

A GUIDE TO ABIDE

A RESOURCE FOR GROWING IN RELATIONSHIP
WITH JESUS THROUGH PRAYER, SCRIPTURE, AND SABBATH



“I AM THE VINE
AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.
WHOEVER ABIDES IN ME
AND I IN THEM,
THEY BEAR MUCH FRUIT.”

JOHN 15:5

Table of Contents

Discipleship Bands	3
Sabbath	4-10
Prayer	11-12
Scripture	13-16

Discipleship Bands

A discipleship band is a group of 3-5 people of the same gender who meet together, preferably every week but at least every other week, for the purpose of sharing honestly about their relationship with God for the purpose of growing as disciples who make disciples.

Format of Meetings

Connect: Band participants begin each meeting by sharing how God has been at work in their lives and how they have lived out their faith as disciples during the past week.

Scripture: Bands read a passage of Scripture together. The Scripture read varies by band. Some bands read the main Scripture from the previous week's sermon, and others work through a book of the Bible, reading 5-10 verses each week.

Discuss: Bands consider what the Scripture teaches us about God and about ourselves.

Challenge: Band participants share with their group about how God has spoken to them through the Scripture and how they will live their upcoming week in light of what the group has discussed.

Prayer: Each band meeting will close with band members praying for each other.

Why Bands?

God has created us to be in relationship with other Christ followers who speak truth into our lives and who lovingly hold us accountable for growing in our faith as we share honestly about our life's struggles and successes. Discipleship bands are a medium where we can do just that. We have seen the importance of discipleship bands at work in our congregation as, according to Canton First's Spring 2026 Abiding Survey, respondents who were participating in discipleship bands were significantly more likely to describe Scripture and Prayer as shaping their lives and faith. As band members grow in their faith, they are also equipped and encouraged to multiply by starting new discipleship bands.

How Do I Join a Band?

You may form a band with people you already know, or you can be placed in a band with others who have similar availability as you. For more information, email Minister of Discipleship, Mattie Bryant at mattie.bryant@cantonfmc.org

Sabbath

The concept of Sabbath is mentioned over 100 times in the Old Testament and 50 times in the Gospels alone, let alone further New Testament mentions. Because of the prominence of this practice in scripture we believe Sabbath is a core practice for Christian discipleship. If Sabbath is such a central teaching of scripture, why is it such a neglected practice in the church today? As we think about how we might grow in this practice there are three common barriers that we need to address.

1. Definition
2. Busyness
3. Context

Definition

The issue of definition is that we often don't hear the same thing when we hear the word "Sabbath" because there are many different, and often conflicting, definitions. Some understand Sabbath to be a particular day of the week (Sunday for many modern Christians, Saturday for Jews and some denominations). Some define the Sabbath as a rigid exclusion of any physical exertion/labor/work. Some define Sabbath as the day we go to church. There is at least some truth in value in all of these definitions but for our purposes we want to be very clear about how we define Sabbath as a church.

We believe Sabbath is a regular day, ideally once a week, when we:

Stop: cease from work (paid or unpaid), productivity, striving, anxiety, and the impulse to constantly accomplish.

Rest: intentionally recover physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Delight: enjoy God's gifts with gratitude: meals, relationships, beauty, play, celebration.

Worship: reorient your life toward God through prayer, Scripture, gathered worship, and communion with Him.

Busyness

American culture is notoriously driven by distraction, consumerism, hustle culture, overwork, and the various forms of burnout and fallout that result from those traits. Many of us suffer from guilt when we spend precious time resting, delighting, and not working/producing. These traits and tendencies serve as a barrier to practicing regular Sabbath and, inversely, practicing regular Sabbath is a powerful antidote to these tendencies. Here's a parable that is helpful for thinking about this:

There were once two lumberjacks that would get to the woods at the same time each day and leave at the same time each day. The only difference in their routine is that the first lumberjack would leave for an hour in the middle of each day, and he somehow still managed to cut far more wood than the second lumberjack. One day the second lumberjack went to the first and said "we start and stop working at the same times each day but you are always able to cut more wood than me even though you leave for an hour in the middle of each day. What do you do for that hour?" The first lumberjack replied, "I go home and sharpen my axe."

Regular Sabbath practice is how we keep our spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional "axes" sharp. Sabbath reminds us that we are human beings, not human doings, and that God loves us for who we are not what we can accomplish/do/produce/achieve. This isn't a magical formula where all of our problems go away when we practice Sabbath, there are still other things we must do to care for our health and wellbeing, but we have found that Sabbath practice is what we might call an anchor practice for our lives. It keeps us rooted, grounded, anchored when the storms of regular life rage against us.

