

ESTABLISHING FOUNDATIONS

**LAYING A SOLID FOUNDATION IN THE FAITH,
IN THE WORD, AND IN THE CHURCH**

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INTRODUCTION

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them
will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”*

Matthew 7:24

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes two different people who both build a house. The first person builds his house on a rock and the house stands firm when the storm comes. The second builds his house on sand and when the storm comes, the house falls. Both men built a house. Both houses faced a storm. Only the house with the right foundation was left standing.

This workbook is designed to help you lay a strong foundation for your life so you too can stand firm as a disciple of Jesus. The goal is for you to learn the foundational truths and practices that characterize the life of a disciple of Jesus while you work through the exercises.

By the end of this book, you’ll be established in three areas:

- Established in the faith
- Established in the Bible and prayer
- Established in the church

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CHAPTER 1

CREATION AND CORRUPTION

Introduction

The Bible is the story of God. And, like all stories, this one has a beginning.

The story of the Bible begins with the main character, God, bringing our world into being, into order, and into its purpose. After each act of creation, he declared that it was good. The only thing that wasn't good was that the first man, Adam, was alone. So Eve, the first woman, was created. Together, they were given the world to rule, to enjoy, and to establish God's purposes.

God set the first humans in a garden and lived among them. In that garden, he placed two trees that represented two paths—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fatal decision that followed and its tragic results have affected all of human history. Humanity would pass down this fatal flaw, this inner corruption, from generation to generation. But for God's intervention, the evil and darkness would have prevailed. Yet, his promise of salvation—deliverance from evil and death—began to unfold in that very Garden of Eden. This beginning story is central to every other story the Scriptures tell.

Exercise 1: The Beginning

Pray

Take a moment to quiet your mind and ask God to be with you as you read his word. Ask him to open your eyes to what he wants you to see and your heart to his leading, in Jesus' name.

Read

Read Genesis 1.

Study

1. Restate Genesis 1:1,2 in your own words.

2. According to this chapter, what was creation like? (Look specifically at verses 10, 18, 21, and 25).

3. In Genesis 1:26, how does the Bible describe the humans?

4. How does God describe creation in Genesis 1:31?

Reflect

Notice the way the Bible describes creation. How is this different from your experience of life, what you see in the news, or what you're fed on social media? Take a moment to think about the goodness of creation—the earthy, embodied world. Write down some of those reflections.

Respond

In the ancient world, the idea that the cosmos was made good by a good God was completely new. Imagine what your life would look like if you believed that the world we know was made originally good. How should that idea change how you think, feel, or act? Take a moment to ask God this question in prayer and write down your response.

Exercise 2: Divine Imagers

Pray

As you pray, ask God to speak specifically to you about human nature—yours and others. Welcome his presence to teach and guide you.

Read

Read Genesis 1:26-2:25 and Psalm 8.

Study

1. In whose image are humans made? From the parts of the Bible you read, what does that seem to mean?

2. What were the image-bearing humans told to do, according to Genesis 1:28 and 2:15?

3. Genesis 2 re-tells the creation of the first humans. What additional details do you notice about how God made Adam? What about Eve?

4. What is this part of the Bible saying about men and women, specifically?

5. According to Psalm 8:5, what other beings has God made?

6. What does Psalm 8 teach us about what God has entrusted to humans?

Reflect

Pay attention to your thoughts and emotions. What thoughts and feelings do these parts of Scripture stir? Write them down.

Also, ask yourself, "Do I believe that I am made in God's image? Do I believe that about others?"

Respond

All humans are made in the image of God. That's part of the reason the Bible tells us not to worship idols (images of pretend gods)—because God has already filled the world with little images of himself! We are not to worship each other, of course, but we are to honor the image of God wherever we find it. What of your thoughts, feelings, and actions need to change in response to this exercise? Write them down and ask God for the grace to make these changes.

Exercise 3: God is Great

Pray

As we study what the Bible says about God himself, ask him to speak to you through his word, to correct any false ideas, and to draw close to you.

Read

Read Psalm 145.

Study

1. How does this psalm describe God? List as many characteristics as you can.

2. According to this psalm, how should we respond to God's greatness?

3. What about God surprises you from this psalm?

4. According to verses 4 and 11, what should we be doing with one another in response to God's character?

Reflect

Take a moment to ask yourself, "do I believe these things about God?" If so, how does that affect you? If not, why not?

Respond

For some, worship simply refers to the songs we sing on Sunday. But this psalm suggests that worship is the response we give to God for his greatness and goodness. Most of us love to share good news, and Psalm 145 teaches us that telling others about God is part of our worshipful response. Take a moment to worship God with your voice, out loud, honoring him for who he is as described in this psalm.

Exercise 4: Rebellion

Pray

Pray for the wisdom and strength to learn about a hard topic—sin, rebellion, and evil. Ask God to convict you and teach you in this exercise.

Read

Read Genesis 2 and 3.

Study

1. According to Genesis 2:15-17, what were God’s commands to Adam?

2. Who tempted Eve? Restate his temptation in your own words.

3. Pay very close attention to the words of Genesis 3:6,7. What did Eve see and think? What did she do? What about Adam? What was the result?

4. How did God respond to Adam and Eve’s sin, according to Genesis 3:8,9?

5. What curses did God pronounce over the serpent, Adam, and Eve?

Reflect

Genesis 3 records the story of human rebellion—the origin story of human evil, selfishness, and separation from God. Notice the two very different responses to humanity’s sin. The humans hid from God, yet God sought humanity. Things have not changed much. Humans still hide from God, and God still seeks them. Think about the tragedy of this story—what the humans were given and what they gave up; what God promised and what life is like now. Ask yourself, “do I understand the gravity of sin?”

Respond

Knowing what you now know about the story of human rebellion against God, do you need to change any of your beliefs, actions, or even emotions?

Exercise 5: The Tragedy of Sin

Pray

Ask God to soften your heart, open your mind, and teach you more about the tragedy of your own sin and your need for his love and mercy.

Read

Read Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 3:9-20, and Ephesians 2:1-3.

Study

1. According to the Scriptures you just read, what state are humans left in by sin?

2. Who is "dead in sin?" Is there anything we can do to repair sin's effects?

3. What do each of these Scriptures teach about sin and its effects? (Isaiah 59:1,2, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 6:23)

4. Read Romans 1:18-23 and explain how that connects to the previous exercise. In our sin, what do we humans do?

5. The Bible teaches that we will be judged by God in the end (Hebrews 9:27). According to Jesus, what will that judgement be like?

Reflect

Sin is simply disobeying God—not doing what God asks, and doing what he forbids. One definition of sin is to “miss the mark,” like failing to hit the target in a sporting event. The effects of sin are horrific, and God takes sin very seriously. Ask yourself, “Do I take sin seriously?” Furthermore, sin has affected everyone and everything. Think about that for a moment.

Respond

Take a moment to pray, asking God to search your heart and mind. The Bible is teaching you that you are a God-created, divine, image-bearer and that you are so impacted by sin that you can’t rescue yourself from it. Do you believe what God’s word is saying to you? What would it look like if you really did trust what God was saying on the subject of sin? Write down your response.

CHAPTER 2

SALVATION AND LORDSHIP

Introduction

Once the first humans sin, the Bible records a series of tragedies that follow. Adam and Eve are forced to leave the garden sanctuary of God's presence (Genesis 3). Then, one of their sons kills his brother (Genesis 4) and from there, matters only become worse. Abuse, violence, enslavement, sexual brokenness, family destruction... all of these terrible fruits grow from the lives of those who ate from the tree of knowledge.

God's very good world was now corrupted by evil. This is a piece of Christian truth that's as easy to demonstrate as turning on the news. Brokenness is still everywhere. How could God possibly fix a world like ours? Furthermore, how could he fix individual lives like ours?

To discover the answer to that question, we must first learn what he did after the garden –after the first rebellion–to save the humans from their own sinful choices.

Exercise 1: The Gospel in the Old Testament

Pray

As you pray, ask God specifically to open your eyes so that his promise to rescue you from sin would become clear to you in the Bible today. Welcome his presence to teach and guide you.

Read

Read Genesis 3.

Study

1. In the Genesis text, who sought after whom? Why does this matter?

2. God gave the humans a special promise while he was cursing the serpent. Re-read Genesis 3:15.
3. The promise to crush the serpent’s head came with a cost: a mysterious bite on the heel. This verse is the very first hint at the way God would redeem humanity. How does this promise foreshadow God’s fulfillment of that promise in Christ?

Reflect

Just as God created humans to partner with him in the care and stewardship of the world, God also desires to partner with humanity for the project of salvation. Here, God promises that a “seed of the woman,” (i.e. one of her children) will one day crush the very being who tempted them. This promise sets us up to ask the question as we learn the rest of the biblical story, “Who is the snake crusher?” For now, take a moment to meditate on the time and care God has taken in his plan of redemption. For five minutes, close your eyes and ponder what God’s promise to rescue humanity there in Genesis 3 means about him. Pay special attention to how you feel, and see if there are any actions you want to take as a result.

Respond

From the moment of human rebellion, God has been asking, “Where are you?” God didn’t ask this question because he didn’t know the answer, but because Adam didn’t. God has planned to save humanity—and has desired to save you—since the moment of the first humans’ sin. How have you responded to God? Do you trust him and what the second Adam has done, or would you say you’re still living in the line of the first Adam?

