduction of sorts. What we find in this story is going to set us up for a longer journey I wish you to accompany me on—a journey towards God . . . a journey along what I've come to call "The Sacred Path."

Are you ready? Let's begin!

## What Should We Be Doing?

In the text just read, we see that Jesus is calling Martha (and, by extension, you and I) away from anxious striving and towards the sweet rest of relationship with him. He is calling Martha to come join Mary at his feet. It is this intimate, abiding relationship with him that he identifies as the one "necessary" thing (v. 42). Mark that. That's important.

But, before we go on, we should clarify. The point Jesus is making in this, I think, is not to say that working or serving like Martha has no place in the Christian life. It is to say, rather, that all the working and serving we do must come out from a place of resting in and receiving from him. We must first sit and listen with Mary and then take that heart of restful reliance on Jesus and bring it into our working with Martha.

*We go with Mary's heart to Martha's work.* That's the idea.

Perhaps the words of one author here will help fill out the matter a bit more for us:

Mary and Martha represent two approaches to the Christian life. Martha is actively serving Jesus, but she is missing Jesus. She is busy in the "doing" of life. Her life, at this moment, is filled with "shoulds"

and “have tos.” Her life is fragmented, pressured, and filled with distractions. Her duties have become disconnected from her love for Jesus.

Martha’s problem goes beyond her busyness. Her life is uncentered and divided. I suspect that if Martha were to sit at the feet of Jesus, she would still be distracted with everything on her mind. Her inner person is touchy, irritable, and anxious. One of the surest signs of her life being out of order is that she even tells God what to do!

Mary, on the other hand, is sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him. She is “being” with Jesus, enjoying intimacy with him, loving him, attentive, open, quiet, taking pleasure in his presence. . . .

Mary is not trying to master God. Her life has one center of gravity—Jesus. I suspect that if Mary were to help with the many household chores, she would not be worried or upset. Why? Her inner person has slowed down enough to focus on Jesus and to center her life on him.<sup>1</sup>

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*Our being with him transforms  
our doing for him.*

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You see it, don’t you? It is not as if we must choose between sitting with Jesus or serving him. But it is that we must start there with Mary, and not let up until our heart comes to quiet rest in him. If and when we truly get *alone* with Jesus, it will undoubtedly reorient our *activity* for Jesus. To put it another way: our *being* with him transforms our *doing* for him. Again, it is not that we must choose one or the other. It is that one is first and fundamental—“*necessary*”—and everything else flows out from there. If we go wrong here, we go wrong everywhere. But if we get it right, well, it’s simply transformative!

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 49.

This story, in many ways, is just an illustration of what Jesus says to his disciples in John 15: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (v. 4). If we want to bear much fruit, we must first learn to abide.

This abiding in Jesus, dear reader, is the one “necessary” thing.

## How Do We Do It?

But now here is the question we must ask (and this will really set up all that follows in this little booklet): if this abiding—or sitting and listening to Jesus like Mary here—is the first, and fundamental, and one “necessary” thing . . . *how exactly do we do it?*

Perhaps, as I’ve gone on, you have already found yourself agreeing, saying, “Yes and amen. What we need most is to take our place with Mary at Jesus’ feet.” It sounds good. We think we get it. But then, when once we stop and really consider it, we find that we are, at least momentarily, a bit confused on the matter. “Wait a minute,” we say. “It is certainly true that I think such a thing to be important, but how do I practically go about it? Jesus isn’t here in the flesh anymore. I can’t sit at his feet and listen the way Mary once did. What does it mean for me to pursue this sort of thing here and now . . . today?”

Pause and consider it. What do you think?

After some thought, it very well may dawn on us: “Of course, of course. I know. We sit and listen at Jesus’ feet now through things like reading the Bible and prayer—by engaging in what’s often referred to as the ‘daily devotion’ or the ‘quiet time.’”

I for one would be inclined to agree with you. I do think this is the way we begin to pursue the heart of Mary now in our day. But (and here is the troubling thing) though we may think sitting with Mary at Jesus’ feet is important, and though after some consideration we may recognize that for us today this particularly entails things like reading our Bibles and praying, nevertheless, the statistics indicate quite clearly that the majority of Christians are still simply not doing it.

Ed Stetzer, in his blog post “The Epidemic of Bible Illiteracy in Our Churches,” refers to a recent LifeWay Research study where they found

that only forty-five percent of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week. Of these churchgoers, only about one in five read their Bibles every day. And, on the other side, about the same number (one in five) say they never read it at all.<sup>2</sup>

So what we have then, broken down, is about twenty percent who read their Bibles every day, another twenty percent who don't read their Bibles at all, and the majority somewhere in the middle who read their Bibles on occasion. And, remember now, these are people *in* the church! These are people who we would assume are desiring, in some form or fashion, to be disciples of Jesus. That's a problem.

## Why Don't We Do It?

So now, with this in view here, the next question that's thrust upon is, in a word, simply: *why?* Again, if Jesus is saying in Luke 10:38-42 that sitting at his feet and listening to his word is the one necessary thing, and we know now that today we engage in this largely through reading the Bible and prayer . . . *why are so many of us still not doing it?!*

At worst, it may be because we frankly don't care all that much. We're busy with other things. But, at best (and this is where I imagine many of us are), it may be because we just don't know how to do it.

Let's be honest. The Bible is confusing. Time alone with Jesus can feel a bit awkward and fruitless. We get excited about the idea of it, but, when we get in to actually attempt it, we just wander about and wonder: "What exactly *should* I be doing? Should I sit quietly, pray, journal, sing, read some other book? What's the point of all this? What's supposed to be happening here? Am I doing it right? Or have I got it all wrong?" It doesn't take long for us to grow a bit disenchanting with the practice and, in time, we're inclined to give up on it entirely. (Is that you? If so, don't pull away just yet. Hold on. There's hope!)

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<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer, "The Epidemic of Bible Illiteracy in Our Churches," Christianity Today, accessed May 9, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/july/epidemic-of-bible-illiteracy-in-our-churches.html>.

# The Sacred Path

These are the sorts of concerns I'm going to attempt to address for us in this booklet. Much in response to my own personal struggles and confusions with the devotional life, I've put together what I call "The Sacred Path."

For years now, I've found that, when I've attempted to sit down and meet with Jesus, I would often end up distracted and divided, with my mind and heart deviating here or there or everywhere else save the matter at hand. I would drift towards ministry work or the daily to-do list. My prayers would devolve into naval-gazing or a mere venting of emotions. I felt like I needed something to help me stay focused—something to keep me on track, on "path," towards Jesus and fellowship with him.

So, looking at Scripture, and drawing inspiration from other godly Christians, I identified and carved out the five steps that have now come to constitute this Sacred Path I'll be outlining for us here.

To be clear, this is certainly not the only way to approach the devotional life. No doubt, through the years (and even centuries!), there have been many other good methods put forward and outlined by men and women much more qualified than myself. Perhaps you already have something that is working well for you. By no means is this an attempt to change that. But, even still, you might find something here to help fill things out a bit, or something you can take and adapt in your own way.

The bottom line is this: if Jesus is saying that sitting and listening to him like Mary is the one necessary thing for the Christian, then, however we may be personally attempting to do this, one thing is certain: *we better be doing something.*

What follows is my humble attempt to help.

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I said there are five steps in this path. I'll give them all to you up front here now, and then we'll proceed to consider them one by one:

Step #1: Solitude—Get Alone with God

Step #2: Silence—Be Still and Know Him

Step #3: Scripture—Let Him Have the First Word

Step #4: Sanctum—Find Renewal in His Presence

Step #5: Solace—Pour Out Your Heart in Prayer

So there you have it. Now let's get to work!

Before reading this, if someone were to ask you what one thing you thought was necessary for the Christian life, what would you have said? Why do you think Jesus highlights what he does for us in Luke 10:42?



Read Luke 10:38–42 once more. What stands out to you? In what ways do you see yourself in Martha? How about in Mary? Would you say you are more of a do-er or a be-er? Why do you think that is?

Describe your devotional life as it is presently. Are you reading the Bible and praying? How often? What's going well? What's not? Where are you strong? Where are you weak? What do you find confusing? What do you hope to gain from this small study?

# Step #1: Solitude

GET ALONE WITH GOD

## Navigating the Extremes

How do you feel about being alone? I imagine that it is somewhat different for each one of us.

Some probably like it quite a bit—perhaps even too much. We grow tired of other people rather quickly. We get out with others and, in almost no time at all, we find ourselves longing to retreat back to our own space and zone.

Others of us might actually have a serious disdain for solitude. We don't like it in the slightest. We do everything we can to avoid it. If we can't be around other people, we'll at least turn on the TV, or the radio, or scroll Facebook for hours. We'd rather be anything but alone.

There are many reasons for these sorts of preferences. On the one hand, we might prefer solitude to company because when we are with others we find that we are too self-conscious. We are always worrying about what we should say next or how it will be received. We are, quite frankly, scared of other people—their opinions, their reactions, their rejection. We feel we must clean ourselves up, put the mask on, play the game. It's an exhausting thing and so we can't bear it for very long. We prefer the safety and comfort of solitude.