You may be thinking "ok, I'm convinced that Sabbath is important, but I simply don't have time. My life is too busy with work, school, family, sports, etc. and too much would be neglected if I took a regular Sabbath day." A very common experience among those who practice regular Sabbath though is that they find they are able to accomplish more in the other 6 days of the week. In some ways it feels like a supernatural stretching of time but most likely it's simply that when we constantly burn the candle at both ends it's impossible to operate at our best. Sabbath provides the rest, renewal, and regular reorientation that we need to show up for our career, family, and other obligations.

Context

The final challenge that we'll discuss in this guide is context. The reality is that most of us have very different schedules and responsibilities than one another and that makes it difficult to recommend a rigid approach to Sabbath that applies to everyone. If we were to say everyone should observe a Sabbath on the same day of the week that would exclude everyone that has to work on that day. If we recommend not doing any vocational or domestic labor, does that mean we shouldn't change our child's diaper all day? There are so many contextual considerations that the best approach is for you to prayerfully create with your family unit a Sabbath plan that outlines in as much detail as you find helpful how/when your family will observe a regular day of Sabbath. In the next section you'll find a Sabbath plan worksheet that helps you intentionally plan your Sabbaths and it contains a section for special considerations for families and young children.

Sabbath Plan Worksheet

The first step to this process is to pray. Pray for God to help you discern what a healthy Sabbath looks like for your family and to make this a life-giving practice for your family. Next, spend some time filling in each section with what you think should be included in that section. If you're married, have your spouse fill this out separately so that you can compare/combine your thoughts later. If you have children at home invite them to provide input to each section as well.

Stop

What are the activities that you need to stop for the Sabbath?

Examples: no checking/answering emails, no cell phone or computer use, no social media, no laundry or dishes, no deep cleaning the house, no shopping. None of these are mandatory, each family will have different answer and there are also some that will be somewhat universal. This is also a good time to think about what things you may need to do each week in preparation for the Sabbath. For instance: you might make sure to wash all of the dishes the day before so that you don't need to wash any on the Sabbath, or you might prep a crockpot meal for dinner so that it comes together with minimal effort.

This is the hardest section because you will be tempted to bend and justify adding things back in that the Holy Spirit is leading you to stop for the day. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to resist these temptations. If you don't STOP then the rest of the Sabbath process will feel like you're adding a bunch of extra obligations rather than a restful day of delight and worship. This is the step that makes room for the other steps.

Rest

How will you rest on the Sabbath to recover spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally?

Sometimes you might take a nap, you might read a book you've been wanting to for a while but haven't had time to because of work, you might take a walk or a hike, you might decide to go fishing. The key is finding what is restful for us and this often means the inverse of what we do for work. If your job is primarily physical you may find more rest in being physically still and engaging your mind through reading, listening to music, or sitting in nature. If your job is more stationary but is more mentally demanding you may actually find that engaging in some physical activity or labor is actually more restful if it's able to give your mind a break such as working in your garden, practicing woodworking, or going on a hike.

Delight

How will you enjoy God's gifts with gratitude on the Sabbath?

What are things that bring you joy and delight and how can you intentionally build them into Sabbath? Maybe you enjoy preparing a wonderful meal and inviting friends or neighbors to share it with you, maybe you enjoy spending time in God's creation, maybe you enjoy reading poetry or listening to a certain kind of music. The key to this step is finding what you delight in, it's likely more than one thing, and finding ways to intentionally delight on the Sabbath while giving thanks to God for his delightful gifts.

Worship

How will you reorient your life toward God through prayer, Scripture, gathered worship, and communion with Him?

Often we think of worship as something that happens in church on Sunday mornings, and that is correct! But worship is also something that can, and should, occur all throughout our lives. On the Sabbath this means spending time throughout the day praying to God, listening/singing to worship music, reading scripture, and also gathering together for worship with other believers. If your Sabbath is on Sunday, this could include worshipping at church. If your Sabbath is Saturday then you might consider Sunday morning worship the culmination of your Sabbath practice. This could also look like gathering together with your family and maybe a few friends or neighbors to sing a hymn of praise after a meal or a song of worship around a campfire. Worship is about offering praise, thanksgiving, reverence, gratitude, love, affection, etc. all to our God who is the giver of every good thing in our lives.

With Children

If you have children living at home, what special considerations do you need to make to observe Sabbath well?