Exercise 2: The Gospel in the Old Testament, Continued

Pray

Take a moment to quiet your mind and ask God to be with you as you read his word. Ask him to open your eyes to your own need for rescue—for salvation.

Read

Read Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15, and Psalm 105.

Study

1. In the last chapter, we learned about the creation story and how sin entered God's good world. In Genesis 12, we see God advancing his great rescue plan by approaching Abraham. What is God's promise to Abraham? What did Abraham do to earn such a promise?

2. In Genesis 15:1-6, God makes a very specific kind of promise to Abraham called a covenant. In your own words, describe the terms and promises of this covenant.

3. You have just read a psalm that describes the history of ancient Israel. Specifically, this psalm is celebrating God's faithfulness to rescue his people. According to this psalm, how did God treat Abraham and his family?

4. What does this psalm say about Joseph? To where did Israel move?

5. This psalm ends by describing Moses. How did God use Moses to save his people?

Reflect

Think about what this psalm (an ancient Israelite worship song) is celebrating. Try to imagine what it would be like to see such miraculous things—like the parting of the Red Sea, or the miracles on Mt. Sinai. What does this story tell you about God? How does it make you feel toward him? Take a minute and meditate on a verse or two from this psalm.

Respond

The work of God in the special people of Israel teaches us many things about God. We learn that God desires humans to be in relationship with him, that he will do the work of rescuing them, and that the work of what he has done inspires great praise and worship. When you read this summary of the way God worked in the people of Israel, what does it tell you about God? What words would you use to describe the God this psalm is describing?

Exercise 3: Israel and Exile

Pray

As you learn a bit about the story of the Old Testament people of God, Israel, and their tragic end, ask God to give you eyes to see and a heart to learn from their story.

Read

Read Isaiah 42:6, Psalm 78, 1 Chronicles 9:1b, Jeremiah 29:1-14, and Ezekiel 11:14-21.

Study

1. According to Isaiah 42:6, why did God create the people of Israel? Who, besides Israel, was supposed to benefit from their special relationship with God.

2. Psalm 78 is a worship song that summarizes the story of Israel up to the reign of King David—their best king. Yet, this song also seems to have another theme, too. What is this psalm telling you about Israel?

3. Read 1 Chronicles 9:1b. Why did God send Israel into Exile?

4. According to Jeremiah 29:1-14 and Ezekiel 11:14-21, what was God promising to do?

Reflect

The story of the people of Israel is described in the Old Testament of the Bible. These were God’s chosen people—Abraham’s promised offspring who would bless the whole world. They were to be a special people who would partner with God for the renewal of the whole world. Yet, Israel broke faith with God. Just as Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden for disobedience, so too, was Israel exiled from their land. Yet, God gave them promises that from them one would come who would make the world right. He also promised to give them a new spirit and a new heart. In a quiet space, take some time to think on what you’ve just read and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see this story in a fresh way.

Respond

The theme of Exile gives us another perspective on sin. It takes us away from where we were meant to live—in God’s presence, together. Gratefully, God is merciful and kind, and has chosen to love humanity in spite of our (and Israel’s) trend toward rejecting him and acting just like the world around us. How does the story of exile and God’s faithful love help you see Jesus in a new light? Today, ask yourself what it would mean to live as God’s special people in the midst of a culture that does not. How might you do this more faithfully?

Exercise 4: Jesus is King

Pray

As we learn about Jesus as King, ask God to give you a revelation of his lordship in your life, so that you would turn away from other, lesser allegiances and follow Jesus fully as your king.

Read

Read Mark 1:9-15, John 14:1-15, Luke 9:18-36, and Acts 10:34-43.

Study

1. What, according to Mark, was the message that Jesus preached?

2. According to John 14, what does Jesus say about himself? What should we do if we love him?

3. Luke 9 records a strange event. What was it, and what was the message that God the Father gave as a result of it?

4. In your own words, summarize the message that Peter preached in the passage you read from Acts.

Reflect

In the Old Testament, the story of Israel ends on the ultimate cliffhanger—God promises to send a king to make all things right, but he doesn't arrive. In the New Testament; however, Jesus appears preaching that he is the true king of a kingdom. Yet, this kingdom isn't like the kingdoms we know, it's God's kingdom. Only by believing this message in mind, heart, and action will we be welcomed into his kingdom. Peter promises that King Jesus is ready to forgive us for our sinful rebellion against God and welcome us into his kingdom. Take some time and ask yourself if you've done this. Choose one of the above scriptures and take five minutes or so to silently meditate on it.

Respond

Are you hearing the message of the kingdom of God and believing it will change your life? Are you following Jesus as king at this time? If so, what does that look like? If not, why?

Exercise 5: Jesus Saves

Pray

Jesus is ready, willing, and able to forgive us and rescue us. As you begin today's exercise, ask him to do this in your life, and ask him to open your mind and heart to understand what that means more deeply.

Read

Read Mark 14-16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and Romans 1:16-17.

Study

1. In your own words, summarize the story Mark tells in chapters 14-16.

2. What, according to Paul, is "of first importance" In 1 Corinthians?

3. What does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have the power to do according to the passage in Romans?

Reflect

Jesus Christ came as the long-awaited King of Israel and as the long-promised savior of the world. In his life, he lived perfectly in relationship with the Father—without sin and without imitation. In his death, he died in our place, taking on himself the penalty for sin. And, in his resurrection, he defeats the serpent and makes a way for all who believe in him to be victorious over him too. Take a few minutes and meditate on the significance of these events.

Respond

Take some time to pray and thank God for sending Jesus as the Savior. Thank him for his life, death, and resurrection. In prayer, ask him to be your Savior, too.

CHAPTER 3

REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Introduction

The story of Jesus is not merely a story. It's the history of God's great rescue of humanity by sending his own Son to the world. It's the history of his life, his death, and his victorious resurrection and ascension. This story isn't like the fiction we're used to consuming in movies and books. This story demands a response from humanity. The only proper response is repentance and faith.

Exercise 1: What Shall We Do?

Pray

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and ears to hear his voice calling you toward him.

Read

Read Luke 15 and Acts 2:36-41.

Study

1. What do the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin tell you about the way God acts toward lost sinners?

2. In the parable of the prodigal son, what does the son finally do? What's the father's response (Luke 15:22-24)?

3. What do you find surprising about Luke 15?

4. In Acts 2, what does Peter instruct the crowd he has just preached the gospel to do?

Reflect

When Jesus told these parables, there were two kinds of people listening—"tax collectors and sinners," and "pharisees." One group was immoral, lost, and broken—and they knew it. The other group was also immoral, lost, and broken, but they didn't know it. Here, Jesus tells stories that show us what God is like toward both kinds of people, and what we're like toward him. Take a moment to reflect on where you would fit in these stories and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you ought to take away from your time in these texts.

Respond

According to Acts 2:26-41, our response to the gospel involves three steps: repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift—God's presence in your life in the person of his Spirit. Have you experienced these three realities? Have you turned from all known sin and the pattern of living life your own way and come to Jesus as king and savior? Have you been baptized? Have you experienced the life-changing presence and power of the Holy Spirit? The great news is that God is not an angry parent tapping his foot impatiently, but the loving Father longing to welcome you home. What will it look like for you to accept his invitation, to be found by him, and respond to his seeking you with repentance and faith?

Exercise 2: True Repentance

Pray

Before you begin this exercise, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas of sin or brokenness in your life about which he wants to speak to you. Invite him to open your eyes and enable your true repentance.

Read

Read Psalm 51, Luke 19:1-10, and 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Study

1. Psalm 51 was written by David after he committed adultery and murder. Guilty of horrific sin, he turned to God and wrote this Psalm. Make a list of all the requests David makes in this psalm.

2. As a psalm of repentance, we see David changing his mind, his emotions, and his actions. According to this psalm, how did David now think? How did he now feel? What was he willing to do next?

3. What kind of man was Zacchaeus? What happened when he met Jesus in Luke 19? What does this show about his repentant heart?

4. Paul talks about two kinds of sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10. What are they? What do they each produce?

Reflect

Repentance is more than mere emotion—feeling shameful or sorry over sin. Moreover, repentance is more than simply having right beliefs about God, or doing right things for God. Repentance comes from a word that means “to turn around.” When God brings conviction in our hearts and minds over our sin, we respond with humility and turn to God in faith. Furthermore, our repentance may even mean making wrong things right, as in the case of Zacchaeus. Take a few minutes to meditate on these scriptures, pondering where and how the Holy Spirit is leading you to repentance in light of what you’ve studied.

Respond

What will repentance look like for you? What wrong or unhealthy thoughts about God, yourself, and others must you leave behind? What actions need to change? How does your heart posture before God and others require transformation? Today, come to God with a heart humbled like David, eager like Zacchaeus, and motivated by godly sorrow, looking to Jesus Christ in full repentance.

Exercise 3: Faith

Pray

Faith is a gift given by the Holy Spirit. So, before you begin today's exercise, ask God to give you the faith to believe him and follow him with your whole heart.

Read

Read John 3:16, Hebrews 11:1-12:2, Romans 1:16,17, and James 2:14-17.

Study

1. According to Hebrews 11:1, what is faith? Write the definition in your own words.

2. Hebrews 11 is sometimes called "The Hall of Faith" for the way it explores the faith of biblical characters. How does the author of Hebrews commend their faith? What can you learn from their faith?