On the other hand, we might prefer company to solitude because when we are with others we are distracted from the sorts of things we fear we might have to face if ever we do get alone. Sometimes it is easier to always have a person nearby, to always be in the buzz of conversation or activity, because it keeps our minds occupied somewhere else. When we get alone our feelings start to rear up, our wounds start to fester, our heart escapes out from the place we'd stuffed it. We become more aware of things broken inside—things we don't want to face.<sup>3</sup>

In either of these two extremes, we miss the idea of solitude as it is presented to us in the Bible. Contrary to the first extreme, we see that the solitude to which the Bible calls us is not merely an *escape* from other people, it is a *pursuit* of God. And, contrary to the second

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<sup>3</sup> On this point, it is quite interesting to note that, in his book about doing life together as Christians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer still thought it necessary to devote a whole section to the importance of time spent *alone*. You see, he understands how the two relate. Listen closely as he explains:

Many people seek fellowship because they are afraid to be alone. Because they cannot stand loneliness, they are driven to seek the company of other people. There are Christians, too, who cannot endure being alone, who have had some bad experiences with themselves, who hope they will gain some help in association with others. They are generally disappointed. Then they blame the fellowship for what is really their own fault. . . . The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, no matter how spiritual this diversion may appear. He is really not seeking community at all, but only distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time . . .

*Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* [New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1954], 76-77; emphasis added.)

Here again, then, we see why Jesus would say that learning to be alone with him truly is the one necessary thing. We cannot do life together properly without it!



extreme, we find that, while solitude does provide opportunity for our internal world to be exposed, it is not intended to be some frightening thing. We meet with God in that secret place and find healing!

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*Let him who cannot be alone  
beware of community.*

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## Making a Case

Before I go any further on this, I should make the case for solitude's importance from Scripture. To do so, while I could come at it from countless angles, it seems I really needn't do anything more than simply put forward a quick survey of our Lord's own life. Solitude with God, his Father, was quite clearly built into the very rhythm of Jesus' day-to-day.

- Consider Luke 4:42-43: "*And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place.*"<sup>4</sup> And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'<sup>5</sup> At this point, Jesus has already done many miracles for these people and, quite understandably, they want him always by their side. Jesus could attempt to keep serving and healing as the crowds demanded of him, but instead he pulls away. He pursues solitude with his Father in order to gain clarity and conviction concerning his mission and what he's to do next. It's only by way of solitude that the Father's voice can be heard over that of the crowd.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark, in his account, makes clear what Jesus is doing in this desolate place: "and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

<sup>5</sup> Any emphasis in Scripture citations has been added by the author.

- We read of the same sort of thing in Luke 5:15-16: “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*”
- In Matthew 14:23 we read that, after Jesus fed the 5000, He “dismissed the crowds, [and] *he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.* When evening came, he was there *alone.*”
- And then, in Mark 6:31, we see that this solitude with God is not something merely for Jesus as the Son. It is for all of us. He tries to instill this rhythm into his disciples as well. After they had been sent out and engaged in much ministry in the surrounding towns, Jesus says to them: “Come away *by yourselves to a desolate place* and rest a while.”

## Getting Practical

In view of these things, I think this Sacred Path towards Jesus begins with the idea of solitude—of getting alone with God.

There are any number of ways you might pursue this. You might rise up early before your kids or roommates, or stay up late after they’ve gone to bed, or sit in your car in some offbeat location before coming into work, or take a long walk out in the woods or hills near your house. You might simply go into your bedroom and close the door. Whatever the case may be, your intention is to get alone in these moments with God.

There is, of course, a very practical side to all of this. For one thing, solitude creates space for you to engage Jesus with *minimal distraction*. You’re not drawn off into what’s happening “over there.” You’re able to be a bit more present and focused.

But, secondly, we also understand that solitude creates space for you to engage Jesus with *minimal reservation*. What I mean by this second piece is that our times with the Lord are actually meant to be messy affairs.

The author of Hebrews gives us window into Jesus’ times with God when he writes: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, *with loud cries and tears*, to him who was able to save him

from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (Heb. 5:7). "Loud cries and tears." That is what Jesus' alone time with the Father looked like. Similarly, in the Psalms we watch as the psalmists cry and sing and shout with great vigor and emotion. Nothing is held back it would seem.

In view of this, we are not left to suppose that spending time with God will always be this sanitary, civilized thing one can easily do in a coffee shop or a neighborhood bookstore. Can you meet with God in such public places? Sure. But the basic idea, it seems to me, is that to meet with God (and I mean *really* meet with him) you have to put yourself in a place where you can truly pour out before him all that's in your heart—the good, the bad, and the ugly. This is not a time for composure and sophistication. You are going to cry and get snot-nosed. You are going to sing, shout, bless him, and even yell at him at times. You need to make space to engage him for real, as a child would his or her father.

I should say one last thing (though this is probably obvious): depending on your stage in life, getting alone with God might require more creativity or work for you than it does for others. Families with young children might find that some rearrangement of the schedule is necessary in order to make a go at this. Though challenging, I hope you see how such things would be well worth the effort. Please do give yourself grace as you try. God can and does meet us in the midst of the crazy as well.

How do you feel about solitude—being alone and away from others? Do you love it? Do you avoid it? Are you afraid of it? Explain.



Read the quote from Bonhoeffer again in the footnotes of this last section. Do you agree with his evaluation there? How have you seen these sorts of things play out in your own life and in the life of other Christians?

Why do you think solitude is important when it comes to engaging Jesus like Mary? How have you personally experienced this? What practical steps might you take this week to pursue more of this solitude with God?

## Step #2: Silence

BE STILL AND KNOW HIM

### Detox and the Devil

Similar to solitude, this idea of silence evokes a whole spectrum of responses. Some may indeed love it. Others loathe it. But, on the whole, it seems to me, in our culture at least, we have developed a kind of allergic reaction to it. We are addicted to noise. When we finally turn off the devices, pull out the earbuds, and retreat into quiet it can feel almost like a sort of detox. Our body sweats and shakes and rejects the notion with surprising vehemence.

The famous missionary martyr, Jim Eliot, rightly observed: “I think the devil has made it his business to monopolize on three elements:

noise, hurry, [and] crowds. . . . Satan is quite aware of the power of silence.”<sup>6</sup>

There’s a power here. We might not know it. But the devil knows it. So as we try to move our souls towards this quiet place with God, it is no wonder it feels as if we are doing war with Satan himself. You see, the devil knows that if we could ever get quiet we would finally be in position to hear the voice of God!

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*The devil knows that if we could ever get quiet we would finally be in position to hear the voice of God!*

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## Making a Case

The first thing I feel I must show you is that silence is, in fact, a good, even biblical, idea.

Perhaps the place to start is to simply point out that Mary back in Luke 10:38-42 is, in fact, engaged in just this. She is not chattering or chattering back and forth with Jesus. No. We are told, rather, that she “sat at the Lord’s feet and *listened* to his teaching” (v. 39). A closed mouth and an open ear. That is what she brings first to Jesus. And that is really what I am referring to here with the notion of silence.

But, of course, the Bible in countless other places makes the case for silence as an essential part of our dealings with God.

We might think of what God spoke through Moses to the people of Israel as they stood trembling on the edge of the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army closing in behind them and the untamed wilderness on either side: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and *you have only to be*

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<sup>6</sup> John Blanchard, comp., *More Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), 295.

*silent*" (Exod. 14:13-14). In other words: "O Israel, stop the fearing and the fretting, and be quiet. In the silence you are reminding your soul that I am God—that the battle belongs, not to you, but to me."

We might also think of what God spoke much later in Israel's history. When the Assyrians were swelling with power, and God's people were facing the threat of exile from their land, God says this through Isaiah: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; *in quietness* and in trust shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15). In the very moments when you feel you must pick up a sword and fight, or you are tempted to make alliances with this or that nation to get help, he's saying again: "Enough with all of that. Come back to me and be quiet. In the place of *your silence* you shall come to find *my strength*."

All of this gets at the fact that our constant talking—whether to God or to others—is often a result of our own inner anxieties and this inescapable sense we have that somehow we must be the ones to come up with a solution to the problems at hand.

But God calls us to silence. And here is what we must see: our move towards *silence* is really a move back towards *sanity*. Silence before God is a return to our place in the universe. It is saying without words: "You are God, and I am not."

This is the sort of thing the author of Ecclesiastes instructs us towards in Ecclesiastes 5:1-3:

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.<sup>7</sup>

Putting silence here near the beginning of this Sacred Path is an attempt to let settle in our hearts the idea that it is God (*his agenda, his will, his word*) who is ultimate in this whole exchange. As Bonhoeffer

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Habakkuk 2:20: "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth *keep silence* before him."

writes: "We are silent at the beginning of the day because *God should have the first word . . .*"<sup>8</sup> He is, after all, God.

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Now, do we have a lot to say? Undoubtedly. There is often much that we wish to speak, or vent, or scream. And, do not misunderstand me, surely we see that God invites us to come into his presence and share with him what is on our heart. But I find, as a general rule, it is wise to approach God first from the place of silence. "You speak to me!"

His speaking brings order to the chaos (cf. Gen. 1:1ff.). Ours tends only to add to it. If we would only let him speak to us first, I have no doubt that we would speak much differently to him thereafter.

## Getting Practical

So we get alone with God, and then we get quiet before him. But what does this silence actually involve?

Zach Eswine, in his book *The Imperfect Pastor*, gives us a very helpful description of what this sort of thing looks like in his own life:

I try to wait with no words for a moment in the presence of him who loves me and sees me in secret. But over the first several minutes my mind isn't silent. The thoughts and feelings that have gone unnoticed amid the chatter of the day seize their moment and rise

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<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1954), 79; emphasis added.

loudly to the surface as I try to quiet down. The first round of these thoughts is like foam on a soda or cream on milk. We clear it away to get to what lies beneath. So, I take each thought that vies for my attention, no matter what it is, how silly or terrible, how ordinary or task oriented, how biblically inaccurate or theologically sound, and turn it into a prayer, saying of each one, "I hear myself thinking this thing, Lord, and I bring it to you. I leave it with you."

By taking each thought to him, I am doing what Peter told me to, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Casting our cares is like reaching into a pile of mixed laundry, sorting out each cloth, and putting each piece back where it belongs. Or going through a worn garage of tools scattered everywhere. One by one I pick up each tool and hand it to God, and he puts it back where it belongs. . . .

