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SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES
TO HELP YOU
GROW IN
YOUR FAITH

WORSHIP
Scripture
Solitude
Fasting

FEED
THE

DOG

MINISTRY
prayer
COMMUNITY

BROCK
GILL

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SESSION

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***SPIRIT AND
FLESH***



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

ALTHOUGH BY THIS TIME YOU OUGHT TO BE TEACHERS, YOU NEED SOMEONE TO TEACH YOU THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GOD'S REVELATION AGAIN. YOU NEED MILK, NOT SOLID FOOD. NOW EVERYONE WHO LIVES ON MILK IS INEXPERIENCED WITH THE MESSAGE ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE HE IS AN INFANT. BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE—FOR THOSE WHOSE SENSES HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

HEBREWS 5:12-14

I love motorcycles. For a few years, I was an amateur motocross racer and it was the most fun I've ever had. But, not all of it was enjoyable. It was hard work and there were trials along the way.

One weekend I was racing in an endurance race in Kentucky. It was a hot September day, and we were to race through the woods for over two hours, nonstop. Motocross racing is among the most physically demanding sports on the planet. Every muscle is used and your heart rate increases rapidly.

I thought I was prepared. I had just trained for and run a half marathon and was in good shape. I had plenty of water and sports drinks. But, as the race progressed, I became extremely tired. Many other competitors had dropped out due to exhaustion, but I continued.

Near the end, I heard other motorcycles behind me revving their engines as a signal for me to slow down to let them pass me, but no one was there. I was hallucinating. It was weird. I continued until I crossed the finish line, but I got off my bike and could not talk. It turned out that I was close to having a heat stroke because I pushed my body too hard and didn't drink enough fluids.

The lesson for me here was simple: I needed to drink more fluids and eat the right foods to keep my body healthy. The same goes for our spiritual lives. What we consume will either make us healthy or sick. We need to feed ourselves good, nutritious, spiritual food in order for us to grow in godliness.

Have you ever been thirsty or dehydrated physically? What about spiritually?

What is the good, spiritual food and drink that you need to make a part of your daily life? Are you already practicing some of the spiritual disciplines? If not, how will you make them a part of your life this week?

I SAY THEN, WALK BY THE SPIRIT AND YOU WILL CERTAINLY NOT CARRY OUT THE DESIRE OF THE FLESH. FOR THE FLESH DESIRES WHAT IS AGAINST THE SPIRIT, AND THE SPIRIT DESIRES WHAT IS AGAINST THE FLESH; THESE ARE OPPOSED TO EACH OTHER, SO THAT YOU DON'T DO WHAT YOU WANT.

GALATIANS 5:16-17

How do we walk by the Spirit as Galatians 5:16 instructs us to do? Which side, the Spirit or the flesh, are you feeding the most? How can you tell?

A man had two dogs; the one he fed grew the biggest.

We have spirit and flesh. We need to feed the right dog. Let me explain. I am not literally saying that the Holy Spirit is a dog. Think of it as you would if you had two dogs. What would happen if you fed one and not the other? One would starve and eventually die. Now, apply this metaphor to your spiritual life.

What areas or parts of your life are of the flesh and need to be starved?

My wife and I are away from home over 200 days of the year, so we don't have any pets or plants, or anything else that requires feeding or tending to. One time we decided to get one of those bamboo plants because we were told that they require almost no attention. So, my wife promised to water it and keep it alive. Guess what? It died. So we bought another one and another and another. They all died. Why? Because we were not around to tend to them. We didn't keep them watered. We killed multiple plants that were supposed to be impossible to kill.

Neglect or time away will kill just about anything. We can't neglect our spirit. Feeding the right dog takes discipline. This doesn't come naturally, so we must be intentional. If we neglect feeding the spirit, then the flesh will naturally grow. And you know what? It will grow out of control. In the coming weeks, you will learn how to feed your spirit so that you will grow to have a strong and healthy spiritual life.

Have you ever forgotten to feed or water a plant or a pet? What happened?

Why is it so important for us to make the spiritual disciplines a regular habit in our lives? List some action steps you will take to remind yourself to feed the spirit instead of the flesh.

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

LET US WALK WITH DECENCY, AS IN THE DAYTIME: NOT IN CAROUSING AND DRUNKENNESS; NOT IN SEXUAL IMPURITY AND PROMISCUITY; NOT IN QUARRELING AND JEALOUSY. BUT PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND DON'T MAKE PLANS TO GRATIFY THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH.

ROMANS 13:13-14

Three things I like are pizza, chocolate, and ice cream. But I really like pie.

Generally I try to eat foods that are healthy though, and most of the time I stick to this philosophy. There are times, however, like vacation, celebrations, or Thanksgiving where I go crazy and eat all of the things I like without counting calories or thinking about the consequences. Over the years I've seen a pattern. Typically I will only eat poorly for a few days around Thanksgiving but after a few days my will is weak. My appetite for unhealthy food begins to take over. I generally continue eating things that are filled with sugar a few days after Thanksgiving. That turns into Christmas and soon I realize that my eating habits have completely changed and I am saying yes to all kinds of foods I used to say *no* to.

How does this happen? Lack of discipline is the short answer. Every January I find myself with extra pounds and tight-fitting pants and it's not until I literally feel the effect of my eating habits that I am motivated to change.

Your flesh, your sin nature, is kind of like my appetite around Thanksgiving. It will always be hungry. No matter how much you feed your flesh, it will never be satisfied. It always wants more than you can feed it and the results are never good. Your flesh does not have your good in mind (1 Pet. 2:11).

READ ROMANS 13:13-14 AGAIN.

In these verses, I see a clear picture of the flesh. And in the last part of verse 14, Paul tells us to not even consider how to gratify the desires of the flesh, but rather to clothe ourselves with Jesus!

How are you most tempted to feed your flesh? How will you clothe yourself with Jesus this week?

List some ways you will practice the spiritual disciplines and make them a daily part of your life.

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE,
KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, AND SELF-
CONTROL. THE LAW IS NOT AGAINST SUCH THINGS.