3. Why is faith important? How is faith different than sheer effort?

4. According to John 3:16, why did God send his son? What should our response to him be?

5. In Romans, how are faith and the gospel related?

6. How are faith and works related in James 2? Can we truly have one without the other? Why?

Reflect

Some have called faith “believing obedience.” This means that believing God in faith is a holistic thing—involving our minds, hearts, and actions. We cannot simply say “I believe the gospel,” and then live how we like. Nor can we have a mere emotional experience, but not trust the grace of Jesus. Feeling and thinking are important, but if we don’t believe the gospel with our minds, trust God in our hearts, and turn toward him with our actions, we’re not experiencing what the Bible calls “faith.” One way to think about faith is simply as “trust.” When we trust our parents, we act trustingly toward them. When we trust God, we act faithfully (trustingly) toward him. This is faith—to believe God in our minds, our hearts, and our bodies.

Respond

Have you turned away from sin and toward God in faith? Have you trusted the gospel as the power of God to save you from your sin, and accepted Jesus as your Lord and master?

Exercise 4: Baptism & Communion

Pray

Baptism is a beautiful sacrament. Today, pray and thank God for baptism, especially if you've been baptized already. Additionally, thank God for his presence in the sacrament of communion, and ask him to be present with you now.

Read

Read Matthew 3:13-17, Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 6:1-14, and 1 Corinthians 11:17-28.

Study

1. In your own words, describe what happened at Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3. Why was Jesus baptized? What happened after he was baptized?

2. At the end of Matthew, what are Christians commanded to do?

3. In Romans, what does Paul compare baptism to? Since Christians have undergone baptism, what does that mean?

4. Read Acts 22:16. Have you been obedient to this command? Why or why not?

5. In your own words, describe what communion is and why Christians take it.

Reflect

Jesus gave his followers two sacraments—physical activities with profound spiritual significance. The first sacrament is baptism. Baptism is the act of washing the body with water, usually through submersion, as a sign and declaration that you have turned away from sin, trusted Christ to be your Lord and Savior, and have been made a new kind of thing: a disciple of Jesus. Communion is the regular sacrament of the Christian where, in the eating of bread and drinking of wine or juice, we remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus on the cross for our sins. Communion is where we look forward in hope for the day when we will sit with Christ at the great marriage feast when Jesus has his bride, the Church, and the world is redeemed. Take some time today and reflect on the amazing gift of these two, physical signs of the salvation Christ offers to us.

Exercise 5: Following

Pray

Today's exercise will cover the topic of Christian obedience. As you begin, pray that God would reveal those areas of your life where obedience is needed.

Read

Read John 14:15, Mark 1:16-20, and Ephesians 2:1-10.

Study

1. According to what you read, what will we do if we love Jesus? What would that look like for you?

2. When calling his first disciples in Mark, what did Jesus ask them to do?

3. According to Ephesians, what is faith?

4. How are we saved?

5. From what you've read, what should be the result(s) of our repenting and believing the gospel?

Reflect

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes." Put simply, repenting from sin and turning toward Christ in faith means that we must now follow him with our whole hearts. Paul is clear that it is not our obedience which saves us, and Christ is clear that we don't start following him and then become his disciples. It all starts with grace—God doing something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. God graciously saves and calls, and we respond by turning from sin (repentance), trusting him (faith), being baptized, and following him wherever he leads. Take a moment to consider where you are in this process. Have you repented? Believed? Are you following him?

CHAPTER 4

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Introduction

The life of a Christian is to be marked by the presence and power of God himself. This is made possible because God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Holy Spirit into the Church. Our lives can be filled with the very presence of God himself, if we come to God in trusting, obedient faith. In this chapter, we'll explore what such a Spirit-saturated life can look like. The Holy Spirit isn't a force or a feeling, he is God; the third Person of the Trinity, and the One promised to dwell within God's people. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we now have the Spirit of God living on the inside of us. We must be filled with the Holy Spirit to live godly lives, advance God's mission, and know God intimately.

Exercise 1: The Holy Who?

Pray

As you prepare for this new week of spiritual exercises, pray that God would send the Spirit to open your eyes, fill you with his presence, and speak to you.

Read

Read John 14:15-31.

Study

1. What are some of the words used to describe the Holy Spirit in the text you read?

2. According to what you read, what is the role of the Holy Spirit?

3. According to Matthew 28:18,19 into whose name were we baptized?

4. There are not two kinds of Christians—those without the Holy Spirit and those with him. All Christians have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Yet we're told in the Scriptures to have an encounter with the Holy Spirit. How do these verses describe our relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Luke 11:13

John 20:22

Acts 8:15

Romans 8:15

Galatians 3:14

5. Though we're sealed with the Holy Spirit at the moment of our faith in Christ, the Scriptures also speak of additional experiences with God the Spirit. According to these verses, why do we need a personal connection with God the Spirit?

Matthew 10:16-20

John 14:26

Acts 1:8

Acts 13:52

Romans 8:4,5

Romans 8:16

Galatians 5:16

6. What are some ways the Holy Spirit helps disciples of Christ?

Matthew 10:19,20

John 14:26

John 16:13,14

Acts 1:8

Romans 8:14

Romans 8:15

Reflect

Jesus lived his life on earth filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the New Adam and perfect human, Jesus is showing us the way we can live, too, if we've turned from sin and trusted him to save us. After all you've read, take a moment and contemplate what it might look like if you were to truly live your life daily dependent upon the Spirit.

Respond

Have you had an experience with the Spirit? Have you heard the voice of God speak to you by the presence of the Spirit? Take a moment, quiet yourself, and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, to speak to you, and to go before you this day. In your silence, wait to listen for him and write down what you hear him speak.

Exercise 2: Pentecost, Power, and Presence

Pray

As you prepare to study the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, pray for God to open your mind and heart, and to be with you as you study his word.

Read

Read Acts 1-2.

Study

1. The book of Acts picks up where the book of Luke ends. What does Jesus promise to give his disciples? What is the purpose of this gift?

2. In your own words, describe the coming of the Holy Spirit. What were they doing when this happened? What was the experience like?

3. What was the result of the filling of the Holy Spirit that the disciples experienced? What happened immediately afterwards?

4. What did Peter tell the crowds to do? What did he promise they would receive?

5. What did the Spirit-filled community of Jesus followers look and act like?

Reflect

The Holy Spirit is the gift given to us by Jesus—the very presence of God himself with us. He is given to us as power for bearing witness to the gospel. The result of the Spirit-filled ministry of the early church was staggering. With all our technology, distractions, and busyness, we can fool ourselves into thinking that we don’t need the Spirit of God as much as perhaps they did. Yet, remember that “while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). Jesus told his closest followers not to attempt to go do God’s work without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Take five minutes and think about how important the Holy Spirit is to you.

Respond

The account of the early church in Acts 1-2 is both amazing and convicting. What would it look like for our church to be so marked by and filled with the Holy Spirit that we could look like they did? What is the Holy Spirit calling you to do in response to this exercise?

Exercise 3: Be Filled with the Spirit

Pray

Pray that God would give you a heart ready to hear from him and a deep desire for him.

Read

Read Romans 8:1-17 and Ephesians 5:15-21.

Study

1. According to Romans 8, what are the results of a life filled with the Spirit? What does the Spirit do?

2. How should we act toward the Holy Spirit?

3. According to Romans 8:12-17, what do we become when we receive the Spirit of God.

4. According to Ephesians, what should we be doing?

Reflect

Paul commands the Ephesian Christians to be filled with the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit occurs when we ask God to fill us with his presence. The book of Acts chronicles many such encounters (Acts 2:1-6, 8:14-19, 9:17-19, 10:44-48, 19:1-6). What's your relationship to the Holy Spirit? Take a moment and read the top two passages of scripture once more, slowly. Ask yourself this question, "Am I experiencing everything the Bible says the Spirit does?"

Respond

Have you had a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit? Have you been filled by him? Ephesians 5:18 literally translated says, "be being filled with the Spirit." That is, our filling is meant to happen, but then keep on happening. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you. Ask him to cleanse your heart of any known sin and to turn you toward him.

Exercise 4: The Fruit of the Spirit

Pray

As we meditate on the person and work of the Spirit once more, ask God to continue to reveal to you your deep need for him.

Read

Read Galatians 5:16-26 and 1 Corinthians 13.

Study

1. Read John 15:1-8. Fruitfulness is an important theme in the Bible. The picture of how a grapevine is maintained is at the heart of Christ's teaching on our spiritual lives. These vines were not left alone on the ground to be trampled and to grow wild. A fruitful vine was lifted off the ground and constantly cared for by an attentive gardener. It would be absurd to think of a branch growing that was separate from the vine or a vine being fruitful and beautiful without constant help from the gardener. According to v. 8, how can we bring glory to the Father?

2. In John 15:2, what happens to the branches that do not bear fruit? What about the branches that do bear fruit?

3. In Galatians 5:22,23, we read about another kind of fruit that the Spirit produces through us. What is this fruit?

4. According to 1 Corinthians 13, what is the first fruit of the Spirit (love) like?

Reflect

Take a moment to think about the two kinds of fruit we've learned about in this study. Consider also the way the "works of the flesh" are contrasted to the fruit of the Spirit. How is the fruit of the Spirit connected to the fruit of discipleship? Begin to imagine what your life would look like if the Holy Spirit were producing more and more fruit in your life.

Respond

Write down the fruits of the Spirit that you find most lacking in your life. In prayer with a partner, ask God to grow these fruits in you. Also, write down the fruit that the Spirit has already produced in you and give him thanks for it.