Now the first blast of frothy thought has been cleared. It matters to know that often after the froth clearing and before the deep drinking in prayerful aloneness with God, boredom, restless mind, feelings of wasted time, and anxious fear all collaborate into a gang and try to loot us. They mosquito-bite us, and we want to get up . . . and do anything but this.

Instead, I invite you to hold on. . . . Let's face . . . this detox deliberately. With Jesus' kindness and mercy set before us, we look again to the open book . . . ; we let in the wise man's mentoring.<sup>9</sup>

If I could elaborate a bit more on this for us, here's what I think begins to happen in the silence . . .

## **1. We Recognize That We Are Always Talking**

First, ironically, in our attempts to get quiet we actually become more aware of the fact that we are always talking. You say, "I'm dreadfully shy. I'm a helpless introvert. I loathe the idea of talking." Externally, perhaps. But internally, I would wager you are always going. Words are swirling about . . . even now.

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<sup>9</sup> Zack Eswine, *The Imperfect Pastor* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 160-61.



Too often it seems that we do not so much have our thoughts as much as our thoughts have us. We don't even realize what all is happening in our minds and hearts until we actually slow down a bit and try to be quiet.

## **2. We Tune in to What We Are Actually Saying**

As we make our efforts at silence and become more aware of the internal noise, in time we'll begin to tune in a bit more to what it is we are actually so busy thinking about.

At first, you might just notice little tasks or to-dos meandering about in your consciousness. They may or may not seem all that significant. Still you try your best, as Eswine suggests, to hand them over to God.

But some of these fluttering thoughts, though they seem harmless at first, you may come to find they are attached to something much deeper and more significant for you. They don't just pass by your consciousness, they take up residence there.

If thoughts keep trending towards a particular circumstance or concern, we must wonder if somehow the center of gravity in our hearts has truly begun shifting towards it as well. Like planets pulled into orbit around the sun, often our thoughts revolve around those things that are central—perhaps too central—to us. If we have no time for thoughts of God because we are too busy thinking of this or that, well then we can be sure we've identified a place where we very much need his mending.

Let me give you an example of this. Perhaps you find that you keep thinking about work—tasks, projects, deadlines, and so forth. It might seem relatively harmless at first, but you find that your mind keeps orbiting these things. You try to give them to God and move on, but you are soon pulled back to them.

As you continue to sit in that place with the Lord, you find that, beneath these flitting thoughts, there are deeper anxieties. One of your friends got fired last week for poor performance and you heard they might be looking to make more cuts.

It's not just these tasks or projects that you're thinking about. It's so much more. You're scared—for your job, your finances, your family, your sense of success and identity. If you don't perform, what will come of

you? All of this sprawls out like a tangled root system beneath what at first seemed merely to be a few harmless passing thoughts.

Again, part of the goal in these attempts at silence is actually that we become more aware, not just of God, but of ourselves—of the things we are thinking and feeling and facing, of the stuff that is twisting and turning within. It is only as we become more aware of these things going on with us that we can more truly and honestly surrender ourselves to him.<sup>10</sup>

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*Like planets pulled into orbit around the sun,  
often our thoughts revolve around those  
things that are central—perhaps too central—  
to us.*

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### **3. We Cast Our Cares, Yield Our Wills, and Open Our Hearts**

And this really leads us to the most essential part in all of this (though really we've been making mention of it all along the way). As these attempts at silence expose our inner noise—our anxieties and idolatries—we quickly begin to roll all of these things over towards God. We cast our cares, yield our wills, and open our hearts (and ears!) . . . to him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As you begin to tune into what you are *thinking*, it is also important that you start to recognize a bit more of how you are *feeling*. Expressing ourselves emotionally to God is critical to truly connecting with him. For help with this, see "Appendix 1: The Feelings Wheel." Use this tool in your times with Jesus. Tell him how you feel. The more you get real with him about your feelings and needs, the more he can get real with you in his Word and grace!

<sup>11</sup> Similar to the preceding footnote, if I could encourage you: as you identify these thoughts and begin to give them over to the Lord, do so with what I call "*toddler talk*." Stop trying to be civilized. Stop trying to be put together. Stop trying to be "adult." Just be a kid talking to his or her dad.

What I've found is that, when for so long you've only discoursed in the world of adults, talking with toddlers can be surprisingly refreshing. Why do I say this? Well, because you

In the silence, you see, we position ourselves for real Christianity, for an authentic encounter with Jesus. Finally, we begin to sit somewhat unhurriedly, undistractedly, undividedly, attentively. Now at last we are ready, willing, and even desperately longing, to hear from him!

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don't have to guess what toddlers are feeling or thinking. They just tell you. "I want this." "Give me that." "No!" Then they start screaming and you know they're hurting, they're angry, they're afraid, or something like this. Their hearts are out in the open. But as we get older we learn how to disguise things. We learn how to use words to hide or manipulate or cover our guilt and shame. And as this goes on over time, even we ourselves start to lose connection with what we are truly feeling, or wanting, or struggling with. We build these fences around our hearts. We act like the issue is somewhere "out there," with the fence or beyond it. We distract attention that way when really there is something deeper going on inside.

You might think of how the average small group handles prayer requests. "Pray for my dog—she's sick." "Pray for my neighbor—he's struggling." "Pray for my work—it's hard." All of this is fine, but it can often be a diversion tactic—"fence-work." We don't want others to see our hearts—what's really going on inside us—so we direct attention to things we're more comfortable with people knowing about. But really, if we were just to be toddlers for a moment, we would say things like: "Guys, I'm scared." "Pray for me, I'm angry." "I'm feeling bitter." "I'm jealous." "I want this." "I don't want that." "I feel weak." "I need you." "Help me!" It's simple. But it's deep.

And here's the point: we should talk like that with God. Read the Psalms and you'll find the psalmists all do the same. They're open. They're honest. They're real with him. And we can be too. He already knows. And he can help.

How do you feel about silence? Do you love it? Do you avoid it? Are you afraid of it? Explain.

Have you ever tried to quiet yourself before God? What's it been like? What sorts of things would you say your thoughts tend to orbit around? Why?

Why do you think silence is important when it comes to engaging Jesus like Mary? What practical steps might you take this week to pursue more of this silence before God?



You might attempt the following exercise. Get alone. Try to be quiet. Notice your breath and (perhaps for the first time!) thank God for it. Feel the chair or floor beneath you. Soak in the sounds round about you. You might pick a few words of Scripture that get your mind moving Godward (e.g. the first line of Psalms 37:7, 46:10, or 139:5) and recite them in cadence with your breathing ("Be still, and know [*breathe in*] . . . that you are God [*breathe out*]"). As you attempt this, make note of any interrupting thoughts. What are they? Why are they there? How are you feeling about these things (use the Feelings Wheel if you need help). Roll it all over to God. Speak simply, like a toddler would to his or her dad. Return to the words of Scripture. Breathe in. Breathe out. Be still and know him. Prepare to press further in.

# Step #3: Scripture

LET HIM HAVE THE FIRST WORD

## A Low Whisper

Realistically, in your times with God, you may give only a few minutes to the things we've been discussing thus far. But however long you sit in the silence alone with him, the point is to ready yourself to hear from him in Scripture.

A text that brings all of this together for us is found in 1 Kings 19. Here we see that the prophet Elijah is on the run from King Ahab and Jezebel. And God meets the prophet in his place of solitude and teaches him that it is, ironically, in the quiet and the silence that his voice is often heard the loudest.

You may recall, at this point, Elijah has taken shelter in a cave, and God calls to him there.

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a *low whisper*. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (vv. 11-13)

We have this tendency of thinking that all the greatest things of God are found in the hustle and the noise and activity—in the Martha-like contexts. But one of the things God is saying to Elijah here is that his word and presence often come to us in the place we'd least expect it: in the quiet. Indeed, it is intriguing to note that the Hebrew translated in the ESV as "a low whisper" (v. 12) can be literally translated "a sheer silence" (NRSV), or as the footnote in the ESV puts it: "a thin silence."

Whatever the case, the point is that it is in the midst of this quiet that Elijah hears the very voice of God. That's why he wraps his face in his cloak. This is a holy moment. He can sense it.

Solitude . . . Silence . . . Scripture!

## Because of the Cross!

But there is one last thing we should say about this text here in 1 Kings. Indeed, the cross of Calvary breaks into our reflection at this point and we are reminded of why we are permitted, even invited, to enjoy all of this with God in the first place.

I wonder if you noticed. God tells Elijah in verse 11: "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." We're not told explicitly whether Elijah actually does this or not, but it would seem, by my read at least, that he doesn't. For it is only later, after all of this wind and earthquake and fire, that we are told "he [finally!] wrapped his face in his cloak and *went out and stood at the entrance of the cave*" (v. 13).

So it would seem from the narrative here that God calls Elijah to come out and stand before him, but before the prophet can even move on that, the wind, earthquake, and fire begin. Meanwhile, Elijah remains in the cave *sheltered* by the rock as the wind, we're told, "tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord" (v. 11). And then the earth quakes and the fire burns.

All three of these elements—wind, earthquake, and fire—are emblems of judgment, God's holy fury against man's sin. Countless verses would lead us to think so.

So there is more being presented in this text than just this idea that God is found by us in the silence. Indeed, in this story we are given a most wonderful picture of how we are brought to actually hear God's word in the first place.

We are sinners. The judgment, the fury, the wrath should be for us. But, instead, we are invited to get alone with God and, in the silence, through Scripture, we are granted to hear his gracious, gentle, soothing voice. How?!