GALATIANS 5:22-23

Recently I traveled to Central America for some of my shows. We journeyed way out onto an island off the coast of Nicaragua known as Rama. We arrived at a small community where we would do a show and share the gospel with the local people there.

My team and I grew extremely tired and thirsty from our extended travel and lack of sleep. We started getting grumpy (maybe a little *hangry* too). At that point we realized we were dehydrated and water was not enough to keep up with the demands of the hot and humid climate.

A local man said “follow me.” He took us across the island into an area filled with coconut, mango, and other fruit trees. The people began to climb up and cut off pieces of fruit for us to eat. Then they cut the fruit open and gave it to us to drink. Immediately, we began to feel the results of the fruit; it completely satisfied our thirst and provided the electrolytes we needed. Fifteen minutes later, our headaches were gone and we were rejuvenated and ready to serve.

The Bible describes the fruit of the Spirit, but also fruit(s) of the flesh.

READ GALATIANS 5:19-21.

These things are obvious. The Spirit is not involved in these things. These are a direct result from our sinful nature (the flesh). When we feed the flesh, we will produce fruit. The fruits of the flesh are obviously not godly and will lead us down the road that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13).

However, when we are in Christ, we have the Spirit who produces fruit in us and leads us down the path of life (Prov. 15:24). The evidence of the Spirit will also be obvious.

There is nothing more incredible than sweet fruit or a refreshing drink in times of physical thirst. Likewise, let's do what we can to feed our spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us to quench our spiritual thirst.

Look at your life. Do you produce fruit of the flesh more than the fruit of the Spirit? How can we produce fruit of the Spirit as opposed to the flesh?

Pray that God will prepare your heart for this study and to walk in the Spirit.

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *FIVE*

A WOMAN OF SAMARIA CAME TO DRAW WATER. "GIVE ME A DRINK," JESUS SAID TO HER, BECAUSE HIS DISCIPLES HAD GONE INTO TOWN TO BUY FOOD. "HOW IS IT THAT YOU, A JEW, ASK FOR A DRINK FROM ME, A SAMARITAN WOMAN?" SHE ASKED HIM. FOR JEWS DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH SAMARITANS. JESUS ANSWERED, "IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD, AND WHO IS SAYING TO YOU, 'GIVE ME A DRINK,' YOU WOULD ASK HIM, AND HE WOULD GIVE YOU LIVING WATER."

JOHN 4:7-10

There was a woman who was embarrassed to be seen in public, so she went to draw water from a well in the middle of the day. She probably did this to avoid bumping into others. Why? Because she had been married five times and was currently living with someone who was not her husband. She likely wanted to avoid the drama. This story of the woman at the well is found in John 4.

READ THE ENTIRE PASSAGE—JOHN 4:1-26.

What jumps out to me is this: Jesus told her that the water she was drinking would leave her thirsty, but He had living water and that if she drank from it, she would never thirst again.

She had probably been trying to find love in her relationships with many different men. She had tried drinking the "water of this world" and it left her thirsty. But when she drank from the living water, her life was changed! The best way to cure your thirst is to drink from the right well. Jesus is the only water that will keep us satisfied.

Oftentimes people try to satisfy that thirst and yearning with other things. Some believe that if their life could just have some adjustments, then they will be satisfied, or have peace or joy. Some try to satisfy this emptiness with friends, or a relationship, while others turn to drinking, smoking, or even eating. I have also seen some try and fill that hole in their heart with money.

Nothing on this earth will ever fully satisfy our thirst. Only the living God can give you living water that will quench your soul's thirst. If you are longing for more, if you are searching, if you lack peace, if you have been chasing things of the world and realize nothing works, then look to Jesus. He is the living water your soul needs!

What things or people are you trying to fill your life with that are not worthy of your time? Are you finding your satisfaction in Jesus? If not, surrender to Him today.

BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE—FOR THOSE WHOSE SENSES
HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

HEBREWS 5:14

My uncle is a police officer in south Louisiana. Several years ago he was called to a house in the middle of nowhere. People honestly didn't even know anyone lived in this remote area. As he drove up to the dilapidated mobile home with no electricity or water, he was not prepared for what he was about to witness.

He went inside to find a 15-year-old boy along with his 13-year-old brother both wearing diapers and nothing else. Their teeth were rotten and unformed, and their bodies severely underdeveloped. He found that these boys were still being bottle fed—still drinking milk and not eating solid food. Their parents, who were mentally ill, had not take proper care of them. As a result, they were severely malnourished. They acted like babies in many ways despite their age. It was the saddest thing my uncle has seen in over 30 years as a police officer.

What would happen if we only ate food that didn't have much nutritional value? For example, if you ate Skittles every day, how do you think your body would respond? On the other hand, if your diet consists of vegetables and foods high in protein with only occasional sweets, how do you think your body would respond? See where this is going? It's a choice. Choose to eat healthy food so you will be healthy or suffer the consequences. We need healthy spiritual food, or we won't make it. We must be mature and able to distinguish between good and evil, as Hebrews 5:14 reiterates.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:2-3 as well. What does the illustration of milk and solid food mean? How does it relate to where we are in our spiritual maturity?

What disciplines or practices are you currently engaged in? Are these practices helping you grow to be more like Jesus? Why or why not?

In this study we will discover the keys to living a healthy spiritual life. Some of those disciplines will be discussed and examined on a deep level. Some of my favorite disciplines are studying the Word, praying, fasting, ministry, solitude, worship, and community. These are essential to the growth of every believer.

Prepare yourself to dive into a feast of things that will feed your spirit. Begin by asking God to help you. Ask God to help you to live a life that is set apart and focused on serving Him. Ask for help to discipline yourself to seek His face.

SESSION **2**

WORSHIP



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

THEREFORE, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, IN VIEW OF THE MERCIES OF GOD, I URGE YOU TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND PLEASING TO GOD; THIS IS YOUR TRUE WORSHIP. DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS AGE, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, SO THAT YOU MAY DISCERN WHAT IS THE GOOD, PLEASING, AND PERFECT WILL OF GOD.