You might have special toys/games/activities that you only bring out on the Sabbath, this helps the Sabbath feel special and delightful for children. You might need to choose a day that aligns with your kids activity schedules and/or choose which activities your kids are able to participate in based on whether or not they conflict with your family's Sabbath. One of the best things about celebrating Sabbath with kids is that we get to do it with them. During the week there are often times when kids want to play with us but we have to say no because we have to get to work or do something around the house. Sabbath is the day when you get to say yes to reading "1 more book" to them, yes to playdough, yes to catch and squirt guns in the backyard, and yes to hours of building legos or magnatiles. Additionally: if your kids still take a nap that is often a time when parents get other necessary tasks done. If you plan and accomplish those tasks ahead of the Sabbath you can nap when the kids nap!

As you consider how to worship with kids on the Sabbath think about what worship songs they like and remember the most from church or the radio and prioritize singing together songs they know and love. Find a kids/family devotional or Bible (the Hands on Bible is a great option that includes lots of fun activities too) to read together during the Sabbath. For tips on praying together consider a resource such as the book "How to Pray: A Guide for Young Explorers" by Pete Greig and Gemma Hunt.

Most of all: remember that spending the Sabbath with your children may not be as restful as a day alone or just with your spouse but it is also one of the most delightful ways to spend the Sabbath and it is only for a season, so soak it up!

How to Take a Silent Retreat

Something many find beneficial in addition to a regular day of Sabbath is to undertake a silent retreat once a year or so. The duration of such a retreat varies from person to person and what time you have available from a half day to a full week or more.

In planning for a silent retreat it is helpful to consider the same questions as your Sabbath plan, how you will Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship during that time but with more than usual attention given to periods of silent prayer, meditation on scripture, and listening for the voice of God.

There are a few places in metro Atlanta that we know and recommend for silent retreats but you can, of course, undertake one in your own backyard or in a cabin or any such location. Recommended locations include:

Monastery of the Holy Spirit <https://trappist.net/plan-your-visit/retreats/>

Ignatius House <https://www.ignatiushouse.org/attend/overview>

There are many Christian monasteries and retreat centers across the country (and the world) that offer retreats as well so feel free to explore the many wonderful options out there. For more information on silent retreats or help finding/scheduling one reach out to Pastor Matt matt.abel@cantonfmc.org

Prayer

Prayer is the intentional practice of abiding in God's presence through honest communication, attentive listening, and loving participation in His will. There are as many forms of prayer as there are feelings, emotions, and circumstances in human existence. Prayer can be an expression of praise, gratitude, grief, pain, questions, desires, dependence, the list is endless because the point of prayer is to invite God into our everyday lives, wherever we find ourselves in any given moment. Put another way, it is becoming aware of God's presence in our lives no matter where we are, how we feel, or what we're doing.

Prayer is not just about speaking to God but also listening to Him. In prayer we find we are able to not only speak to God from where we are but we also become more and more aware of His presence in every circumstance and we learn to recognize His voice.

If you are someone who is passionate about prayer please consider joining the CFMC Prayer Team! There are a variety of different ways that members of our Prayer Team serve to support the mission and ministries of CFMC with prayer. If you're interested in joining please contact Julie Little julie.little@cantonfmc.org

How to Pray

If you are new to prayer it can be hard to know where to begin and helpful to follow a guide. Here are a few resources that can help shape your prayer life whether it is a brand new practice for you or one you are already well acquainted with.

Lectio365. This is an app that is part devotional and part guided prayer experience. You can read the devotional or listen to the audio version (highly recommended) and it has one for every morning, midday, and evening. Don't worry if you can't do all three, start where you can and add more later! You can download the app on the Appstore or go to lectio365.com

How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People by Pete Greig. This book is a fantastic, easy to read, simple to implement guide to prayer. Whether you're new or an expert it is likely you'll benefit from what Pete has to say.

How to Hear God: A Simple Guide for Normal People by Pete Greig. This is the follow-up to Pete's first book on prayer and focuses more specifically on how to listen for the voice of God in prayer.

God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer by Pete Greig. If you've ever struggled with grief, loss, suffering, or felt like your prayers are going unanswered this is a challenging and powerful book drawn from Pete's own experiences.

How to Pray: A Guide for Young Explorers by Pete Greig and Gemma Hunt. In this book Pete and Gemma adapt the material from the original book *How to Pray* and tailor it for a younger audience and parents. A great resource for those looking for ways to incorporate prayer as a family.

P.R.A.Y.

There are lots of guides and models you can follow to pray. If you have one you love and works for you that's great! This is a model that we have found helpful and is just one of many that you can use to grow in prayer, it comes from the book *How to Pray* mentioned above.

Pause: Begin by becoming still and aware of God's presence. This is a deliberate slowing down; breathing deeply, quieting distractions, and centering your attention on God before speaking. Pete Greig emphasizes that prayer starts not with words, but with presence. "To start we must stop."