Exercise 5: The Gifts of the Spirit

Pray

Pray that God would give you eyes to see and ears to hear what he wishes to teach you from his word.

Read

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Romans 12.

Study

1. According to Luke 11:13, how does God the Father feel about giving you the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

2. How are we to feel about spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 14:1?

3. Read Hebrews 2:3,4. How did God attest to the message of the gospel?

4. Read Romans 12:3-8. List the gifts that Paul mentions.

5. Read Ephesians 4:11,12. What leadership gifts has God given to the church? What is their purpose?

6. According to 1 Corinthians 13:1,2 , what should be our motivation for desiring and using our spiritual gifts?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 14. What does Paul say about the gift of prophecy?

8. According to 1 Corinthians 14, what are we to understand about tongues?

Reflect

Take a moment and think about everything you just studied. How do you feel about the presence, power, and person of the Holy Spirit? Be honest and confess your feelings to the Lord. What causes you to feel comfortable, excited, fearful, or worried? Talk to God about that.

Respond

Unless we're empowered by the Spirit in the way that Jesus was, we cannot expect to live as Jesus lived, nor to do what he did. Have you had an encounter with the Spirit? Have you asked him for his gifts and power to be released in your life? If not, now is the time. Talk to your group leader or pastor about what your next steps should be.

CHAPTER 5

GOD AND HIS WORD

Introduction

The Bible is a fascinating, glorious, and life-giving book of books. It was written across 1,500 years in three different languages, across three continents. It's a book of books—sixty-six of them, in fact. This book of books is divided into two sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament. It includes many different genres of writing, including history, sermons, letters, songs, poems, architectural plans, family trees, and various other forms. It was written by over 40 human authors from every background (kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, scholars, etc.). It's not the product of any one generation, guru, people, ethnicity, or culture. In short, the Christian Scriptures are multiethnic, multicultural, and global.

The Bible is one, unified story that centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. As the word of God about himself, it's filled with power, life, light, wisdom, and the way of salvation. Therefore, if we want to know God, we must take the Bible seriously and learn to understand it diligently.

Exercise 1: The Nature of Scripture

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you not just understand what the Scriptures say, but what they are and how you should relate to them.

Read

Read Deuteronomy 8:3, Luke 4:4, Psalm 119:105–112, and 2 Peter 1:20,21.

Study

1. To what do both Moses and Jesus liken God's word in Deuteronomy and Luke? Why does this matter?

2. Describe what you personally believe the Bible to be. How does it play a role in your life at the moment?

3. How does Peter describe the word of God being written?

4. According to Psalm 119, what is the Bible like?

5. List all the metaphors given for the Scriptures that you read today and describe what they might mean.

Reflect

Jesus described the word of God in the same way as Moses—as bread. The psalmist described the word as light, as God’s testimonies, and his statues. If that’s true—and it is—then we’re forced to ask the question, “How are we relating to this word?” It’s God’s word, a light to us, and our nourishment. Therefore, let us eat of it, drink from it, and be given light by it. Are you doing that? What keeps you from reading God’s word? What questions do you have about it—its nature, its reliability, its meaning—and how can you begin to take steps to answering some of those questions?

Respond

This week, find one other person and pick a short-term Bible reading plan to read with them. Discuss what you’ve read as you read together.

Exercise 2: The Goodness of Scripture

Pray

Ask the Lord to give you a hunger for his word and to accept all of its teachings as good, right, true, and worth following.

Read

Read Psalm 119 and Deuteronomy 30:8-20.

Study

1. How does the Psalmist describe the goodness of Scripture?

2. In Deuteronomy, Moses is exhorting the people of Israel. What does he say about God's word (laws/ways/statutes)? What does he say the result of obeying or disobeying them will be?

3. Jesus approached the words of Scripture as good and true. What's your honest perspective on Scripture? What do you love about it?

4. What aspects of the Scripture do you find difficult? Have you ever discussed them with anyone?

Reflect

Do you believe that God’s word is good? If we were to look at your life—how you spend your time, who you trust, who gives you advice, and whose words you follow—would you conclude that God’s word gets the same amount of weight? Take a moment and really reflect on how you feel toward God’s word and what that means for how you live your life.

Respond

If God’s word is everything that Moses and the psalmist say that it is, what should your response be? Should it be to read it? To obey it? To trust it? What’s in the way of the Bible—its story and its power—to fully shape your mind, your heart, and your actions? Today is a day to take the next step. What will your next step be?

Exercise 3: The Authority of Scripture

Pray

Ask the Lord to give you a soft heart to the conviction and leadership of the Scriptures.

Read

Read John 1:1-16 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

Study

1. According to what you read, how does the Bible say the world was created? See also 2 Peter 3:5.

2. What happened as "the word of God" spread in Acts 6:7? How is that like what "the word of the Lord" was doing in Ephesus while Paul was there, described in Acts 19:20?

3. What, or rather who, does John say the Word is?

4. What does the word of God have the right, power, and authority to do in the life of the Christian according to 2 Timothy 3:16?

Exercise 4: The Power of Scripture

Pray

Ask God to show you the power of his word today.

Read

Read 2 Timothy 3:16, Psalm 1, Romans 1:16,17, and Matthew 4:1-11.

Study

1. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, what are the Scriptures useful for?

2. Describe the encounter that Jesus had with Satan in the desert found in Matthew. How did Jesus defeat Satan? What can you learn from this?

3. According to Psalm 1, what's the man or woman like who obeys God's law? What are the promises associated with this?

4. What does Romans 1:16,17 say the Gospel—the spoken words about Jesus's story—have the power to do? What does this mean for you?

Reflect

God’s word has extraordinary power. It was by the word of God that everything was created. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. The Scriptures are the very words of God for us, for our lives, and for the pursuit of godliness. Trusting in God’s word has the power to order our lives, save us, and cause us to prosper. Take a moment to reflect on the way the word of God has blessed you and helped you, even in this study so far. Express gratitude to God for his word and what it has done in your life.

Respond

Are you walking with the power of God’s word? Whose advice are you trusting? What news are you most often listening to? If the word of God is like bread, water, and light, then it seems that sometimes we live hungry, thirsty, and blind. But we don’t have to live this way. Today, decide when you will read God’s word. When will you eat and drink from the powerful words of God? Stick to it, and don’t give up.

Exercise 5: Confessing Scripture

Pray

Ask God to show you the areas of your life that need the power, wisdom, and light of the word of God to shine upon it.

Read

Read Revelation 12:10,11, Romans 10:9,10, Mark 11:20-26, Hebrews 4:12, and Luke 4:1-12.

Study

1. What did Jesus confess in order to defeat the devil in Luke? What does this mean?

2. When John describes the saints in heaven who overcame the evil one in Revelation, what does he say?

3. According to Romans, how are we saved? What does this mean about the power of our words?

4. What does Jesus tell his disciples about the power of words spoken in faith found in Mark?

5. According to Hebrews 4:12, what is the word of God like? How have you seen this at work in your own life?

Reflect

The word of God is more than mere words, mere law, and mere story. It's living, active, sharp, and powerful. It feeds us, but it also cuts us. If we confess it in faith, reality changes, the enemy flees, and a power is released into the world that can change the world around us. Do you believe this? How have you seen this at work in your life? If you haven't, why not?

Respond

Attached to this book is a series of faith confessions. This week, don't only commit to read the word of God, but begin to confess your Bible over your life. As you do this, note what happens in your life.

CHAPTER 6

DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

Being a Christian is about far more than religion, church membership, or even going to heaven. It's about being a disciple—a student, or apprentice—of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the life of the Christian is one that is characterized by discipleship from start to finish. In fact, our discipleship to King Jesus transforms every part of who we are—our minds, our passions, and our actions. This whole-of-life approach to following Jesus is exactly what Christ had in mind when he commissioned his first disciples to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

Exercise 1: Holistic Discipleship

Pray

Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to show you how your thoughts, your actions, and your inner-life can come into full re-orientation around Jesus and his mission. Freshly give your whole self over to him as his disciple.

Read

Read Matthew 4:18-22, John 13:12-17, 1 John 1:5-2:6, and Luke 6:39-49.

Study

1. Some have imagined that being a 'disciple' of Jesus is somehow different than being 'just a Christian.' Given what you've read, how would you respond to that?

2. In your own words, describe the call that Jesus gave to Simon and Andrew in Matthew. Why do you think Jesus called them in this way?

3. How does John (in 1 John) describe the life of following Jesus? What does he say is important?

4. How should following Jesus change the way you think? The way you feel? The way you act?

5. As you reflect on the message of Luke 6, what's your foundation like? What does a wise man or woman build their life upon? How do we become like our master?

Reflect

Following Jesus should change every aspect of our lives—our thoughts about God and the world, our behavior, and the deepest parts of our inner lives. Jesus actually loves each of those parts and desires that we bring our whole selves to him, that we might build our lives upon the solid rock. Take a moment to reflect on the way in which you live your life. What parts of your life are submitted to him, and what parts still need to come to him? Spend some time thinking about whole-of-life discipleship as it's been described here and what that means for you.

Respond

In the coming exercises, we'll be exploring the specific ways disciples should act, think, and even feel. But before we get there, ask yourself which parts of your life are in need of submission to Christ, and what you're ready to do about that.

Exercise 2: Engaging the World

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind some of the people in your life who need to repent and believe the gospel. Pray for them.