ROMANS 12:1-2

What is true worship? Webster's dictionary says to worship is "to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission." This brings up the following questions. Is your love extravagant? Do you have extreme submission?

Maybe we need to start there. When we fall in extravagant love with Jesus, then we will begin to find true worship. When we are in extreme submission to God, then we will find that we are naturally ready to worship. Giving God honor with our extravagant love and extreme submission is true worship. It's much more than the feeling we get when our favorite song is played. Worship starts with falling in love with God. This requires knowing who God is and submitting more of your life to Him.

Looking back at today's Scripture, how would you define true worship?

What did Paul instruct believers to do in addition to offering their bodies as a living sacrifice?

True worship involves focusing on who God is as He reveals Himself in Scripture. Doing so leads us to live holy lives that are pleasing to the Lord. And living lives that are holy and pleasing to the Lord leads us to true worship.

How will you focus your heart and mind on God's goodness, glory, and greatness today? Tomorrow?

How might you offer more of yourself as a sacrifice of worship to God? What is one way you might worship God by obeying Him this week?

IN THE YEAR THAT KING UZZIAH DIED, I SAW THE LORD SEATED ON A HIGH AND LOFTY THRONE, AND THE HEM OF HIS ROBE FILLED THE TEMPLE. SERAPHIM WERE STANDING ABOVE HIM; THEY EACH HAD SIX WINGS: WITH TWO THEY COVERED THEIR FACES, WITH TWO THEY COVERED THEIR FEET, AND WITH TWO THEY FLEW. AND ONE CALLED TO ANOTHER: HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD OF ARMIES; HIS GLORY FILLS THE WHOLE EARTH.

ISAIAH 6:1-3

I love great art. Performance art is my favorite. There are some people whose performances just capture me. I love feeling the moment of pure astonishment.

When I see something that creates this feeling of awe, everything stops. I escape reality and feel like I am caught up in another world where nothing is impossible. Before I get all artsy-weirdo on you, I want to bring it back down to earth. I know the feeling of great art, the emotion that can flood the heart. But those things are all temporary. What really overwhelms me is the holiness of God. When I see how great, how grand, and how incredible God is, I am truly overwhelmed. Why do I shudder? Because He is holy. He is beyond anything I have ever experienced in any earthly performance or adventure. God is truly exceptional.

When we worship, we worship a holy God. What is holiness?

Holiness literally means *to be set apart*. It means to be without sin, or to be different from the world. God is the absolute perfect example of holiness. In the Book of Revelation, the angels cry out day and night to God saying “holy, holy, holy” (4:8). God is holy. Through faith in Christ, we are being made holy. This process is sanctification and it refers to the process of becoming more like Christ. When we worship, we can know that we are worshipping a worthy God because He is holy and has made us holy through the blood of Jesus.

When I look at my sin, I am disgusted. When I see how much God has forgiven me, I am blown away and driven to worship Him. Prayer and reading the Word are so vital because these practices expose my sin, reveal the idols in my heart, and remind me of God’s promises. When we take these truths and promises to heart, worship will become a something we do every day.

Read John 3:30. How can you decrease today so that you might delight more in Christ? What might this look like?

How might you make worship a part of your everyday life this week?

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

I EXALT YOU, MY GOD THE KING, AND BLESS YOUR NAME
FOREVER AND EVER. I WILL BLESS YOU EVERY DAY; I WILL PRAISE
YOUR NAME FOREVER AND EVER. THE LORD IS GREAT AND IS
HIGHLY PRAISED; HIS GREATNESS IS UNSEARCHABLE.

P S A L M 145 : 1 - 3

I saw a video one time about Michael Jackson. He was a worldwide superstar. He had millions of fans who were completely in awe of him. There are video clips of Michael walking onto the stage and people in the audience screaming his name.

Some of the fans would freak out and cry at the sight of Michael Jackson. This was a picture of false worship. Or maybe I should say it's a picture of true worship of a false god. Michael Jackson may have been a great singer or entertainer, but worship should be reserved for the only One worthy of worship. He was a mortal man with a sinful nature. Every superstar, no matter how great, will eventually fail and disappoint you because each has a sinful nature.

Reserve your worship for the One who is without sin. Worship the One who will never let you down. Worship the One who loves you more than you love Him. Worship the One who knows your name. If you go to a concert to see any famous musician, you will see thousands of fans adoring and watching his or her every move. Some people will hold up signs or lift their hands, or even sing every word of the songs. But there is one thing I can most certainly guarantee: The performer doesn't know who you are. That person doesn't know your name. That person doesn't care about you personally. That star on stage wants you in the audience because that's how they make money. Not to throw every performer under the bus, but it is essentially impossible for them to know the names or stories of the thousands of people in their audience. Remember that God knows your name. He knows your story. He knows your past, and He knows your future. He is worthy to be praised. He is worthy of worship.

Have you caught yourself worshipping something unworthy?

How does God's personal care and knowledge of you change your attitude about Him? How should knowing this change the way you live?

How does the way God knows and loves you influence the way you worship Him?

BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S FAITHFUL LOVE WE DO NOT PERISH, FOR HIS MERCIES NEVER END. THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING; GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS!
 I SAY, "THE LORD IS MY PORTION, THEREFORE I WILL PUT MY HOPE IN HIM."

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

Who is worship for?

I live in Nashville, so when I was writing this book I decided to go have a conversation with my friend Phil Joel (formerly of the Newsboys, currently leader of the band Zealand). As a musician who has written dozens of worship songs and taught on worship, I wanted to get his thoughts on worship. As we sat on his front porch, this is the gist of what he shared, although I'm paraphrasing: "We think worship is for God, but He doesn't need to be worshiped in order to be happy and full. He already knows the things we sing to Him or say to Him. He is God."

But, we also need to worship God because it's for us. The purpose of worship can be settled on this simple truth: It's a reminder for us of how great He is and how much we need Him. Worship reminds us who God is. It reminds us that He is good. It reminds us of what He has already done. And it reminds us of His holiness.