Well, we too, like Elijah, have been sheltered by a rock have we not? There is another who took the wind, the earthquake, the fire. You do remember, don't you, that while Jesus was on the cross these are the sorts of things that took place all round about him, literally! We are told that the earth quaked and the sun went black. The fury of a holy God against sin was being vented out and upon him. He was not sheltered. He was not hidden. He did not hear his Father's soft voice.

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*The Son gave his life that we might have this privilege. So then let us give ourselves to it.*

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He was utterly abandoned and exposed and railed against—all so that what Elijah experienced here in solitude and silence could be our experience as well; so that God could come, not in wrath, but in love . . . and speak tenderly to us. The Son gave his life that we might have this privilege. So then let us give ourselves to it. Let us draw near to God in his Word and listen!<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Before proceeding to the next step, at this point I'd encourage you to check out "Appendix 2: Four Practical Suggestions for More Productive Bible Reading." There I make recommendations regarding the kind of Bible you might want to purchase, the kind of reading plan you might want to follow, etc. I hope you find it helpful!

Why would it be important to let God have the first word? Looking at your own life and devotions, would you say that you actually do this?

If you haven't already, read "Appendix 2: Four Practical Suggestions for More Productive Bible Reading." Which of the four suggestions seem most relevant and helpful to you? Why?



Have you ever tried to read the whole Bible through and through? If not, why not? If so, how did it go? What was good about it? What was hard?

What Bible do you currently read from? Have you ever used a Bible reading plan to help you stay the course? Do you already have a method of study that you've found fruitful? Let's learn from one another!

## Step #4: Sanctum

FIND RENEWAL IN HIS PRESENCE

### The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

To understand this word "sanctum" it might help you to think of the related word "sanctuary." It's the idea of a sacred meeting place between man and God. It's a word that in the Latin was used with reference to the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple where God was said to dwell in his glory.

The basic sense here then is this: in our reading of the Bible, we trust, by God's grace, there will be times where we will become suddenly, even surprisingly, aware that we are no longer merely reading words on



a page, but are, in fact, sitting in the very presence of God; that God, by his Spirit, is speaking to us through the ink and paper; that Jesus is in the room!

I get this idea in particular from 2 Corinthians 3-4. There Paul recalls from the Old Testament how Moses would meet with God in the sacred place of the tabernacle during their wilderness sojourn. And then he turns the discussion towards his modern day context and says, now, as people of the New Covenant, it is through the ministry of “God’s word” (4:2), and the “gospel” especially (vv. 3-4), that we are brought into God’s presence and given sightings of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). In other words: we now encounter God in general, and the risen Christ in particular, not in a tabernacle set up somewhere, but in and through the inspired words of Scripture!

## The DNA Method

It’s at this point that I wanted to drill a bit deeper and consider with you what it actually looks like to read the Bible and encounter Jesus there. For this, let me introduce you to what I would call the DNA Method of Bible study. DNA here is an acronym that stands for *Discover, Nurture, and Apply*.

I’ve found this method with its acronym particularly helpful for at least two reasons. Let me share those with you now . . .

### 1. It Keeps the End Goal in View

For one thing, the acronym as a whole keeps ever before us what is really the end goal of our times with Jesus. Think about it. The idea of DNA carries with it the notion of genetics. With this we are reminded that our Bible study and meditation—our time in God’s Word—is intended to transform us in Christ at the most basic, even genetic, level.

When we are born again in Jesus, you could say, in a sense, we are given his DNA, through the Holy Spirit. We become sons and daughters of God. We begin to draw from a different gene pool, as it were. And we start to be renewed into his image, into the very image of God. That is why Paul, back in that same discussion just referenced, wrote earlier

in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “[W]e all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image* from one degree of glory to another.”

So, as we engage with Scripture, and as we meet with Jesus there in that sacred space, we come to find that we are, slowly but surely, being transformed into his image and likeness. For Moses, if you recall, after spending time with God in the tabernacle, he would literally start to shine—he would begin to look more like the one he’d been spending time with. For us it’s really not all that different. Though our faces may not literally glow, our lives should certainly start to. After spending time with our Savior, we too should find that we are beginning to look more and more like him—in the way we think, feel, talk, and act.

This renewal into God’s image is really the end goal of our redemption as a whole (cf. Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). And it is no less the end goal of our devotions and Bible reading as well.

## **2. It Moves Us towards This End Goal One Step at a Time**

“Okay, well and good,” you say. “I want my times in the Bible to be transformative just as much as the next Christian. But how does all of this really work out?” Well, this leads to the second reason I find the DNA Method so helpful. You see, each letter in the acronym, properly understood and engaged, actually takes you towards this end goal one step at a time.

Discover, Nurture, and Apply.

It might help you to see these three as part of a journey from *head*, through *heart*, to *hand*. We Discover with our heads as we study the Scriptures and learn. We Nurture these truths in our hearts through repentance and faith. And we Apply these things with our hands as we live out the implications of the gospel and God’s Word in our day to day lives.

But now let’s move on to consider each of these steps one at a time

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## Discover: *What Do I See?*

For this, I invite you to imagine with me. It's early in the morning. You've brewed yourself a cup of coffee. No one else in the home is up yet. You're alone. You've quieted your soul. You've opened the Good Book. You're ready to meet with God. So you begin to read.

Now what?

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### *Discover, Nurture, and Apply . . . a journey from head, through heart, to hand.*

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My suggestion is that, as you read, perhaps a chapter or two, you might try to identify a key word, a phrase, a verse—something that stands out to you. Write it down—in your journal, on your calendar, on your morning's Sacred Path Worksheet,<sup>13</sup> or somewhere else.

The idea is that, from your larger reading, you should try to land on something to focus in on in a bit more detail—something to soak your soul in for a little while. I agree with Charles Spurgeon when he says:

Set your whole heart on the Word of God! Some people like to read so many chapters every day. I would not dissuade them from the practice, but I would rather lay my soul soaking in half a dozen verses all day than I would, as it were, rinse my hands in several chapters. Oh, to bathe in a text of Scripture and to let it be sucked up into your very soul till it saturates your heart!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> You can find a sample of this worksheet in "Appendix 3: The Sacred Path Worksheet and Bookmark" and you can download your own copy for use online at <https://mercyhillchurch.org/faith/the-sacred-path/>.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "Taught That We May Teach," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed May 12, 2021, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/spurgeon/sermons27/cache/sermons27.txt>.

Remember, the goal in all this is not to merely increase your knowledge of Scripture, it is to be transformed by the one you meet in and through it. For this to happen, you have to thoroughly engage God's Word with all your heart. And I for one don't think we can realistically do that with more than a verse or two at a time.

So as you set about your reading, it might help you to imagine yourself as giving the Holy Spirit a highlighter. Ask him to draw your attention to that verse or small section that he especially desires for you to consider this day. You'll be surprised. You may have read the same book many times over, but each time something new will jump out at you—something God is trying to accent for you. Settle in there.

When you've landed on a place to focus, here are some questions you might use to help you reflect:

*What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an attribute to adore, a truth to trust, a promise to hope in, a command to obey, a warning to heed, an example to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Preach the good news to yourself once more.<sup>15</sup>*

The first set of questions above gives you basic ways of breaking down and drawing out things from the text. But that last question is where I especially want to offer help at this point. I'm thinking in particular of this idea that, whatever God is revealing to you, wherever you are in Scripture, it can and should (and *must!*) be connected to what he has revealed to us in the person of Jesus and his work on the cross.

There are a couple of presuppositions that stand behind this idea and I'd like to consider them with you for a moment now . . .

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<sup>15</sup> For your ongoing reference, these questions have also been included on the Sacred Path Worksheet as well as on the back of the Sacred Path Bookmark (see Appendix 3). The hope is you'll find them helpful in stirring your capacity for discovery in Bible reading.

# 1. All of Scripture Is Held Together and Made Sense of by the Good News of Jesus Christ

The first presupposition is simply that it's the gospel that holds together and makes sense of Scripture as a whole. To remove the gospel from the Scriptures would be like removing the binding from your Bible. You tear it off and all the pages just fly apart. There's no center. There's no unity. There's no glue. And this is why we should expect that wherever we are in our Bible reading—whether in the Pauline epistles or the book of Leviticus—the gospel is close at hand!

I could take you to countless texts for this, but I'll give you just one—perhaps the most prominent and pointed on the matter. Do you remember, at the end of Luke's gospel, what Jesus says to his disciples after he's risen from the dead and is soon to ascend to his Father?

"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 and the Prophets and the Psalms* must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations . . ." (Luke 24:44-47)

Did you catch that? He's saying: "Guys, why have you been so troubled and confused here about the cross and all of this? The Old Testament (the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms) should have prepared you for these things because that's what it's all been about—my death, my resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins that can now be proclaimed in my name to the entire world. How could you have missed it? It's on every page!"

This is why Spurgeon would say elsewhere concerning his approach to reading the Bible:

He [Jesus] leans over me, he puts his finger on the lines, I can see his pierced hands: I will read it as in his presence. I will read it knowing that he is the substance of it, that he is the proof of this book as

well as the writer of it; the sum of Scriptures as well as the author of it. This is the way for true students to become wise. You will get to the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading.<sup>16</sup>

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*To remove the gospel from the Scriptures would be like removing the binding from your Bible. You tear it off and all the pages just fly apart. There's no center. There's no unity. There's no glue.*

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Contrary to what we may have first thought, we don't have to wait until we come in our reading to the New Testament to encounter Jesus in the Bible. Truly, he's been there all along. And we can meet with him on every page!

## **2. What You Need More Than Anything Every Day Is the Good News of Jesus Christ**

But now, the gospel is not only what holds all of Scripture together, it's also what, we could say, holds us together as well. Just as we can find the gospel on *every page of our Bibles*, so too you and I need the gospel *every day of our lives*. It's just as central to my spiritual well-being as it is central to God's inspired revelation. Here then is the second presupposition and the reason we ought to always be looking for the gospel as we come to read our Bibles: we desperately need it . . . more than anything . . . every day!