Read

Read Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 1:16–20, 1 Corinthians 9:19–27, and 2 Corinthians 5:11–21.

Study

1. In Mark 1, what does Jesus promise to make Simon and Andrew? What does that mean for us?

2. What kind of ministers are we? According to Paul, what does the ministry of reconciliation mean? What does it require of us?

3. Why do people need to be reconciled to God? How does God want us to be part of that?

4. As disciples, we're called to go make disciples. So, we must engage the world—the people and places that don't know Jesus—with the gospel. How did Paul do that?

Reflect

Discipleship and evangelism are not two different things—evangelism is the first step in discipleship. When Jesus told his disciples to “go make disciples” (Matthew 28:19), there were not yet any other disciples. The book of Acts chronicles the expansion of the church through the work of evangelism—showing and sharing the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. Reflect for a moment on how you came to faith in Jesus Christ. Imagine what your life would be like if those who told you about Christ had become too scared, to embarrassed, or too distracted. How grateful we are to those who embraced the cross enough to show us its glorious, saving message! Therefore, discipleship involves the activity of engaging someone with the gospel so that they may become a follower of Jesus Christ. All of this requires that the Holy Spirit works in both them and us—us to preach and them to respond with saving faith.

Respond

Take some time to list out your “top 10” men or women who need to come to faith in Christ. Starting today, begin praying for each of them by name. Ask God for an opportunity to open your mouth and share with them the good news of the gospel and how that has changed your life. Trust God for the opportunity to engage those who don’t know Jesus with the good news of Christ.

Exercise 3: Established in the Faith

Pray

Ask the Lord to build your life firmly on the rock of the word of God.

Read

Read Psalm 1, Luke 6:44-49, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, and James 1:22-25.

Study

1. According to Psalm 1, what's the righteous man or woman like? What do you notice about how solid his life is? Why is it this way?

2. What does Jesus have to say about foundations in Luke 6? What, specifically, is the foundation he speaks about?

3. How did Paul build into the church at Corinth? What does he say will happen to both the good and bad parts of our "spiritual foundation?"

4. What is the relationship between hearing the word of God and doing what it says? How does that make you feel?

Reflect

To be a disciple is to engage those who don't know Jesus and, having believed, to establish strong foundations in the word of God, in the ways of being like Christ, and in spiritual family. As you reflect on your own biblical foundations, how well do you know and understand the Bible? Is it the guiding foundation in your life? What's your relationship with the Holy Spirit like? How solid is your inner, emotional/spiritual life in Christ? Reflect for a moment on your foundations in the faith and, in light of what you have read, what may need to improve.

Respond

Discuss with your small group leader what you've learned in this exercise. What might it look like for you to build stronger foundations in your beliefs, in your activities, and in your inner life? Develop a plan with them for taking some important next steps in these areas.

Exercise 4: Equipped for the Mission

Pray

Pray for God to give you spiritual gifts and to equip you for greater effectiveness for his mission.

Read

Read Ephesians 4:11-16 and Mark 6:7-13.

Study

1. In your own words, summarize Ephesians 4:11-16. Why did God give these leadership gifts?

2. In Mark, what does Jesus do to equip his disciples? What do you think this was like for them?

3. What had Jesus done to prepare his disciples for this "mission trip" that he sent them on in Mark 6?

4. Read Revelation 12:11. What do the saints of God have that overcomes the evil one? How are these two things different?

Exercise 5: Empowered for a New Life

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you by his Spirit for a new life of discipleship and disciple-making.

Read

Read John 20:19-21, Acts 9:1-22, and Matthew 28:18-20.

Study

1. In John 20, what did Jesus do with his disciples after his resurrection?

2. You read the story of Saul's conversion in Acts. How long did he wait until he began to tell others about Jesus? What does this tell you about your own responsibility?

3. How did Jesus empower his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20?

4. According to what you've read today, describe Jesus' attitude toward empowering us to carry on his mission? How does he seem to feel about that?

CHAPTER 7

SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Introduction

When we're born, we're born into a family. The same is true when we're born again—we're added to the family of God. That family has a lot of different local expressions, and our church is one of them. In an age of relational shallowness, Christians must be far more intentional about living within church relationships, or as we'll call it here, spiritual family.

Exercise 1: The Body of Christ

Pray

As you pray, take some time to pray for your church, pastors, staff, and leaders.

Read

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Romans 12:3-8.

Study

1. To what does Paul compare the church in 1 Corinthians? How does this make sense of the different people in the church? How should we relate to each other?

2. What does Paul command us to do in Romans 12:3-8? How could you do that in your church?

Exercise 2: The Victorious Church

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a vision for the church as Jesus' holy, victorious people.

Read

Read Matthew 16:13-20, Ephesians 5:25-33, and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.

Study

1. After Peter confessed that Jesus Christ was Messiah in Matthew 16, how did Jesus describe the church? What does this mean?

2. What is the ultimate destiny of God's people?

3. Because the church is and always will be victorious over the enemy, Paul encourages his readers in 1 Corinthians in a very specific way. What does he encourage the church to do? How can you apply this in your life?

4. According to Ephesians 5, how is Jesus' relationship to the church like a husband's relationship to a wife? What does this mean?

Exercise 3: Church Leadership

Pray

Take a moment and pray for the pastors and leaders of your church. Pray that God would bless them, protect them, and give them immense wisdom.

Read

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, Ephesians 4:11-16, and Hebrews 13:17.

Study

1. Based on what you've read, what kinds of leaders does the church have? Where do you see those in operation in our church?

2. What should our attitude be toward our leaders?

3. What kind of person should a pastor/elder be? What should his character be like?

4. What leadership gifts did God give to the church in Ephesians? What is the role of these leaders?

Exercise 4: Church Conflict and Discipline

Pray

Because the church is filled with people, conflict is inevitable. So, take time and ask God to grow the fear of the Lord within you, a love of holiness, and a freedom from all bitterness.

Read

Read Matthew 18:15–20, 1 Corinthians 3; 5:1–13, and 1 Peter 1:13–15.

Study

1. Part of what can make life within church family difficult is the relational conflicts that eventually arise. According to Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, what are the steps to take when you feel that someone in the church has hurt or offended you?

2. In contrast to what Jesus said about conflict resolution, how have you mishandled conflict in the past? What should we not do?

3. Paul gave clear, detailed instructions about the way the church should behave toward each other in 1 Corinthians. Observe and describe his instructions. How does that mean we should treat each other in the church?

4. In our church, we take discipline seriously. Notice that the word “disciple” and “discipline” are connected. Both come from the Latin word, “discipuli,” meaning “student.” How do these passages of scripture shape your understanding of discipline, both for the church in general and for you in particular?

5. According to what you’ve read, what is the goal of church discipline?

Reflect

Take some time and think about discipline—both your own personal discipline and the concept of church discipline. In what areas of your life do you lack discipline? When you've been hurt or offended by another, have you followed Matthew 18? Ask the Lord to search your heart in these matters, to give you a desire for holiness, and to be part of a church body that conducts itself with holiness and righteousness.

Respond

Given what you’ve just learned about church discipline and the disciplines that we should embrace as disciples, what is God calling you to think, feel, or do differently?

Exercise 5: Renewal and Habits

Pray

As you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the way you spend your time and your energy.

Read

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 and Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:19-25.

Study

1. According to what you read, what regular habits does God expect of his church?

2. According to Hebrews, how should you think and feel about regularly gathering for church and with your spiritual family? How does this contrast with how you're currently living?

3. How does the Bible view your habits? Why are they important?

Reflect

Following Jesus is certainly spiritual, but it's not only spiritual. Our spiritual natures are impacted by our daily, weekly, and other regular habits. We're shaped by what we regularly do, say, think, and feel. Therefore, God wants our habits to come into alignment with what's best for us individually and for his church corporately. Take some time to reflect on your habits. How do you regularly spend your time, your energy, and your emotions? Are your habits shaping you to be more and more like Christ? What would it look like if they did?

CHAPTER 8

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Introduction

As you've been learning, disciples of Christ are to embody new, different ways of living. These ways of living have been called *spiritual disciplines* by some. Such disciplines include prayer, fasting, worship, work, rest, and others. As we follow Christ, all that we do in life begins to be reformed by following him. In this chapter you'll learn how to begin walking in these disciplines so you can walk more closely with Christ himself.

Exercise 1: Prayer

Pray

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Take a moment to ask God to teach you as well.

Read

Read Matthew 6:5-14, Hebrews 4:14-16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Study

1. Restate the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 in your own words.

2. What pattern do you see in Matthew 6 regarding prayer? Do you see any steps? If so, what are they?

3. According to what you've read, what should be our attitude and posture when we come to God in prayer?

4. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:17 say? What does it mean? What should you do about it?

Reflect

Take a moment to think about your habit of prayer. If prayer is a conversation with God, communion with God, and connection with God, we should be praying often. In fact, we should be in prayer all the time in some way or another. How good is it that we can know God, speak with him, hear him, and bring our hearts to him. What a good, caring Father he is.

Respond

How often should you pray? What does your daily discipline of prayer look like. Take a moment to put in your calendar when you plan to pray.

Exercise 2: Meditation

Pray

Pray and ask God to speak to you. Call to mind your favorite scripture, and then sit silently for sixty seconds and think about that promise. Thank God for his goodness to you, and ask him to teach you from this lesson.

Read

Read Joshua 1:6-8 and Psalm 119:9-16, 97-104.