Worship reminds us of who God is and what He has done. Sometimes we see God as some attention hungry, old white-haired judge sitting on a throne waiting for us to mess up. We think God simply wants and needs us to worship Him. This is so not true. God is worthy of our worship, but He needs nothing. He created us, but worshipping Him is more than our obligation. It brings us to a place of understanding His character so that we love Him more. Don't get me wrong, God loves when His children worship Him. Maybe it's like when parents hear their child say *I love you*. God doesn't need that acknowledgment to be who He is, but He loves and longs for us to love and worship Him.

READ LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24.

Do you need a reminder of who God is and how much He loves you?

What are some examples of spiritual food? How will you fill your life with things of God and the Spirit this week?

Does it surprise you that worshipping God is for us and for Him? Why or why not?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *FIVE*

I WILL BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES; HIS PRAISE WILL ALWAYS BE ON MY LIPS.
I WILL BOAST IN THE LORD; THE HUMBLE WILL HEAR AND BE GLAD. PROCLAIM
THE LORD'S GREATNESS WITH ME; LET US EXALT HIS NAME TOGETHER.

PSALM 34:1-3

When and where should we worship?

I am a magician, or if that term bothers you, I am an illusionist. Unlike what some may want to believe, it is hard work. It's not as easy as waving a wand. Much physical dexterity is necessary. I spend hours training my muscles to accomplish the sleight of hand required to do card tricks or make coins "disappear." The reality is that if I don't practice, then I get sloppy. If I don't spend hours working on my effects, then I can't perform or create anything of beauty on stage or on camera. I have no option, I must find time to practice.

Most people think of worship as something that happens at church on Sundays. The truth is, we can worship through music at church or just about anywhere. Finding moments to take advantage of the time during our busy schedules is essential to keeping the Spirit fed and the flesh starved.

Think of it as practicing for your big moment on stage or the field. Athletes and musicians will find ways to practice before their big moment. If there is no practice, then they will get rusty, and eventually be unprepared to take the stage or the field.

Let's not wait for Sunday morning, with the lighting just so, and the band sounding perfect, before we worship.

Music is a wonderful way to connect with God. It's a great way to communicate what's in your heart. Music is a method. You can connect with God even if there is no music playing. Turn your heart toward God and prayerfully worship anywhere and anytime.

Our worship is both individual and corporate. But don't be confused, even our corporate worship at church is individual worship. However, we need the freedom to worship anywhere. Put in some headphones and see how your heart can turn to God and give Him praise, thanksgiving, or adoration. Try this on the bus, at work, or while shopping.

READ PSALM 34:1-8.

What are some practical ways you can worship God individually? List a few ways you will take refuge in Him this week.

WHEN I KEPT SILENT, MY BONES BECAME BRITTLE FROM MY GROANING ALL DAY LONG. FOR DAY AND NIGHT YOUR HAND WAS HEAVY ON ME; MY STRENGTH WAS DRAINED AS IN THE SUMMER'S HEAT. THEN I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN TO YOU AND DID NOT CONCEAL MY INIQUITY. I SAID, "I WILL CONFESS MY TRANSGRESSIONS TO THE LORD," AND YOU FORGAVE THE GUILT OF MY SIN.

PSALM 32:3-5

READ PSALM 51.

In Psalm 51, we see David in the moments after he was caught in adultery and murder. He realized his sin and turned in repentance. Even as a home-wrecking, adulterous murderer, David found forgiveness and a reason to worship God. The reason? His forgiveness. That forgiveness motivated him to worship.

What did David ask from God? What did David praise God for?

As verse 14 reiterates, it's God's righteousness that allows us to worship Him. Not because we are worthy, but because of who God is. He has saved us from sin. He has saved us and forgiven us of our sin. That leads us to worship.

David was in trouble. He refused to confess his sin or admit wrongdoing and humble himself before the Lord. The result was pain and anguish. However, there is freedom in confessing our sins. That freedom leads us to worship. In freedom we see who the Savior is. Free people can worship because we are free to worship. When it's difficult to worship, or when you can't find motivation to worship, examine your heart and ask God to reveal sin. If you find sin or anything close to rebellion, then the answer is to immediately confess it as sin. Go to God and admit the shortcoming or utter failure and watch what happens. He will flood you with His grace. The blood of Christ will erase the sin and you will realize you are clean. You are free. The guilt is gone. All shame is gone. All sin is forgotten. He refuses to count your sins against you.

How sinful was David? He was a murderer and an adulterer. He was a liar and abused his power. He was at his lowest point, yet God forgave him without question. If God forgave a murdering adulterer like David, then surely He can forgive you and me. Our God is good and forgiving. He is worthy of all the worship our hearts have to give.

How could David worship God even after committing murder? How might you follow David's example?

SESSION **3** _____

SCRIPTURE



No wonder that in our very busy lives the enemy works so hard to convince us we don't have time or that the Bible is not relevant to our struggles.

Jesus said in John 17:17: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

God's Word has a way for you to avoid the pitfall of sin. Look what the author of Psalm 119 says:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word. I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands. I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you. —Psalm 119:9-11

The Word of God is fascinating! It is full of historical stories of real people with real lives doing extraordinary things. It's full of stories of romance, war, betrayal, victory, and miracles. There is wisdom and truth that can be applied to our daily lives right now—today. When we study the Bible, we find answers to our deepest questions and direction in our most pressing problems. Scripture not only equips us to think clearly, but also to live selflessly. As you study the Bible more, you will find yourself better equipped to love and serve the people around you. God's Word opens our eyes to God's glory and it opens our hearts to the people around us. If you are not consistently seeking God in His Word, you are missing out. There is an adventure awaiting you each day where you can hear God's voice and watch Him confirm and reveal His will. He will guide you through the day and you will see blessings, peace, and His presence as you walk through good times and bad. The Word of God is powerful, active, and alive. Let's sink our teeth into the Word of God and let it feed us, sustain us, and transform us. Let's feed the Spirit. Let's feed the dog.