Rejoice: Move into worship, gratitude, and reflection on Scripture. This could include praying through a Psalm or meditating on a biblical passage. Rejoicing reorients the heart toward God's goodness before bringing requests.

Ask: Bring petitions and intercessions to God; for your own needs, for others, and for the world. This includes daily concerns, guidance, healing, justice, forgiveness, and the coming of God's kingdom. Asking is not selfish is how we practice relational dependence on the Father.

Yield: End in surrender and openness to God's will. Yielding means releasing control, listening for God's voice, confessing sin, and saying "yes" to His direction and presence. In *Lectio 365*, this is described as welcoming "His love, His plans, and His presence into your day."

Scripture

Studying scripture is a core spiritual practice because through it disciples continually encounter the voice, character, and way of Jesus, learning to abide in Him, become like Him, do what He did, and multiply disciples.

Scripture is not merely information to master but a way we abide with and are formed in the presence of Christ. As we prayerfully read, meditate on, and internalize God's Word, we learn to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd amid the noise of the world. In this sense, Scripture reading is an act of abiding: a continual returning to Jesus so that His thoughts shape our thoughts, His desires reshape our desires, and His life begins to flow through ours. Rather than approaching the Bible simply for knowledge or productivity, abiding in Scripture invites us into a slow, relational encounter with the living Christ and nourishes intimacy, cultivates obedience, and roots our lives deeply in the love and truth of God.

If you are new to scripture reading it can be hard to know where to begin. A very accessible daily devotional that we recommend is the **Wake-Up Call** from Seedbed. You can sign up to receive this devotional to your email daily at <https://seedbed.com/wakeupcall/> and you can also listen to the audio version wherever you listen to podcasts.

If you're interested in going deeper with your study of scripture it helps to follow a rhythm or method of Bible study. There are lots of good ones out there but we'll share three on the following pages that you can try out for yourself: **S.O.A.P**, **Disciple Bible Study** (DBS), and **Lectio Divina**.

If you are already committed to a regular method of scripture study but want to take your skills to the next level we are working towards offering a regular class on **Inductive Bible Study** (IBS). IBS is an intensive form of scripture study taught at many seminaries and is a great way to deepen your engagement with scripture and can be especially helpful for those who are studying to lead classes and Bible study groups. If you're interested in this class please reach out to Mattie Bryant to express interest and be notified when the class opens mattie.bryant@cantonfmc.org

S.O.A.P.

BIBLE STUDY METHOD



SCRIPTURE:

Read the scripture passage out loud and then write it down. Writing helps you focus on each word individually and the passage as a whole.



OBSERVATION:

Examine the text and write down what you notice.

- Pray, "God, why did You write this?"
- Who is it written by? Who is it written to?
- What do you think the main message is?
- What words or ideas jump out to you?
- What seems interesting or unusual?
- What comes before and after the passage?
- Is there repetition, comparison, or contrast?



APPLICATION:

Ask God how he wants you to apply this passage in your life. Write it down. This is the part where the scripture becomes personal.

- Is there a specific action you need to take or confession you need to make?
- If it is an action, make it SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time bound.)



PRAY:

Respond to God's word with your own words. This is where head knowledge becomes heart transformation.

- Pray that the passage becomes real in your life.
- Praise God for His attributes revealed in the passage.
- Confess any sin that comes to light.
- Thank God for His Word.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to work in your life, making you more like Jesus.




"THY WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET
AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH."

PSALM 119:105

DBS




1  **CONNECT:**


- What are you thankful for today?
- What is stressing you today?

2  **REVIEW:**


- How did it go with obeying the lesson from last time?

3  **READ:**

- Read the scripture text.
- Retell in your own words.
- Reread the text.

4  **DISCUSS:**

- What does the story teach about God?
- What does it teach us about ourselves?
- Is there a command we should obey, or an example we should follow?

5  **SHARE:**

- How will you obey what we've learned today?
- Who will you tell about what God has shown you today?

6  **PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

ACTS 2:42

LECTIO DIVINA



1



PRAY:

Begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study and to speak to you through the Word.

2



BIBLE PASSAGE:

Write the book, chapter, and verse of the scripture you're studying today.

3



LECTIO:

Read the passage carefully and slowly. What words or phrases jump out at you? What makes them stand out to you?

4



MEDITATIO:

Read the passage again. Think deeply about the text. What emotions does it stir up? What is God saying to you personally through this passage?

5



ORATIO:

Read the passage again. What response or action step is God inviting you to take? Have a loving conversation with God.

6



CONTEMPLATIO:

Read the passage one last time and allow the divine reading to sink in. Rest in God's presence.

7



PRAY:

End by offering the time back to God, thanking him for his Word and Holy Spirit, and asking Him to enliven the truths of scripture in your heart and life.