Study

1. Biblical meditation can be defined as the "act of calling to mind some supposition, pondering upon it, and correlating it to one's own life." With that in mind, what are these scriptures asking you to do? How often? Why?

2. What is the relationship between God's word and meditation?

3. Many eastern religions describe meditation as the emptying of one's mind. How is Christian meditation different than that?

Reflect

We live in a busy, loud, distracting world. Focused time to be silent, to think on God and his word, and to slow the pace of our souls will only happen if we're intentional to do so. As an exercise, find one scripture or promise to meditate on. Try it out. Focus on it. Turn it over in your mind. Try to visualize it. And as you do, ask the Lord to reveal something to you.

Exercise 3: Worship

Pray

As you pray today, ask the Lord to give you a heart of worship.

Read

Read Psalm 100, 148, and 150 aloud.

Study

1. When you studied the Lord's prayer, you'll remember that one of the first steps in that prayer was to pray, "Father in heaven, holy is your name." Worship is the first part of prayer. What do these psalms teach you about worship?

2. What kind of worship does God command in these psalms?

3. Worship is a discipline that we are to engage in both privately and corporately. How do reading these psalms aloud prepare your heart for worshipping God on your own?

4. How might the discipline of personal worship impact the way you worship when the church is gathered?

Exercise 4: Work and Rest

Pray

Ask God to give you wisdom with regard to your time, teaching you to work hard and rest well.

Read

Read Genesis 1-2:3, Exodus 20:8-11, and Matthew 11:28-12:8.

Study

1. What did God do on the first six days of creation? What did he do on the seventh? How does that connect to the command in Exodus 20:8-11?

2. Based on what you've read, why should we rest?

3. What does Jesus say about sabbath rest? What does it mean?

4. Take a moment and list all the obstacles to rest in your life. What do you need to do in order to regularly rest, setting aside time for God, and to be renewed in his presence?

Exercise 5: Habits, Wisdom, and Time

Pray

Take a moment to pray, asking God to give you insight into how he wants to increase your self-discipline and improve your habits.

Read

Read Psalm 39:1-8, Proverbs 6:6-11, 1 Corinthians 10:31, and Ephesians 5:15-21.

Study

1. According to what you read, how should you approach time? Give examples from the text.

2. How does Ephesians challenge your current habits, use of time, and manner of speech? Why do you think Paul said this?

3. How does the Bible view your habits? Why are they important?

Reflect

Our use of time, habits, and actions shape our souls. We're not merely spiritual beings. We're spiritual beings who are embodied. Therefore what we do with our time really matters. Take a moment to reflect on how you spend your time. Where do you see room for improvement? What are ways in which you're using time well? How about your habits? Spend some time asking the Lord to talk to you about these things.

CHAPTER 9

FAITH

Introduction

Our lives as Christ followers are to be marked by faith. Faith is just another word for “trust,” and without trust in God we cannot follow him. This week, we’ll explore the meaning of faith, how we can grow in faith, and what it looks like to exercise our faith.

Exercise 1: What is Faith?

Pray

Ask God to give you a new measure of faith in him.

Read

Read Hebrews 11:1-12:2.

Study

1. What is this passage saying? What does it mean?

2. What is faith? How does this definition compare to what you thought it was?

3. Compare what you read in Hebrews with Ephesians 2:8,9. How is faith related to salvation?

Exercise 2: Saving Faith

Pray

Pray for those you know who are not yet in relationship with Jesus. Ask God to give them the gift of saving faith.

Read

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and Romans 4:1-5:2.

Study

1. According to what you've read, what role does faith play in salvation? How does it relate to the good works we do?

2. How was Abraham "counted righteous?" How does Paul say that relates to us?

3. In Romans 5:1, Paul uses the word "therefore," to make a point. What's the point he's making, and how does that relate to your life?

Reflect

How good is God that he's not a heavenly accountant who sits in Heaven keeping track of our sins like a mathematician—weighing them against our good works? Reflect for moment on the kind of God who, knowing we could not achieve righteousness on our own, saves us by faith in the righteousness of his son. Let that knowledge move your heart and your mind.

Exercise 3: Faith and Works

Pray

Ask God to show you how your actions for him and your trust in him should connect.

Read

Read James 2:14-26 and Galatians 3:1-14.

Study

1. How does James talk about works? How does he relate them to faith?

2. What might James mean in James 2:22? How does that relate to what Paul said in Galatians?

3. If good works do not save us, what do they do? Why are they important?

Reflect

Do you try to earn God's favor and forgiveness? Have you ever felt so bad about something that you've done that you tried to pay God back somehow? This is not the right relationship of faith and works. We're saved from sin because we've believed the gospel. Yet, in believing the gospel, we're now empowered and commanded to do good works. Take a moment and reflect on how faith and good works are connected and how God may be asking you to respond.

Exercise 4: Mountain-Moving Faith

Pray

Pray that God would give you a greater level of faith.

Read

Read Luke 18:35-43; 7:1-10, Matthew 21:18-22, Mark 11:23, and Romans 4:19-21.

Study

1. To what does Jesus respond in the miracles you read about? What does this mean?

2. How is the faith you're reading about here similar to and different from the saving faith of the previous exercise?

3. What was Abraham's situation described in Romans 4? What did he do? What did he not do?

4. What's something in your life that you've lost faith for? A friend or relative to come to faith? A healing? A need to be met? How does this exercise challenge your faith? What's God calling you to trust him for?

CHAPTER 10

MONEY AND POWER

Introduction

Much of our time is spent thinking about money—acquiring money, spending money, or accounting for our money. In most societies, the more money one has, the more power one has. However, in the Kingdom of God, money and power are to be thought of differently and used differently. This week we'll explore these ideas.

Exercise 1: Wealth and Blessing

Pray

Ask God to give you his heart and mind toward wealth and material blessings.

Read

Read Deuteronomy 8:11–20, 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, Matthew 6:25–34, Luke 16:10–13, and 1 Timothy 6:6–10.

Study

1. What is God's instruction to the Israelites in Deuteronomy? What does he promise? What are the conditions? Who is it that brings blessings?

2. What did Jesus warn us about regarding money in Luke? How does he reassure us?

3. What should our attitude be toward giving, according to Matthew 6?

4. How does Jesus connect faithfulness and blessing? What does that mean for you? Why does God give us money at all (2 Corinthians 9:11)?

5. Based on what you've read, how can you be sure that God will take care of your financial needs?

Reflect

What do you believe money is for? Based on what you've read, take a few minutes and meditate on God's generosity toward you and your relationship with money.

Respond

What's your current attitude toward money? Do you desire it too much? Are you afraid of it? After this lesson, how does God want to re-shape your attitude toward wealth. What are you willing to do in response?

Exercise 2: Tithing and Giving

Pray

Ask the Lord to give you his heart toward tithing and giving.

Read

Read Leviticus 27:30, Malachi 3:6-12, Proverbs 3:9,10, and Acts 2:42-47.

Study

1. There are enormous blessings that come with tithing. Tithing is about honoring God with the first of our wealth because (a) it belongs to him, and (b) it honors God when he has the first in our lives. Based on what you've read, what's tithing and why is it important?

2. Proverbs has a lot of wisdom for us regarding giving, generosity, and wealth. In addition to what you've read already, read Proverbs 10:3,4; 22,13:22, 21:20, and 22:4; 9. In your own words, restate what each of these teaches.

3. Tithing forces us to remember the principle of first fruits. The first of our wealth belongs to God. Giving it to him is not an option, nor simply a nice thing to do. It's his. This is why not tithing caused God to accuse the Israelites of robbing him. How does all of this change your view of tithing? What should your response be?

Exercise 3: Earning and Generosity

Pray

Ask God to give you a right heart and mind toward hard work and great generosity.

Read

Read Ecclesiastes 9:10, Matthew 6:19-21, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, and 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Study

1. What do the texts you've read say about generosity? What do they specifically mean for you?

2. What does Acts 20:35 say about Paul's attitude toward earning and generosity? How is that similar to Ephesians 4:28? How is it different?

3. What does Paul say should happen to someone who can work but refuses in 2 Thessalonians 3?

4. What should we do with the money we earn?

Exercise 4: A Servant's Heart

Pray

As you pray, ask God to build the heart of a servant within you.

Read

Read Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 22:24-30, and 1 Peter 4:10,11.

Study

1. In the story of the talents, what did the master expect? Why?

2. If God has entrusted something to us—money, power, or a particular skill—what does he expect us to do with it?

3. How does Jesus expect his disciples to treat one another? What does this mean about how we should treat each other? How does that involve your money?

4. What does Peter instruct us to do?

Exercise 5: A Blessed Life

Pray

Ask God to bless you and trust him with your greatest needs.

Read

Read Luke 21:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Study

1. How does Jesus describe the poor widow's offering? What does he mean?

2. How does Paul describe the Macedonian church's giving? What was their attitude toward giving?

3. How does Paul connect generosity to the gospel story?

Reflect

Some people scrimp and save all their money. Others are always lacking. How does this exercise reveal God's desire for our relationship with money? What does God promise if we live this way?

CHAPTER 11

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Introduction

Jesus told his disciples to “go into all the world and make disciples of all nations,” (Matthew 28:18-20). As his disciples, this commandment applies to us. This week we’ll learn what the Scriptures have to say about global missions, the spread of the gospel, and the advance of the Church into the world.