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND EFFECTIVE AND SHARPER THAN ANY DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD, PENETRATING AS FAR AS THE SEPARATION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, JOINTS AND MARROW. IT IS ABLE TO JUDGE THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTIONS OF THE HEART.

HEBREWS 4:12

There is a book called *Expert at the Card Table* by S.W. Erdnase. It's widely considered by illusionists to be one of the most important books on card tricks. Illusionists have studied this book for over 100 years.

The true masters of card effects have poured over this book's pages. But here is the problem: we don't really know who wrote it. The author has never been discovered in history or in other books. None of the famous or influential magicians of that era mentioned him. No one has seen him or met him. In fact, if you look up the name Erdnase, you will have trouble finding anyone with that last name. So, who was he? How can we be sure that someone by the name of S.W. Erdnase even wrote this book? The book is a goldmine of skills and techniques, and yet we may never know the true identity of the person who wrote it. However, we actually do know the authors of the Bible. For example, we know who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Luke was a physician. He carefully studied the accounts of what happened in the life of Jesus and the apostles, and he was careful to get the details right. We can trust what Luke says because we know who he was and his writing matches other sources. The Bible is the most important book of all time. It can be trusted. Its power continues to be proven throughout history.

Unlike Erdnase, the authors of the Bible have credibility and trusted character. Why does this matter? Because the Bible is no ordinary book. It is God's Word and it was written by eyewitnesses in front of eyewitnesses. The Bible's most important claims, like the resurrection of Jesus, can be verified. When your flesh tries to convince you that the Bible is just an old book, remember that Scripture is inspired by God—He used specific people who He called to write the truth we find on its pages.

So, let's read the Word with confidence. Let's read the Bible and allow it to change us.

Have you ever been tempted to believe that the Bible can't be trusted? How did you overcome this temptation?

How will you deepen your trust in God and in His Word this week?

THE ONE WHO HAS MY COMMANDS AND KEEPS THEM IS THE ONE WHO LOVES ME. AND THE ONE WHO LOVES ME WILL BE LOVED BY MY FATHER. I ALSO WILL LOVE HIM AND WILL REVEAL MYSELF TO HIM.” JUDAS (NOT ISCARIOT) SAID TO HIM, “LORD, HOW IS IT YOU’RE GOING TO REVEAL YOURSELF TO US AND NOT TO THE WORLD?” JESUS ANSWERED, “IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD. MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, AND WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM.

JOHN 14:21-23

Why should we know the Word of God?

So that we can walk in obedience. Obedience does not come naturally to anyone. We all have the tendency to rebel from birth. Scripture, however, is clear—God calls us to obey Him. But we have a problem.

In Exodus 24:7 we see God making the first covenant with His people. The response from God’s people was, “We will do and obey all that the LORD has commanded.” His people collectively agreed to do all God had spoken and be completely obedient to Him. Their response, though they probably were a little too confident in their ability to obey, reflected their humble and repentant hearts. If we want to be close to God, we must be obedient. But how can we be obedient outside of knowing, understanding, and applying the Word of God? The Word shows us His way and His will. We won’t submit to God if we don’t study His Word.

It really all comes down to this: Do we really love God? If we love Him, then we will obey Him. If we love Him, then we will want to feast on Scripture. It really is that simple.

How will you dwell on God’s commands this week?

What specific commands are you struggling the most to obey?

Take some time to pray for the strength to be obedient to God in these areas of your life. Allow the Word to guide you to live in obedience to God’s commands.

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

... BUT WHENEVER A PERSON TURNS TO THE LORD, THE VEIL IS REMOVED.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:16

I was recently in New York City where I decided to go watch a famous illusionist from the United Kingdom who specializes in illusion techniques based on psychology. He asked the audience to look for a gorilla on stage as he placed a banana on a lamp stand.

After a few minutes he pointed to the stand only to find the banana was gone. So he put out another banana. Later I realized the banana was gone yet again. I never saw the gorilla. My friend sitting next to me saw it both times but most of the audience missed it. How is it possible to be intently watching the stage and yet miss a person, wearing a giant gorilla suit, walk out and take the banana? The answer is quite simple: It's because of our cognitive blind spots. A cognitive blind spot hinders us from seeing the whole picture. Our brain can only handle a certain amount of info at a time. It has a limited amount of bandwidth and therefore misses some things.

The spiritual life also has blind spots. We can be blind to the obvious sin in our lives and not even realize it. It may be the way we are acting toward someone, or believing something false, but we all have moments of blindness.

Before we come to Christ, we are all spiritually blind. We cannot see or understand the truth.

According to Paul, Satan has "blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:16 AGAIN.

We are spiritually blind until we turn to the Lord and the veil is removed.

So, how do we remove blind spots? By reading and understanding the Word of God. Read it, study it, and meditate on it. The Word is a light that will remove blind spots. Anything lurking in the shadows of our hearts will be exposed.

How can we help others come to faith in Christ and no longer live in blindness?

Paul answers that in Romans 10:17 when he explains that faith comes by hearing. And the only way for people to hear the gospel is for someone to speak it to them. Romans 10:14 says "how can they hear without a preacher?"

Who do you need to share truth from God's Word with this week? Why can it be challenging to share our faith?

AND HE SAID, 'THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS HAS APPOINTED YOU TO KNOW HIS WILL, TO SEE THE RIGHTEOUS ONE, AND TO HEAR THE WORDS FROM HIS MOUTH, SINCE YOU WILL BE A WITNESS FOR HIM TO ALL PEOPLE OF WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.

ACTS 22:14-15

My friend, Jason, is a musician. He played in a band that toured the world for about 15 years. He currently spends time in a studio mastering music for other artists' records. He listens for small imperfections and makes adjustments to make the music sound better for the listener.

Jason has an ear like no one I have ever known. He can hear in ways most humans cannot; he hears everything. You can take a coin out of your pocket and drop it on the floor and he can tell you what type of coin hit the floor. He hears with precision.