And again, I could take you to countless texts for this, but I'll give you just one: Galatians 3:1-5. Back in the early years of my walk with

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "How to Read the Bible," The Spurgeon Center, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/learning-spurgeons-daily-priority/>.

Christ this text set off a personal revival for me. I had fallen into a legalism that was choking out my joy in God and growth in grace. Somewhere along the way I had mistakenly come to think that the gospel is merely how a Christian gets started and then he must carry on from there in his own strength. But God rescued me from this error by way of these words from the Apostle Paul:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by *hearing with faith*? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by *hearing with faith* . . . ?

The implication is plain: you do not start by faith in the gospel and then carry on by self-reliance and works of the law. No! You carry on in the same way you began: hearing (the gospel!) with faith. If you want the Spirit-filled life, this is the only way to get it. You and I need the gospel every day.

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*The gospel is not only what holds all of Scripture together, it's also what holds us together as well. Just as we can find the gospel on every page of our Bibles, so too you and I need the gospel every day of our lives.*

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Consider the wise words of Tim Keller here:

[I]n our Christian life we never “get beyond the gospel” to something more advanced. The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of

truths; rather, it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth. The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience; rather the gospel is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power to take us through every barrier (Rom. 1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows: "The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience." But Colossians 1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and "hard work" that is not arising from and in line with the gospel will not sanctify you—they will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them "to the word of his grace, which can build you up" (Acts 20:32).

The main problem in the Christian life, then, is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel; we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life. Richard Lovelace says that most people's problems are just a failure to be oriented to the gospel—a failure to grasp and believe it through and through. Luther says, "[The truth of the Gospel] is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine. . . . Most necessary is it therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually." The gospel is not easily comprehended. Paul says that the gospel does its renewing work in us only as we understand it in all its truth. All of us to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not "get it." So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is continual rediscovery of the gospel. The discovery of a new implication or application of the gospel—seeing more of its truth—is an important stage of any renewal. This is true for either an individual or a church.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Tim Keller, "The Centrality of the Gospel," Redeemer City to City, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/the-centrality-of-the-gospel>.



# The Hub Diagram

Now it's one thing to know and agree with all of this, and it's quite another to actually start to see how all of Scripture really does speak of Jesus. As we sit down at his feet to listen like Mary, as we open our Bibles and read—whether in the New Testament or the Old—how do we connect whatever text we are reading to the good news of Jesus Christ?

Keller puts forward here that the gospel is like a “hub in a wheel of truth.” I wrote virtually the same sort of thing a while back in a training manual for our Home Group leaders: “The gospel is not merely the starting line of a much longer race. It's more like the hub of a wheel. Without the gospel always at the center, nothing in the Christian life turns. Everything stalls out. You go nowhere.”

Drawing on this idea, and to help us see the various ways we might find Jesus in the Scriptures, I put together what I'd call the Hub Diagram. You'll find this diagram in pictorial form in Appendix 4. Feel free to turn there now and check it out. Undoubtedly, I could spend countless pages expounding on the diagram, but that would be beyond the bounds of this current project.<sup>18</sup> Instead, let me just reiterate here the main “spokes” of the wheel and I'd encourage you to consider these things further in your own time. My goal is to simply alert you to the myriad ways you can make your way to Jesus and the gospel in the Scriptures. It really is all about him!

As you'll find in the diagram, Jesus is . . .

- the *realization* of every *promise* (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20)
- the *fulfillment* of every *prophecy* (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12)
- the *essence* of every *symbol* (cf. John 1:29; 2:18-22; 3:14-15)
- the *substance* of every *shadow* (cf. Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:1-6; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:4)
- the *apex* of every *attribute* (cf. Heb. 1:3; John 14:9)

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<sup>18</sup> If you are wanting to engage further, I did preach a series of eight sermons wherein I expound on each of the spokes in this diagram. You can find them online at [https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/#category-sort\\_-sub-series--hearts-afame-how-to-see-jesus-in-all-of-scripture](https://mercyhillchurch.org/resources/sermons/#category-sort_-sub-series--hearts-afame-how-to-see-jesus-in-all-of-scripture).

- the *epitome* of every *theme* (cf. Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11 on the theme of God exalting the rejected)
- the *unveiling* of every *mystery* (cf. Col. 1:25-27; Eph. 3:8-9)
- the *climax* of every *story* (John 5:39; Luke 24:44-47)
- the *obedience* of every *command* (cf. Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 5:17)
- the *solution* of every *problem* (cf. Acts 4:12)
- the *satisfaction* of every *longing* (cf. John 7:37-38; Matt. 11:28)
- the *point* of *everything!!!* (cf. John 5:39, 46; Col. 1:15-20)

Consider keeping this list close at hand. I do think it will prove helpful to you as you seek to find Jesus in your times of Bible reading.

## **An Example: Psalm 119:11**

Let me just give you one example of what this might look like as you get alone with Jesus in his Word. We'll carry this same example through the next steps in this DNA Method as well so you will hopefully get a full picture of the process by the time we're done.

Imagine you're reading in Psalm 119 and a certain verse jumps out at you: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (v. 11). You write that down in your journal and begin to ponder it.

You see an *example to follow* in this verse, do you not? The psalmist is storing up God's word in his heart. And you should too. So is that it then? Are we done? Are you to now just run off into your day and try your best to do as the psalmist does? Not exactly. Allow me to slow you down just a bit.

Perhaps on most mornings, you might read this verse and find it inspiring. "Okay God, I want to do this. I'm ready to follow the psalmist's example here." But now imagine this particular morning you're feeling a bit differently. Imagine you've been discouraged lately. Stumbling. Far from God. You look at the example held out by this psalmist and you don't see something inspiring. You see something condemning. "I'm not storing up your word in my heart. I don't feel like I have the strength, let alone the time, to make this happen. What is there for me

in this text but just another weight to tie round the ankles of my discouragement?!”

Here’s the point. In Psalm 119:11 you might initially see a *good example* or *good advice*, but you don’t yet see *good news*. And it is good news, remember, that you need above all else. You need to hear and believe the gospel before you ever set out to go and do. You need to see Jesus here. And you mustn’t stop pressing into the text until you do!

So in you press, and here’s the sort of thing that comes to light . . .

- Jesus is the singer of every psalm. He is the substance of this shadow here. He is the epitome of this theme. He is the obedience of this command. It is all leading us to him. He is the one who truly, fully, perfectly stored up God’s word in his heart. And in every trial he faced, we see plainly, that it was this word that kept him from sinning.
- In the wilderness, when tempted by the devil, it is Scripture that Jesus quotes at every point to fight him off (cf. Matt. 4; Luke 4).
- And, later, when the devil comes at him again in full force at the cross, it is Scripture stored in Christ’s heart that keeps him strong. Spurgeon says that the words of God ought to be so in us that when we are pricked we bleed Bible. Well, that’s quite literally what we see with Jesus. The more they punch and whip and strike, the more Scripture flows out from him. Even his statement of utter despair—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46)—is a quote from Psalm 22:1!

So Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 119:11. And suddenly I see that he is here to help me in my weakness, to unshackle the chains from my ankles. He was put to death for my failure and sin on this point, and he is present now by his Spirit to help me grow in it. I am not being condemned. I am being set free. There is not just a good example or good advice in this text, there is good news. It’s all being brought into the light of the cross . . . and that changes everything!

## Nurture: *What Do I Believe?*

Now we move from Discover to Nurture. We continue on our journey from head towards heart.

Here is where we really start to get real with ourselves before God. We may at this point have a better grasp on the text itself. We *understand* it. But now we must take things a bit deeper and ask: “Okay, but do I really *believe* it?”<sup>19</sup>

So, at this point, you might consider questions like these:

*Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there’s an attribute, are you adoring? If there’s a truth, are you trusting? If there’s a promise, are you hoping? If there’s a command, are you obeying? If there’s a warning, are you heeding? If there’s an example, are you following? Why or why not? What’s in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing?*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This is the sort of thing George Muller refers to in his autobiography when he writes:

The most important thing I had to do was to read the Word of God and to meditate on it. . . . What is the food for the inner man? . . . [T]he word of God—not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe. No, we must consider what we read, ponder over it, and apply it to our hearts. (George Muller, *The Autobiography of George Muller* [New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984], 139.)

We don’t stop with merely reading and discovering Jesus in the Scriptures—that would be water merely passing through a pipe. We must then take what we’ve discovered and meditate on it. We must draw that water down until it percolates into the very soil of our hearts! We must, in other words, move on from Discover to Nurture.

<sup>20</sup> Remember, part of the purpose of your time spent in silence before God is to help you identify a bit of what “you are currently facing.” You have a better sense of where you’re struggling, where you’re being tested and tempted, where your heart is prone to wander. You have a better sense, in other words, of where you desperately need God’s grace and guidance. Consider how the text at hand speaks into this place of your deep need. This is the most fruitful way to read the Scriptures. As Oswald Chambers has said: “To read the Bible according to God’s providential order in your circumstances is the only way to read it, viz., in the blood and passion of personal life” (Oswald Chambers, “Disciples Indeed,” in *The Complete Works of Oswald Chambers* [Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2000], 387). In the Bible, God is not just speaking in general. He is speaking to you, right where you’re at, in the midst of the burden and struggle of daily life.

*How can Jesus come to your rescue? Make the good confession once more.*<sup>21</sup>

Carrying on with our previous illustration, if what we have before us in Psalm 119:11 is an example for us to follow, we need to consider whether we are following it or not. And, as we've already said, let's imagine that we've not been. Well, now we come to face the question: why not?