Exercise 1: Everyone is a Minister

Pray

As you pray, ask God to give you a heart for the world to come to know Christ. Take time to ask him to put a specific nation or nations on your heart.

Read

Read Genesis 1:26-31, 2 Corinthians 5:11-20, and Acts 20:17-38.

Study

1. What does Genesis say humans are to do? In whose name are humans to act? Whom do they represent?

2. Jesus Christ is the better, truer Adam (Romans 5). For those of us who follow him, we follow the one who reclaimed God’s image and represented God perfectly in the world. How does Paul describe such a ministry in 2 Corinthians 5?

- a. In Christ, what are we?

b. What kind of ministry have we been given?

c. What is an ambassador? How are we like ambassadors?

3. When Paul was saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, how did he describe his ministry? How does that impact the way we should think of our ministry?

4. Ephesians 4:11-18 makes it clear that we're all ministers, not just those who are vocationally connected to the church. How does this exercise clarify that reality for you?

Reflect

Take some time to think about what it would mean for you to truly embrace the lifestyle of ministry. For some, ministry is a vocation—the work they are called to do as a career. But for all of us, ministry is to be our lifestyle. To whom can you minister?

Respond

Now that you know that ministry is for all of us, what are you going to do about it? What next steps can you take to serve someone else and minister to their needs with the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel?

Exercise 2: Evangelism and Boldness

Pray

Before this exercise, take time to ask God to make you bold as you represent him in the world.

Read

Read Acts 4:23-31.

Study

1. When you think about speaking to someone else about Jesus, how do you feel? How did the disciples feel in Acts 4?

2. What did the believers do before God gave them boldness?

3. Read the believers' prayer. How did they view God? Was he in charge of history, or did they view him more as responding to history? How does their view of God seem to shape their prayers?

4. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him in Ephesians 6:19,20. What did he ask for? Why?

Reflect

God wants us to be kind, yes. But, he also wants us to be bold for his name. God desires that we stand securely, unshaken on his word. Take some time and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you those areas where you walk in fear—fear to speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost. Ask God to make you brave and to give you opportunities to speak about your faith this very week.

Respond

With whom are you afraid to share the gospel? This week, ask God for an opportunity to open your mouth and share your faith. Then, speak with a small group leader about what happened.

Exercise 3: The Gospel for the World

Pray

Ask the Lord to open your heart to the mission of spreading the gospel around the world.

Read

Read Luke 24:36-52 and Acts 1:6-11.

Study

1. In your own words, describe what happened in these two texts. What did Jesus say? How might the disciples have felt? What was he commanding them to do?

2. Read John 14:6. How does Jesus' statement here shape the way you feel about Christ's command to go to the world?

3. What is the relationship between "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth?" What does that mean for us today?

4. Read Matthew 9:35-37. What is Jesus telling us to pray? How is that like what you read in Luke and Acts?

Reflect

God loves the nations. Ever since God began his great rescue plan, he has had his eye on the nations. He spoke to Abraham about being a blessing to all the nations. He told the prophets that the nations would come to the light of Israel. Jesus is called the Savior of the world. The early Christians clearly understood that they were to carry the good news of the gospel all around the world. Take some time and meditate on your spiritual lineage. Who told you the gospel? Who told them? Take a moment to thank God for the boldness and missional action of those who came before you.

Respond

You are called by God to make disciples of all nations. That is the project of the church. What should you do today to be part of that? For whom can you pray? What can you give? Where can you go?

Exercise 4: Spiritual Power and Spiritual Warfare

Pray

Ask God to give you the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as you prepare to share your faith. Ask also that your eyes may be open to the real enemy around you.

Read

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 and John 14:12-14.

Study

1. In your own words restate the promise of Christ in John 14. What does that mean for you?

2. Read Acts 2:43, 3:16, 8:6-8, and 14:5-10. What happened here? How is that related to Jesus' promise in John 14?

3. How did Paul characterize the opposition Christians face in sharing the gospel? What does he say to do in response?

4. Describe the armor of God found in Ephesians 6. What do you notice? How do we put it on?

CHAPTER 12

FUTURE AND FOREVER

Introduction

God has an amazing future promised for his people. It's quite literally beyond anything we can ask, think, or imagine. In this final chapter, you'll explore God's promises regarding the future. Christians are promised by Christ that, through faith in him, we will be raised again to live with him in a renewed world, forever. That promised future is a powerful motivator for our present faith.

Exercise 1: Death and What's Next

Pray

Ask the Lord to give you understanding about your own death, what it means, and how you should live in response.

Read

Read Genesis 2:15-17, and 1 Corinthians 15.

Study

1. Why do humans die? What happened in Genesis that resulted in death?

2. Death is the result of sin. Yet, God has willed to not allow death to have the final word for his people. What did Jesus promise the thief on the cross in Luke 23:42,43? What does that tell you?

3. Read Hebrews 9:27. How does that compare to what Paul says about death and judgement in 1 Corinthians 15?

4. Read Hebrews 2:12-14. Is death a friend or foe? What will Christ do with death? How does a vision of death, judgement, and resurrection impact how we live?

5. After death we will appear before God (Hebrews 9:27). At that moment, we will either be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:42,43) or we will not. Sometimes this experience is called the "intermediate state," and it refers to what happens to Christians who die before the resurrection. Read 2 Corinthians 5:8 and describe how this "intermediate state" is different from the resurrection of Christ's followers described in 1 Corinthians 15.

Reflect

Take a moment to think about what death means for you. How would you like to be remembered? Imagine, with your faith engaged, what living a life worthy of the resurrection would mean.

Respond

Death is coming for us all, but it's not the end. How does what you've read change you?

Exercise 2: The Day of the Lord

Pray

As you pray, ask the Lord to open your eyes to his promise to judge the world rightly, set it in its proper order, and make it new again. Ask God for a heart for justice and righteousness shaped by his word and Spirit.

Read

Read Isaiah 2:6-22, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, Acts 2:17-21, and Revelation 20:7-21:4.

Study

1. What does Isaiah 2 say is the day of the Lord? Why is it good news?

2. How does Paul describe the way God will judge his people? What impact should that have on the way we live in the present?

3. Describe what happens in the passage from Revelation.

4. How does God's promise to judge the world make you feel about the injustice you see in the present moment?

Exercise 3: Resurrection

Pray

Take a moment and center your prayers on Jesus' instruction to pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Ask him to show you what it means to live in light of the resurrection.

Read

Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; 9:24-27; 15, Philippians 3:17-4:1, 2 Peter 3:9-13, and Revelation 20:4-15.

Study

1. What does God promise to do at the end of time? What are the two resurrections?

2. According to Philippians, how should the resurrection affect how we live? Look also at the end of 1 Corinthians 15.

3. What metaphor is used by Paul for the way he lives his life in 1 Corinthians 9? What is the prize that he wants to obtain?

4. Restate 2 Peter 3:9-13 in your own words.

Exercise 4: New Heavens, New Earth

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with joy at the thought of God's new world. Ask him to help you live in light of that coming reality.

Read

Read Revelation 20-22.

Study

1. In your own words, describe what God promises to do at the end of the age. What will the new world he is bringing be like, given what you've read?

2. What will God do with evil? Why is that good news?

3. From where does New Jerusalem come? Where does it go to? What happens to the earth?

4. When does Jesus promise to return? What should we be doing, thinking, and feeling in the meantime?

LEADER GUIDE

How to Use This Leader Guide

Now that you've established a solid foundation, you can lead someone else to help them do the same. Establishing Foundations can be used one-on-one, with a small group, or with an entire class. The questions below are designed to help you lead a conversation with those who are working through the Establishing Foundations exercises. We suggest having a time in which you check in with the person or people going through Establishing Foundations weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly.

Conversation Questions

The questions below are designed to work in any discussion you have. They're not specific to any of the chapters, but they'll help you gain insight into how the person's interacting with the Establishing Foundations exercises.

- What significant takeaways did you have from the exercises you've been doing?
- Was anything confusing or hard to understand?
- How is God calling you to apply these biblical foundations to your life?

Mile-Marker Questions

The questions below pertain to specific chapters from Establishing Foundations. A great way to structure a discussion with someone is to use a combination of the conversation questions above and the mile-marker questions below.

Chapter 1: Creation and Corruption

- How has your view of God been re-shaped by what you've studied? What about your view of your own life as a human being?

Chapter 2: Salvation and Lordship

- What stood out to you from Israel's story?
- What did you write for the "respond" section in exercise 4?

Chapter 3: Repentance and Faith

- What did you write for the following “response” question in exercise 1: *According to Acts 2:26–41, our response to the gospel involves three steps: repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift: God’s presence in your life in the person of his Spirit. Have you experienced these three realities?*
- Have you been baptized?

Chapter 4: Life in the Spirit

- Have you had an encounter with the Spirit? Have you asked him for his gifts and power to be released in your life?

Chapter 5: God and His Word

- What was your answer to study question 2 from exercise 1? (*Describe what you personally believe the Bible to be. How does it play a role in your life at the moment?*)
- In exercise 4, you read Psalm 1. What “blessing” do you want God to bring into your life through his word?

Chapter 6: Discipleship

- What was your answer to study question 5 of exercise 1?
- Who was on your “top ten” list from the response section of exercise 2?

Chapter 7: Spiritual Family

- In the discussion about gifts in exercise 1, what gifts do you believe God has given you?
- How has this chapter impacted the way you think about your local church and your place in it?