What if I told you that you could have spiritual ears that hear with the same sort of precision? When we listen to the Word of God, we are hearing God's voice. God uses the Word to speak with precision to His children. When we hear the Word of God whispered in our minds, we can more clearly hear God's direction, His will, and His answer. This doesn't happen overnight, it takes time. You must learn to read the Bible in context so that you can understand spiritual truth the way God wants you to.

You don't have to be an expert, but you do need to put the time in reading and learning what the Scriptures are telling you.

Have you come to a crossroads in life where you wish you knew the answer? Have you found yourself wondering what was best in a decision you were trying to make? Have you ever wished that you could just hear the answer so you know what to do?

The more you understand the Bible, the more equipped you will be to find the answers to these types of questions. God's Word equips us with the wisdom and direction we need to do God's will and live for His glory.

READ ACTS 22:14-15.

What did Ananias say to Paul about God's will? How can you, like Paul, know God's will?

How will you study, rest in, and live out God's will for you this week?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *FIVE*

YOUR WORD IS A LAMP FOR MY FEET AND A LIGHT ON MY PATH.

PSALM 119:105

I had a conversation with someone recently who was in a serious relationship with her boyfriend. She was about to graduate from college and was hoping to be engaged soon.

She seemed genuinely excited about this guy and the possibility of marriage. I had never met her boyfriend and I respect her, so I asked her about his relationship with the Lord. I asked her if he reads and talks about the Bible. I asked her if he talks openly about his relationship with Christ. Her answers were vague. She couldn't remember having many conversations with him about Christ or the Bible. I suggested she might want to consider pumping the brakes on this relationship. If we are committed to following Christ, then we will be in the Word. If we are in the Word, then it will be a part of our conversations with close friends and family, and especially other believers.

How has God been speaking to you lately through His Word? How has the Bible shaped the way you think and live?

Maybe you don't know how to answer these questions because you are not very familiar with Scripture. My challenge to you is to get in God's Word and feast on it. Consider keeping a Bible near your bed. Read it before you get going each day. List some verses on notecards and post them by your mirror and read them while you brush your teeth.

Put the Bible app on your smartphone, and set up alerts and reminders to read it every day. Find a Bible plan to read the Scriptures. Use little moments of downtime during the day to open the Bible or a Bible app on your phone and read a little bit at a time. Designate a specific time each day when you will shut off your phone for the purpose of dwelling on God's Word.

As you have been reading God's Word this week, what has stood out to you? Has God's Word challenged how you have been living? How so?

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to help you be committed to studying and applying the truth of His Word in the weeks and months to come.

FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH HAVE THEIR MINDS SET ON THE THINGS OF THE FLESH, BUT THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT HAVE THEIR MINDS SET ON THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT. NOW THE MIND-SET OF THE FLESH IS DEATH, BUT THE MIND-SET OF THE SPIRIT IS LIFE AND PEACE. THE MIND-SET OF THE FLESH IS HOSTILE TO GOD BECAUSE IT DOES NOT SUBMIT TO GOD'S LAW. INDEED, IT IS UNABLE TO DO SO.

ROMANS 8:5-7

The only way that you will grow in Christ is if you set your mind on it. You must get serious. This is your moment. Decide to set your mind on feeding your spirit and make it happen.

Remember the illustration with two dogs—the one we feed will grow the biggest. If we feed our minds the Word of God, then we will grow the spirit and starve the flesh. Simple, right?

READ ROMANS 8:5-7 AGAIN.

I want to please God. I want to be fully submissive to Him but according to Paul, I can't (v. 7), at least not on my own. I need God's help. I need to cry out to Him for the strength necessary to set my mind on the Word of God.

Each day we need ask God to help us set our minds on the truth of the gospel.

What else can we set our minds on? What does Paul say we should set our minds on (see Phil. 4:8)?

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-2.

How will you make time and space for setting your mind on "things above" this week?

The discipline of reading and setting your mind on God's Word will change your life. The more you feed on the truth, promises, and hope found in Scripture, the more you will grow to be like Christ. Take some time now to pray that God would help you clear your mind of all the pressures, temptations, and distractions in your life. Focus on Him and the truth of His Word. Ask Him to help you prioritize time in His Word every day this week.

SESSION **4**

PRAYER



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

“THIS, THEN, IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY: “OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE.”

MATTHEW 6:9-13

What is prayer, exactly?

Prayer is simply conversation with God. Don't worry if you don't hear His voice in an audible way. He has His own way of whispering to you and you may see it in Scripture as you prayerfully read God's Word.

Prayer is nothing more than taking time to talk to God. If you love Jesus, you will want to talk to Him. How should that conversation go you may ask? Don't over think it! If you were to talk to a trusted friend it would come naturally, wouldn't it? Think of prayer as if you talking to your most trusted friend. You can talk about the things that make you happy. You can share your fears and anxieties. The key is to be honest because nothing is hidden from Him. And nothing is out of bounds. That means you can literally say anything or ask anything and it will not shock Him. Even if you ask for things outside His will, it will not offend Him. He is the most trusted friend you will ever have. If you will be honest with Him, He will help you, guide you, and transform you. He will even change your desires so that they begin to align with His. Most importantly, you will grow more aware of His presence. You will grow closer to the God who made you.

Maybe you have trouble processing your thoughts or communicating. Try writing your prayers to God as if it's a text message or a letter. This can be part of your journaling experience. Journal your prayers to God and then record how He answers, even if it is months or years later. Remember, God always answers our prayers, it's just that sometimes His answer is no or wait. How did God answer your prayer? Record the answer. Later when you return to that journal and see God's faithfulness on display, your faith will be strengthened.

Don't spend a lot of time worrying about how to pray. God wants to hear from you. There is no use in using big churchy words to try and impress God. He knows your heart.

Using the Lord's Prayer as a guide (Matt. 6:9-13), write a short prayer to God, thanking Him, praising Him, confessing sin to Him, and asking for more of Him.