As you think, pray, and maybe journal on these things you come to realize that you've been storing up a different set of words in your heart—words that won't keep you from sinning, but instead are leading you towards it.

You saw this come out just the other day with your coworker. The project went bad and when the boss called you in to give an account this guy threw you under the bus with all sorts of false accusations and outright lies. You lashed back in self-defense and went beyond that even into slander. Now you cold-shoulder him whenever you pass by in the hall. You refuse to even look him in the eyes when you stand in line at the coffee pot. And, in secret, you've been nursing thoughts of how you can make him pay, make him hurt. You've bought the lie that getting vengeance will somehow bring you peace.

And then you come to this verse. And as you soak in it before God—seeing how Jesus has fulfilled it on your behalf, recognizing that he is present here to help you do as he did—you begin to repent and move back towards the place of faith: “Jesus, I’m sorry. I have seen this morning once more how you responded in the face of abuse. You had your Father’s word stored in your heart and you were kept from sin, you were enabled to love. O Jesus, forgive me and help me. You alone can turn my heart right—turn me towards mercy and patience and kindness. I throw everything I have upon you. Don’t let your servant falter today!”

Again, do you see how everything now is different in light of the cross? You are not condemned or disturbed by the psalmist’s example because you know it comes to you now through Jesus who forgives and

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<sup>21</sup> As with the previous set of questions, you can find these on the Sacred Path Worksheet and Bookmark for your ongoing reference (see Appendix 3).

is here to help. There is good news for a bitter soul in these moments. There is hope and power to change.

## Apply: *What Do I Do?*

Now we move from Discover, through Nurture, to Apply. We continue on our journey from head, through heart, to hand.

Here is where we come to face Jesus' words like those in Luke 11:28: "Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God and *keep it!*" We are not just to hear God's word, nor should we be satisfied merely claiming to believe it. We must also keep it. We must do it. Our faith should work. Our time with Jesus should change us.

To get at this, you might consider asking questions like these:

*What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt. 6:34). If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else might need to hear this? Bear the good fruit once more.*<sup>22</sup>

Returning one last time to our illustration from Psalm 119:11, now with fresh faith in and reliance upon Jesus, how might you apply all of this to your life? Well, you might look for some word to store up in your heart, right? Something that will give you strength when you head into the office and come to face that coworker once more.

So you begin to flip through the Scriptures looking for something to store away, and as you do maybe you land on Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." You write it on a notecard and put it in your pocket so you can revisit it throughout the day. You turn it over in your mind and try to memorize it during your morning commute. You ask Jesus to help you store it in your heart and

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<sup>22</sup> Once again, you can find these questions on the Sacred Path Worksheet and Bookmark for your ongoing reference (see Appendix 3).

help you apply it as you go about your daily work. You lean in on him to help you do what only he truly can.

And when you push open the door to the office and find that coworker right there in the front room, smug face and all . . . you look him in the eyes and you say, "Good morning." And, from your heart, you mean it!

Read the quote from Keller again. What stands out to you? Describe your relationship with the gospel. To this point have you seen it as merely the “first step in a stairway of truths” or as the “hub in a wheel of truth”? What’s the difference? Why do we need the gospel every day? What’s the danger in drifting from it?

Look at the Hub Diagram in Appendix 4. Do you understand what’s being communicated here? Pick a few “spokes,” look at the verses cited, and discuss how all of this relates to Jesus and the gospel.

Pick a section of Scripture (maybe something you’ll be reading next in your devotions) and walk through the DNA Method bit by bit. Ask the questions and journal on them. See how God speaks and transforms! (Feel free to use the worksheet or bookmark in Appendix 3 to keep you on track.)



Each of us will likely trend towards one step in the DNA Method over the others. Some love to read the Scriptures and learn (Discover) but they struggle to engage the heart and apply what they’ve learned. Others love to pray and engage Jesus from the heart (Nurture), but they aren’t so good at studying and walking it out. Still others are too quick to run off and put to action (Apply) what they’ve not yet fully understood nor truly believed. Which step in this method are you personally bent towards? Which comes easiest/hardest?

As an example of what this DNA Method might look like in practice, watch “What God Can Do in Daily Devotions” by John Piper.<sup>23</sup> What stands out to you here? Have you personally experienced this sort of thing?



# Step #5: Solace

POUR OUT YOUR HEART IN PRAYER

## The Natural Progression

So you've discovered something of the truth of God and the gospel, you've nurtured these things in your heart through repentance and faith, and you've worked out how you might apply the text to your life in reliance upon Jesus and his grace. Is there anything else?

Well, yes! All of this leads naturally to the last step in this Sacred Path: what I've here called "Solace." With this I am thinking simply of prayer. This is where we might set aside special time to intentionally take refuge in God—talking to him, worshiping him, requesting from him, and so on.

No doubt prayer has been happening through each of the steps prior, but here it becomes our primary focus.

It would be, once again, beyond the bounds of this current project to elaborate much on what this praying could and should entail. Many books have been written and sermons preached on the subject and we simply don't have the space for that here.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, if you keep reading in Luke's gospel, Jesus himself will go straight from conversing with Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) to discussing the importance and practicals of a disciples' prayer life (11:1-13). Read his words there. Reflect on them. Learn from them.<sup>25</sup>

But let me at least leave you with yet one more quote from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*. In this instance, he's making the case that prayer

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<sup>23</sup> Find it online at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-find-gold-in-gods-word/excerpts/what-god-can-do-in-daily-devotions> (cf. also <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-can-i-make-daily-bible-reading-authentic>).

<sup>24</sup> A book I'd especially recommend on the subject is *A Praying Life* by Paul E. Miller.

<sup>25</sup> If you're interested in listening to the sermons I preached on Luke 11:1-13 through the month of August 2018, you can find them online at <https://mercyhillchurch.org/our-blog/a-s-k-sermons-on-prayer/>.

should naturally follow our time in the Scriptures and, as such, I think it fits well with the progression of things along this Sacred Path and brings it all to an appropriate end. He writes the following:

Scripture meditation leads to prayer. . . . [T]he most promising method of prayer is to allow oneself to be guided by the word of the Scriptures, to pray on the basis of a word of Scripture. In this way we shall not become the victims of our own emptiness. Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one's personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations. . . . According to a word of Scripture we pray for the clarification of our day, for preservation from sin, for growth in sanctification, for faithfulness and strength in our work. And we may be certain that our prayer will be heard, because it is a response to God's Word and promise. Because God's Word has found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, all prayers that we pray conforming to this Word are certainly heard and answered in Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

## Journey On!

So there it is! We get alone with God. We quiet our hearts in his presence. We give him the first word as we open and read from our Bibles. We meet him in that holy place and are slowly transformed into his likeness. And we give ourselves to praying over all he's shown us.

Solitude . . . Silence . . . Scripture . . . Sanctum . . . Solace. The Sacred Path! This is just one way of pursuing with Mary what Jesus calls the one "necessary" thing. I hope you've found it helpful. Journey on friends!

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<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1954), 84-85.



Describe your prayer life (or lack thereof!). How often do you pray? What does it look like? What's been good? What's been hard? How might reading Scripture first really help guide any of your prayers that follow?

Identify one big takeaway from this booklet that you hope to apply to your devotional life and pursuit of Jesus. I hope you've found it helpful!

## Want More?

If you are wanting to engage the subject matter found in this booklet further, you might consider the following resources:

- *A Praying Life* by Paul E. Miller
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney

## Need Help?

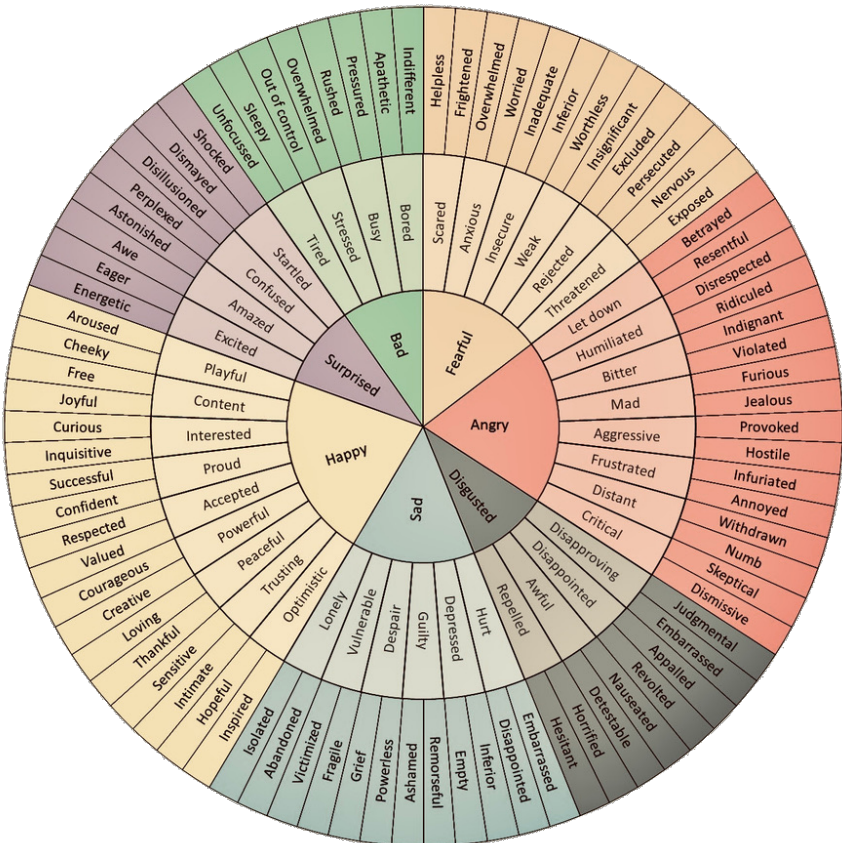
Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at [info@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:info@mercyhillchurch.org).