Chapter 8: Spiritual Disciplines

- Did you put what you learned about prayer into practice? How did it go?
- After going through exercise 4 (Work and Rest), do you feel led to make changes in your lifestyle and schedule? If so, what are they?

Chapter 9: Faith

- Do you have clarity on the role that faith and works have in your relationship with God?
- What was your answer to study question 4 from exercise 4? (*What’s something in your life that you’ve lost faith for? A friend or relative to come to faith? A healing? A need to be met? How does this exercise challenge your faith? What’s God calling you to trust him for?*)

Chapter 10: Money and Power

- What did you write for your response section in exercise 1?
- What place do tithing and giving currently have in your life?

Chapter 11: Discipleship and Mission

- Who has God put in your life right now that you're looking for an opportunity to share the gospel with?
- Take some time to pray for those people and for opportunities to preach the gospel.

Chapter 12: Future and Forever

- What did you write for your response section in exercise 2?
- How does the hope of resurrection impact you?

HEARING GOD (INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY)

Introduction

God is a living God. He speaks to his people in two ways—two forms of revelation. First, he speaks to us in the world he has made. By observing the universe and ourselves within it, we can learn true things about God (Psalm 19, Romans 1:18-23). This is called “general revelation” because it’s available to everyone. The second way God speaks is through speech—his word to us. God has spoken most clearly and authoritatively through Scripture. So, if we want to hear God, we must learn to read and listen to the Bible. From solid, biblical study and interpretation we learn how to hear God speak to us through his Spirit.

Exercise 1: Inductive Bible Study (Part 1)

Pray

Ask the Lord to teach you how to study his word effectively, truthfully, and transformationally.

Read

Read John 3:1-14.

Study

1. “Inductive Bible Study” is a name that’s given to a simple, straightforward, and fruitful way to read and understand the Bible. It has three parts: observation, interpretation, and application. Take a moment to observe what this text is saying. Try to say it back to yourself, verse-by-verse.
2. During the “observation” step, we want to do a few things. First, ask “reporter questions” of what you’re reading (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?). As you do, make note of words repeated multiple times in a passage, anything that can be put into a list, words that indicate a change in topic or time, words that contrast one thing against another, and words that indicate cause and effect. Remember, you’re not interpreting yet, so avoid the temptation to make the text “mean” anything at this stage. Just note your observations.

What further matters do you observe about this passage?

3. The second step is “interpretation.” This is when your observations begin to take the shape of an interpretation. Your job at this stage is to discover what the author is trying to communicate. To do this, you need to look at the context. Here are a few questions you can ask:

- ▶ What’s the cultural and/or historical context of this passage?
- ▶ What else do I know about the book, author, and broader context of the passage?
- ▶ What other Scripture passages might help me better interpret this one?
- ▶ Have I overlooked anything or made any assumptions?
- ▶ What is the clearest meaning of this text?

Take some time to note these interpretive questions here:

4. As you continue your interpretation, remember this:

- ▶ Don’t “twist” Scripture—meaning, don’t manipulate the text to get it to say something you’d like for it to say. This is a dishonest way to interpret the text.

- ▶ Look for the plainest interpretation first. Believe that the text means what it says. Sometimes there will be figurative language and confusing imagery, but don't start by looking for hidden meaning. Start with the obvious.
- ▶ Scripture interprets Scripture. Allow the Bible to help you understand other passages of the Bible. Where similar words are used, explore the context of each of those instances.
- ▶ Avoid basing important doctrines on obscure passages.
- ▶ Connect each passage back to the gospel and the broader message of the Bible.

In light of these rules, what do you believe the text you read means?

5. The final step in inductive Bible study is "application." This is where you discover what your/our response to the text should be. Because we want to grow as disciples, we don't study the Bible simply for knowledge. We study so we can hear God, know God, and more fully follow him. So, ask yourself...

- ▶ What does this text teach me to believe?
- ▶ What does this text say about my inner life—how I should feel and experience God?
- ▶ What does this text say I should do?

Take a moment and answer those questions below.

Exercise 2: Inductive Bible Study (Part 2)

Pray

Ask the Lord to teach you how to study his word effectively, truthfully, and transformationally.

Read

Read John 3:16-21.

Study

1. You just learned that “Inductive Bible Study” is a name that’s given to a simple, straightforward, and fruitful way to read and understand the Bible. It has three parts: observation, interpretation, and application. Take a moment to observe what this text is saying. Try to say it back to yourself, verse-by-verse.
2. Remember that during the “observation” step, we want to do a few things. First, ask “reporter questions” of what you’re reading (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?). As you do, make note of words repeated multiple times in a passage, anything that can be put into a list, words that indicate a change in topic or time, words that contrast one thing against another, and words that indicate cause and effect. Remember, you’re not interpreting yet, so avoid the temptation to make the text “mean” anything at this stage. Just note your observations.

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- What does this text teach me to believe?
- What does this text say about my inner life—how I should feel and experience God?
- What does this text say I should do?

Take a moment and answer those questions below.

Reflect

Take a moment to prayerfully reflect on what you’ve studied, and ask God to shape you by his Spirit from what you’ve studied.

Respond

What’s this text asking you to think, feel, and do? What are you going to do in response to what you’ve read? Speak to your small group leader about what you learned here.

Exercise 3: Inductive Bible Study (Part 3)

Pray

Ask the Lord to teach you how to study his word effectively, truthfully, and transformationally.

Read

Read Romans 5:1-11.

Study

1. Once again, we want to try to grow in "Inductive Bible Study." By now you remember that it has three parts: observation, interpretation, and application. Take a moment to observe what this text is saying. Try to say it back to yourself, verse-by-verse.
2. During the observation step we want to ask "reporter questions" of what you're reading (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?). As you do, make note of words repeated multiple times in a passage, anything that can be put into a list, words that indicate a change in topic or time, words that contrast one thing against another, and words that indicate cause and effect. Remember, you're not interpreting yet, so avoid the temptation to make the text "mean" anything at this stage. Just note your observations.

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- What does this text say about my inner life—how I should feel and experience God?
- What does this text say I should do?

Take a moment and answer those questions below.

Reflect

Take a moment to prayerfully reflect on what you’ve studied, and ask God to shape you by his Spirit from what you’ve studied.

Respond

What’s this text asking you to think, feel, and do? What are you going to do in response to what you’ve read? Speak to your small group leader about what you learned here.

Exercise 4: Inductive Bible Study (Part 4)

Pray

Ask the Lord to teach you how to study his word effectively, truthfully, and transformationally.

Read

Read Psalm 1.

Study

1. We're continuing to drill "Inductive Bible Study," and its three parts: observation, interpretation, and application. Take a moment to observe what this text is saying. Try to say it back to yourself, verse-by-verse.
2. During the observation step we want to ask "reporter questions" of what you're reading (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?). As you do, make note of words repeated multiple times in a passage, anything that can be put into a list, words that indicate a change in topic or time, words that contrast one thing against another, and words that indicate cause and effect. Remember, you're not interpreting yet, so avoid the temptation to make the text "mean" anything at this stage. Just note your observations.

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 - ▶ What's the cultural and/or historical context of this passage?
 - ▶ What else do I know about the book, author, and broader context of the passage?
 - ▶ What other Scripture passages might help me better interpret this one?
 - ▶ Have I overlooked anything or made any assumptions?

- What is the clearest meaning of this text?

Take some time to note these interpretive questions here:

4. As you continue your interpretation, remember this:

- Don't "twist" Scripture—meaning, don't manipulate the text to get it to say something you'd like for it to say. This is a dishonest way to interpret the text.
- Look for the plainest interpretation first. Believe that the text means what it says. Sometimes there will be figurative language and confusing imagery, but don't start by looking for hidden meaning. Start with the obvious.
- Scripture interprets Scripture. Allow the Bible to help you understand other passages of the Bible. Where similar words are used, explore the context of each of those instances.
- Avoid basing important doctrines on obscure passages.
- Connect each passage back to the gospel and the broader message of the Bible.

In light of these rules, what do you believe the text you read means?

5. The final step in inductive Bible study is “application.” This is where you discover what your/our response to the text should be. Because we want to grow as disciples, we don’t study the Bible simply for knowledge. We study so we can hear God, know God, and more fully follow him. So, ask yourself...

- What does this text teach me to believe?
- What does this text say about my inner life—how I should feel and experience God?
- What does this text say I should do?

Take a moment and answer those questions below.

Reflect

Take a moment to prayerfully reflect on what you’ve studied, and ask God to shape you by his Spirit from what you’ve studied.

Respond

What’s this text asking you to think, feel, and do? What are you going to do in response to what you’ve read? Speak to your small group leader about what you learned here.

Exercise 5: Studying for Yourself

Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text of Scripture.

Read

Select your own passage of Scripture.

Study

In this exercise, you will do “Inductive Bible Study” on your own. Select a passage from the Bible, and remember the three parts: observation, interpretation, and application. Take a moment to observe what this text is saying. Try to say it back to yourself, verse-by-verse.

1. As you observe this passage, what is it saying?

2. As you move to the interpretation step, what does this passage mean?

3. Finally, as you apply this text, what is the Holy Spirit telling you about your thoughts, your inner life, or your actions that he might wish to change?

Reflect

Take a moment to prayerfully reflect on what you've studied, and ask God to shape you by his Spirit from what you've studied.

Respond

What's this text asking you to think, feel, and do? What are you going to do in response to what you've read? Speak to your small group leader about what you learned here.