PRAY AT ALL TIMES IN THE SPIRIT WITH EVERY PRAYER AND REQUEST, AND STAY ALERT WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE AND INTERCESSION FOR ALL THE SAINTS.

EPHESIANS 6:18

When should we pray? We are in a war. There is a battle going on right now in the spiritual realm that you may not see.

READ EPHESIANS 6:12-18.

We are in a battle and we need to be prayerful. There is a constant war going on around us that we cannot see. This should get our attention. Satan and the demons are plotting right now to trap and ruin you. The devil hates you and hates any child of God—he spends his time organizing ways to deceive and stop you. The enemy is most definitely at work and he has placed a target on your back. The life we are living is not to be taken lightly. It's serious business. Many people are tricked and trapped by sin. Lives are being destroyed. Let's fight against the enemy!

READ 1 PETER 5:8.

BE SOBER-MINDED, BE ALERT. YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL IS PROWLING AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, LOOKING FOR ANYONE HE CAN DEVOUR.

READ EPHESIANS 6:18 AGAIN.

Notice how we should be in constant prayer. The author stresses the fact that we should be praying at all times. Then he continues with reminding us to stay alert.

Why should we stay alert in constant prayer?

Because of what Paul described in the first part of the passage. Life is a war and we are in it. Stay alert in constant prayer.

Do we have a good reason to pray? Is there danger out there?

How have you seen other lives devoured? How can you prevent it?

Find a quiet place to spend time in prayer. Remember to confess your sins, give thanks to God, and bring your requests before Him.

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

FOR I WILL POUR WATER ON THE THIRSTY LAND AND STREAMS
ON THE DRY GROUND; I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON YOUR
DESCENDANTS AND MY BLESSING ON YOUR OFFSPRING.

ISAIAH 44:3

Why pray? Because God wants to bless you.

Why does He want to bless you? Because we, Christ followers, are His children. And the father loves His children. He blesses those He loves. He wants to bless His children and show His love. This makes me happy. There is no question that the Father loves me. I have seen His love in so many ways. But sometimes my flesh lies to me and tricks me into thinking that God cannot be trusted as my good and perfect Father. My flesh wants me to believe that I have to earn love and acceptance from the Father. My flesh is very tricky and cannot be trusted. When we choose to pray, we are opening up the door for God to show us and remind us over and over that He wants to bless us and is worthy of our trust. He will watch over us.

What does He want to bless you with?

He wants to bless you, first, with His presence. You are His child and the good Father wants to bless His children.

God will pour out His Spirit and His blessings on you if you honestly and humbly seek Him. He will give water to thirsty land. When you are dry and thirsty and in need, He is there to bless you. He will do so because if you have trusted in Him, you are His child and He is a good Father.

Pray. He will bless you.

Read Job 22:26-27 and Isaiah 65:24.

How do we know God hears us?

What struggles or difficulties do you need to cry out to God for help in? Don't wait, cry out to Him now.

He always answers—sometimes it's yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait, and sometimes He says repent first and then we will talk.

DEVOTION STUDY DAY **FOUR** **4**

“ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. SEEK, AND YOU WILL FIND. KNOCK, AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU. FOR EVERYONE WHO ASKS RECEIVES, AND THE ONE WHO SEEKS FINDS, AND TO THE ONE WHO KNOCKS, THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED. WHO AMONG YOU, IF HIS SON ASKS HIM FOR BREAD, WILL GIVE HIM A STONE? OR IF HE ASKS FOR A FISH, WILL GIVE HIM A SNAKE? IF YOU THEN, WHO ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN GIVE GOOD THINGS TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM.

MATTHEW 7:7-11

Pray! Just pray.

We discussed earlier that we should pray because He is good and because He loves us. He also wants us to depend on Him and to come to Him. He wants our attention. He didn't have to promise us anything, but He did.

Jesus' intent in Matthew 7:7-11 is for us to ask. Ask and keep on asking. To knock and keep knocking. To seek and keep seeking. The emphasis is on our persistence. If we ask, knock, and seek, then He will give, bless, respond, rescue, reveal, and so on.

Remember prayer is not a magic wand that you just wave around and make things appear. It's not a trick you can use to get whatever you want. Prayer is the promise that God will take action when His children pray according to His will. We should not just pray for what we want, but for God to change our hearts and align them with His so we can honor Him.

So, have confidence that God listens when you talk to Him. Matthew 21:22 says “And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask in prayer.” Believe and pray in faith and watch what God does.

He is the good Father who wants to give good gifts to His children. Believe He is good.

Are you persistent in prayer? Why can this be difficult sometimes?

What are a few things from Scripture and this session that you need to dwell on and remember about prayer this week?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY FIVE

REJOICE ALWAYS, PRAY CONSTANTLY, GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING;
FOR THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS. DON'T STIFLE
THE SPIRIT. DON'T DESPISE PROPHECIES, BUT TEST ALL THINGS. HOLD
ON TO WHAT IS GOOD. STAY AWAY FROM EVERY KIND OF EVIL.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

How should you pray?

We discussed earlier that we should always pray because there is a war against us in the spiritual realm. But you may ask, how should I pray? First, pray all the time, every chance you get. You don't have to bow your head and close your eyes. You can pray while riding in the car or walking or while you are in class after you have finished all your work. These can be short prayers that continually roll out of your mind. I strive to have an attitude of prayer. I like to be thanking God as I see things throughout my day. I like to thank Him for all of His blessings. I thank Him for His protection. I rejoice over all of the good things He has done for me. I love to thank Him for His death on the cross and resurrection. It's easy to be in prayer when we are thinking about how great God is.

I try and pray continually by asking God for small things as well as big things. I will pray for people I see in the community even if I don't know them. I will pray for pastors and missionaries. I will pray for anyone who crosses my mind during the day. These prayers oftentimes are not more than a few words. I am trying to align my heart with His so that I can be more like Jesus. This is what Christ following is about. Being a Christian is becoming more like Jesus. I have a long way to go. But the more I pray, the more I understand how to live like Jesus, think like Jesus, and love like Jesus.