# What's Next?

Having learned a bit more about getting alone with Jesus, let's now begin to consider what it means to do life together as God's people. Check out the next step: *Become a Member*. Find more info at the Next Steps Table on a Sunday or online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org).

# Appendix 1: The Feelings Wheel

The Feelings Wheel, originally created by Dr. Gloria Wilcox, can help us name and express our emotions in communication with God and other people. Use this tool, not as a means of morbid introspection or self-indulgent naval-gazing, but as a way of putting words to the interior matters of your heart so that you can more profoundly and productively relate to God and those around you. While the diagram below is a bit small to read, you can find a full-size printable option available online at <https://feelingswheel.com>.





# Appendix 2: Four Practical Suggestions for More Productive Bible Reading

*"Help! I want to read my Bible but I don't know where to start!"* If that's where you're at, this appendix is for you! Let me quickly give you four suggestions that might get things moving in the right direction . . .

## **Suggestion #1: Get a Good Bible**

For this, I'd recommend in particular that you check out the *ESV Study Bible*.

The Bible is an intimidating read, no doubt. It's not a book you'd think to take along on your summer vacation for perusing while you lounge at the beach. It's long; it's complex; it's confusing; it's a few thousand years removed from our context. We need help. For goodness sake, I went to seminary full-time for four years, I've devoted my life to studying this book . . . and I still, like you, need help.

A good study Bible like the *ESV Study Bible* can be a tremendous asset in all of this. As you're reading through and come to places where you're just scratching your head, of course you pray, of course you ask God for help and the gift of illumination in the Spirit, but you also humbly receive help from those who are a few steps ahead of you. You can look at the cross-references and maybe make connections that grant you a bit more understanding. You can read the included commentary on the verses and find your bearings once more in matters of interpretation.

For me to simply hand you a Bible and tell you to read it from cover to cover would be like me trying to teach you how to swim by taking you out on a boat to the middle of the ocean and just dropping you in. Even if you somehow learned to swim in all of this, I think we can agree this isn't the right approach. You need floaties. You need lessons. You need help.

And it's no different with our Bible reading. The *ESV Study Bible* is a great resource for this. I commend it to you.

## Suggestion #2: Get a Good Plan

Before I put forward a suggestion on this, let me just give you a few quick stats to help you see what we're dealing with when it comes to reading the Bible:

- First, I wonder if you know that it takes about seventy-five hours to read the Bible cover to cover.<sup>27</sup> Now, at first that may sound like an awful lot. But do you realize that if you divide seventy-five hours by the 365 days that are in a year we are talking about reading for somewhere around fifteen minutes a day to get through the entire Bible in a year. That puts things in perspective, doesn't it?
- Second, to help you see this from another angle, I wonder if you realize that there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Again, this may sound at first like an overwhelming number. But when you divide 1,189 chapters by the 365 days that are in a year, we come to find that we would only need to read about three chapters a day to read it all the way through in twelve months. Not so hard, right?

So let's imagine you want to try to read through the Bible in something like a year. Now you know we're talking about reading around three chapters for fifteen minutes or so each day. But how exactly are you going to go about this? What's going to be your plan? Do you just attempt to read from start to finish, from Genesis on to Revelation? Some may find that works well for them. Personally, I have heard of too many starting this way only to die out by Leviticus (just a few books in!). The book of Leviticus, admittedly, is hard to understand. The content doesn't seem immediately edifying. And, in the back of your mind, you're a bit concerned about the fact that Jesus isn't going to show up

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<sup>27</sup> For example, ESV audio Bibles online run for about seventy-five hours in total.



for almost another eight months of reading! This is why so many people tap out early. It seems too daunting of a task.

But here's where the various Bible reading plans can really come in and help us. Because it's understood that just reading the Bible through can be a lot for people to attempt, these plans will often divide up the material so that we are reading in various places of Scripture all at the same time.

Now, there are many helpful plans at this point,<sup>28</sup> but the one I like best is quite simple. I call it the 3x3 Plan (three books and three chapters).<sup>29</sup> You begin reading simultaneously in three books—Genesis, Job, and Matthew—and then you progress reading a chapter or so a day from each starting point. This essentially divides the Bible into thirds and, assuming a relatively even pace, you will finish each section at approximately the same time.<sup>30</sup>

The two major benefits to this that I've experienced are: first, it's balanced—you get to read from various places in Scripture; and, second, it teaches you to read Scripture towards Jesus. The tensions and struggles and promises and shadows you see in your Old Testament reading take on new meaning and find their fulfillment in Jesus as you come to your New Testament reading. It's amazing. And it's really the way Jesus would have us come to understand things (cf. Luke 24:27, 44-45).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ligonier Ministries has put out an extensive list of plans for you to consider (<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/>). One other plan I'd recommend would be the one put out by The Bible Project (<https://bibleproject.com/reading-plans/>). The fact that this plan coincides with their profoundly helpful videos makes it an especially attractive option.

<sup>29</sup> See "Appendix 5: The 3x3 Plan" for a book-by-book trackable breakdown of this plan.

<sup>30</sup> The astute observer will notice that the New Testament section of the 3x3 Plan does not have quite as many chapters as the other two sections. Therefore, if you're not all that concerned with reading the whole Bible within a year, you might consider reading a little less from the New Testament books each day, giving yourself instead more time to meditate on the contents therein.

<sup>31</sup> Full disclosure: I personally don't even attempt to read the Bible in a year. Often, I make my way at the pace of about a chapter a day, reading from one of the three sections for a few days and then moving on to another. Sometimes, I'll read a chapter from two of the sections. Other times, I'll do the whole 3x3. It just depends. Remember, we don't read our Bibles so we can check off some box as if it were a mere task on a list. No! We

## Suggestion #3: Get a Good Method

So you've got a good Bible. And you've got a good plan to keep you going. Now you need a good method. What I mean here is you need to know what to do with the Bible as you read it.

For this I commend to you what I've come to call the DNA Method of Bible study. Now, since this method is described in great detail in Step #4 of the Sacred Path (Sanctum), I won't reiterate it again here. Refer to that section of this booklet and take the matter seriously. As I say there, we must not read the Word of God and let it run in one ear and out the other as water runs through a pipe. We must instead draw God's Word down into our hearts as rain percolates into soil. Take it into the deepest parts of you and let God satisfy you there and bring transformation out from it. The DNA Method has been designed to aid you in this process.

But now, since the specific method itself is covered more thoroughly elsewhere, with the space I have here let me instead give you one other piece to consider. While the DNA Method helps you go deeper with the particular chapters and verses read, we must also remember the value of getting up and above the trees, as it were, where we can catch a glimpse of the whole forest itself. What I mean is, as you come in your reading to a new book in the Bible, before you launch right into it, you might consider first orienting yourself by seeking out some introduction to the book as whole.

If you've ever hiked in the backcountry, you know that before you haul off into the woods, you first spend time poring over topography maps in effort to get a sense of the "lay of the land." Such work may seem at first less exciting and unfulfilling, but when once you get in and amongst the trees, you're always glad you did it. Now you have a better idea of what you're looking for and where you're headed. The journey is less stressful and more enjoyable.

Engaging Bible book introductions is somewhat like this.

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read our Bibles to meet with God. So find what works best for you in all of this and press in towards him. That's the point!

So when you come to a new book in the Bible, here are a few of my suggestions you might consider:

- In your *ESV Study Bible*, read the introduction they provide for that book. This may seem a bit academic and boring at first, but it will pay dividends later.
- Watch the Bible Project’s overview video for that book.<sup>32</sup> These are always masterfully compact, stimulating, and insightful.
- Listen to Mark Dever’s “book-level overview sermon” for that book.<sup>33</sup> He manages to preach a single sermon on each book of the Bible. You can listen to it during your commute or while doing your daily chores.

If you take me up on even just one of these suggestions, I trust you will find it immensely helpful.

## **Suggestion #4: Get A Good Friend**

This cannot go unsaid. A good friend is a great help in the journey. What if we were a church that read the Scriptures together?!

Now I know that, as part of the Sacred Path outlined in this booklet, I’ve been calling us to solitude—to getting alone with God. But that does not mean we shouldn’t include others in some way. We need accountability, prayer, and support if we are to make it through in this.

- Perhaps you tap someone to simply check in with you occasionally to ask how your times with God are going.
- Maybe you commit to getting together with the person on a regular basis to discuss what you’ve each been getting out of your own devotions.
- Maybe you even decide to read one of the books in the 3x3 Plan together, chapter by chapter, and you engage the DNA Method questions over a cup of coffee.

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<sup>32</sup> You can find them online at <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/>.

<sup>33</sup> You can find them online at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/sermons/>.

Whatever you do, the bottom line is this: God wants to meet with us in his Word. We cannot, we must not, excuse ourselves saying that the matter is too complicated for us. There's much we can still do to press in towards him. We can get a good Bible. We can get a good plan. We can get a good method. And we can get a good friend. May God bless you as you go!


# Appendix 3: The Sacred Path Worksheet and Bookmark

The following sample worksheet and bookmark were created to help you along in your journey day by day. You can download and print your own from the Sacred Path page online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org). We also keep bookmarks preprinted and cut for you to take at our services on Sundays. Feel free to make use of these resources as you see fit.

I for one keep three of the bookmarks in my *ESV Study Bible*—one in each section of the Scriptures I’m slowly making my way through (see “Appendix 5: The 3x3 Plan”). I’ll pull out the bookmark and use it to remind myself of the Sacred Path. When it comes time to read the Scriptures, I’ll flip it over and let the questions on the back guide my reflections as I journal and pray.

Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

# THE SACRED PATH

<b>SOLITUDE</b>	<b>SILENCE</b>	Cast my cares Yield my will Open my heart	
		<b>SCRIPTURE</b>	
<b>SANCTUM</b>			
<b>DISCOVER</b> 	<p>What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an <i>attribute</i> to adore, a <i>truth</i> to trust, a <i>promise</i> to hope in, a <i>command</i> to obey, a <i>warning</i> to heed, an <i>example</i> to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Preach the good news to yourself once more.</p>		

NURTURE



Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there's an attribute, are you adoring? If there's a truth, are you trusting? If there's a promise, are you hoping? If there's a command, are you obeying? If there's a warning, are you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What is in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescuer? Make the good confession once more.

APPLY



What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt 6:34). If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else might need to hear this? Bear the good fruit once more.

Adore  
(w/ love)  
Surrender  
(w/ trust)  
Knock  
(w/ need)

SOLACE

# THE SACRED PATH

## Solitude

GET ALONE WITH GOD

## Silence

BE STILL AND KNOW HIM

## Scripture

LET HIM HAVE THE FIRST WORD

## Sanctum

FIND RENEWAL IN HIS PRESENCE



Discover



Nurture



Apply

See backside for stimulus questions

## Solace

POUR OUT YOUR HEART IN PRAYER





### **Discover:** *What do I see?*

As you read from the Scriptures, try to identify one verse or small section to focus in on. What do you see in this text? What questions do you have? What answers can you find? What is God revealing to you here—about himself, about yourself? Is there an *attribute* to adore, a *truth* to trust, a *promise* to hope in, a *command* to obey, a *warning* to heed, an *example* to follow (choose one)? How does what he is revealing here connect to what he has revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus? Every verse in Scripture becomes good news when run through the cross of Christ. Preach the good news to yourself once more.



### **Nurture:** *What do I believe?*

Do you believe the things God is revealing to you in this text? If there's an attribute, are you adoring? If there's a truth, are you trusting? If there's a promise, are you hoping? If there's a command, are you obeying? If there's a warning, are you heeding? If there's an example, are you following? Why or why not? What's in the way? How are these things being tested in what you are currently facing? How can Jesus come to your rescue? Make the good confession once more.



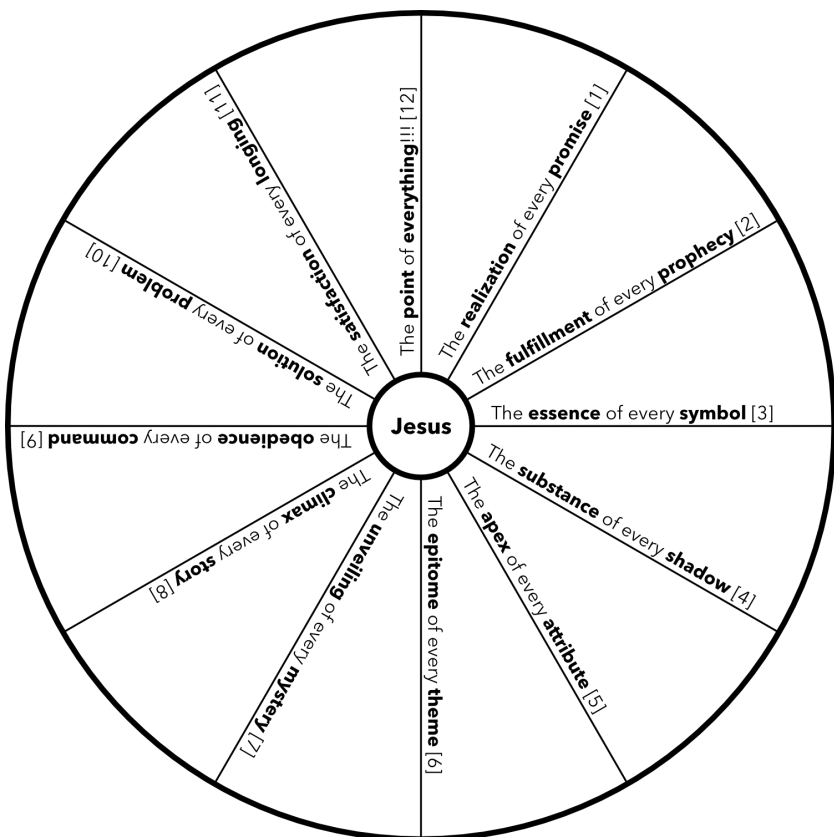
### **Apply:** *What do I do?*

What would this text look like walking out into the details of your life? Think again about what you are currently facing. If you adored, trusted, hoped in, obeyed, heeded, followed, how would it change your next 24 hours? Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt 6:34). If this word from God can touch the next few hours, it will start to touch your life as a whole. Identify one thing you can do to apply this. Who else might need to hear this? Bear the good fruit once more.



# Appendix 4: The Hub Diagram

*"The gospel is not merely the starting line of a much longer race. It is more like the hub of a wheel. Without the gospel always at the center, nothing in the Christian life turns. Everything stalls out. You go nowhere."*



[1] Cf. 2 Cor. 1:20

[2] Cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12

[3] Cf. John 1:29; 2:18-22; 3:14-15

[4] Cf. Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:1-6;  
Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:4

[5] Cf. Heb. 1:3; John 14:9

[6] Cf. Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11 on  
the theme of God exalting the rejected

[7] Cf. Col. 1:25-27; Eph. 3:8-9

[8] Cf. John 5:39; Luke 24:44-47

[9] Cf. Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 5:17

[10] Cf. Acts 4:12

[11] Cf. John 7:37-38; Matt. 11:28

[12] Cf. John 5:39, 46; Col. 1:15-20



# Appendix 5: The 3x3 Plan

If you'd like to mark things up and track your own progress, you can find a PDF version of the 3x3 Plan to download and print on our Sacred Path page online at [mercyhillchurch.org](http://mercyhillchurch.org).

<b>Gen.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50					

<b>Exod.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40															

<b>Lev.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27								

<b>Num.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

<b>Deut.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34		

<b>Josh.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24												

<b>Judg.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21															

<b>Ruth</b>	1	2	3	4
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<b>1 Sam.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31					

<b>2 Sam.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24												

<b>1 Kings</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22														

<b>2 Kings</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25											

<b>1 Chron.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29							

<b>2 Chron.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

<b>Ezra</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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<b>Neh.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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<b>Esther</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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<b>Job</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42													

<b>Pss.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55
56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74
75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93
94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112
113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131
132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150

<b>Prov.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31					

<b>Eccles.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12						
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<b>Song</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8										
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<b>Isa.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55
56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66								

<b>Jer.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52			

<b>Lam.</b>	1	2	3	4	5													
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<b>Ezek.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48							

<b>Dan.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12						
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<b>Hosea</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14				
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<b>Joel</b>	1	2	3		<b>Amos</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9				
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<b>Obad.</b>	1		<b>Jonah</b>	1	2	3	4											
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<b>Mic.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		<b>Nah.</b>	1	2	3						
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<b>Hab.</b>	1	2	3		<b>Zeph.</b>	1	2	3		<b>Hag.</b>	1	2						
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<b>Zech.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14				
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<b>Mal.</b>	1	2	3	4														
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<b>Matt.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							

<b>Mark</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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<b>Luke</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24											

<b>John</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21														

<b>Acts</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28							

<b>Rom.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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<b>1 Cor.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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<b>2 Cor.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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<b>Gal.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6		<b>Eph.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
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<b>Phil.</b>	1	2	3	4		<b>Col.</b>	1	2	3	4
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<b>1 Thess.</b>	1	2	3	4	5		<b>2 Thess.</b>	1	2	3
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<b>1 Tim.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6		<b>2 Tim.</b>	1	2	3	4
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<b>Titus</b>	1	2	3		<b>Philem.</b>	1
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<b>Heb.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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<b>James</b>	1	2	3	4	5		<b>1 Pet.</b>	1	2	3	4	5
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<b>2 Pet.</b>	1	2	3		<b>1 John</b>	1	2	3	4	5		<b>2 John</b>	1
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<b>3 John</b>	1		<b>Jude</b>	1
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<b>Rev.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22													





You were created for God—to be known and loved by him and to know and love him in return. Engaging in this relationship ought to be the chief business (and delight!) of our lives. And today, as we likely well know, we can cultivate this relationship by reading our Bibles and praying. And yet, if we're honest, many of us simply don't do these things. For some, it may be because we're just lazy or uninterested. But for others, it could be that we genuinely want to but we get tripped up and don't know how. The Bible is a big book and it's not always easy reading. And prayer, while exhilarating at times, is often awkward and even dull. We need help. And that is why we've developed what we call the "Sacred Path." This Next Steps Resource has been created to help you travel along this path and lead you deeper into relationship with God through Christ!



### **Consider Jesus**

For those skeptical or curious about Christianity and the claims of Jesus.



### **Be Baptized**

For those ready to say yes to Jesus and "go public" with their faith.



### **Walk the Sacred Path**

For those wanting to grow in their devotional lives (e.g. Bible reading, prayer).



### **Become a Member**

For those interested in going all in with this local church and committing to "be the body" here and now together.



### **Join a Home Group**

For those wanting to move towards community and live on mission for Jesus with others in the church.



### **Pursue Discipleship**

For those interested in going deeper in their faith and growing more in the image of Christ.



### **Use Your Gifts**

For those interested in identifying the gifts God has given them and using those gifts to serve in the church.



### **Spread the News**

For those interested in evangelistic training and opportunities.



### **Serve the City**

For those interested in getting their hands and feet dirty in love for others in our city and world.

Our leaders at Mercy Hill would love to help you take this next step! If you'd like someone to chat, pray, or read with along the way please don't hesitate to reach out to us at [info@mercyhillchurch.org](mailto:info@mercyhillchurch.org).