Rejoice, give thanks in all circumstances. This is a great way to "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" as it says in Colossians 3:2.

This will feed your spirit and starve the flesh.

What is God's will? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18. It tells us exactly what God's will is—to pray and to rejoice.

How are you praying? How are you rejoicing in the Lord?

HE ALSO TOLD THIS PARABLE TO SOME WHO TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS AND LOOKED DOWN ON EVERYONE ELSE: “TWO MEN WENT UP TO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY, ONE A PHARISEE AND THE OTHER A TAX COLLECTOR. THE PHARISEE WAS STANDING AND PRAYING LIKE THIS ABOUT HIMSELF: ‘GOD, I THANK YOU THAT I’M NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE—GREEDY, UNRIGHTEOUS, ADULTERERS, OR EVEN LIKE THIS TAX COLLECTOR. I FAST TWICE A WEEK; I GIVE A TENTH OF EVERYTHING I GET.’ “BUT THE TAX COLLECTOR, STANDING FAR OFF, WOULD NOT EVEN RAISE HIS EYES TO HEAVEN BUT KEPT STRIKING HIS CHEST AND SAYING, ‘GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER!’ I TELL YOU, THIS ONE WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED RATHER THAN THE OTHER; BECAUSE EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, BUT THE ONE WHO HUMBLDES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED.”

LUKE 18:9-14

Compare and contrast the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector in this parable. Whose prayer was honoring to God? Why?

What is humility? Why is it crucial to pray with humility? How might our pride hinder our prayers?

Have you ever heard someone else pray and thought to yourself, “I can’t pray like that! I wouldn’t even know where to start!” While Jesus is concerned with correcting those who trusted in themselves, the above parable tells us something about the type of prayer that honors God. He isn’t impressed by those who know all the right things to say, nor is He moved to action when we pray the correct words. God wants us to be humble and honest when we pray. We must realize we are needy, but He is sufficient and He is our provider.

Don’t worry about trying to figure out the right things to say to God. Rather, just be honest and ask God for help. When you cry out to God for help, you are admitting that He is greater and you need Him. Additionally, notice that the tax collector was honest about his sin. Perhaps lately you’ve felt like you don’t measure up or you’re not good enough to pray to God. If that’s you, just admit this and ask for His forgiveness and mercy. The good news is that when we humbly ask for mercy, God gives it. We serve a God who loves to forgive His people when they cry out to Him. Remember the ultimate goal of prayer is to seek God.

SESSION **5**

SOLITUDE



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

BUT WHEN YOU PRAY, GO INTO YOUR PRIVATE ROOM, SHUT YOUR DOOR, AND PRAY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN SECRET. AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU.

MATTHEW 6:6

If you want to grow closer to God, you need to spend some time in solitude. When we get alone and get still, we can grow in intimacy with the God who made us.

READ MATTHEW 6:6 AGAIN.

Why is it important that you make time to spend alone with God?

Have you ever heard the saying, “Love is spelled T-I-M-E”? If you love someone, you will want to spend quality time with him or her. The more time you spend together, the more it will begin to bother you when you are away. To be separated from someone you love creates a longing that compels you to find a way to spend time with them.

It’s very difficult to love someone when you choose not to spend time with them. This is why FaceTime and Skype were created. We have some family who are missionaries in Peru. They spend a few years at a time in the Amazon jungle working with the local people there. All three of their children were born there in Peru. We will often all gather around a computer screen and make a Skype or FaceTime call. It’s not the same as being in the same room but it was the best we could do. My point is, we made an effort to see them every chance we could.

Solitude is about quality time with God the Father. He wants us to give Him our undivided attention.

Have you ever been interrupted or distracted when trying to have a conversation with someone? Maybe someone kept calling or texting, or maybe you did not realize the pressing nature of the issue or situation at the time and simply felt bothered. Can you imagine that scenario and feel the frustration on the other end of the one trying to communicate with you? I think God may feel the same way when we are distracted and not spending time with Him. Solitude is simply eliminating distractions so you can talk to Jesus and hear from Him. Listening is key. When the distractions are gone, the intimacy of God is near. That’s quality time. That’s solitude.

How will you eliminate distractions this week so you can focus on listening to God?

BECAUSE IF ANYONE IS A HEARER OF THE WORD AND NOT A DOER, HE IS LIKE SOMEONE LOOKING AT HIS OWN FACE IN A MIRROR. FOR HE LOOKS AT HIMSELF, GOES AWAY, AND IMMEDIATELY FORGETS WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE WAS.

JAMES 1:23-24

Meditation. The word *meditation* is a confusing term. Some people hear meditation and think of Eastern religious practices, or transcendental meditation where people think they can fly. These sorts of things are not at all what the Bible has in mind when it refers to meditation.

One day, we went to the beach. When we arrived, we noticed a guy meditating by sitting with his legs crossed on a beach towel. He would begin to shake and convulse as if he were out of control. He shook violently until his phone rang, then he would check his phone and then go right back to shaking around. It was wild to watch. This is not the type of meditation I am talking about. The type of meditation the Bible calls us to practice is completely different.

Biblical meditation is not letting go of our minds and ourselves, but rather focusing our minds on truth. Christian meditation requires contemplation—deliberately focusing on the truth of God's Word. We need to prepare our minds to deeply consider the truths and promises of God in Scripture, looking for meaning and application to our lives.

Read James 1:23-24 again. How does James describe those who hear God's Word but fail to put it into action?

Meditation gives us a chance to think about the truths of God and to apply those truths. Thinking on these truths that we read in the Word is such a great way to find God's will. He will guide us and we will have the right direction in life when we meditate on His Word daily.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:8.

It says to think on these things—these things will feed your spirit.

Why is it important that you worship God with both your heart and your mind?

What, specifically, could you think on this week as a means of seeking God and growing in your relationship with Him?

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

JESUS CAME NEAR AND SAID TO THEM, "ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO, THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE."

MATTHEW 28:18-20

The passenger.

When I was 22 years old I had to drive an hour to get to work. I didn't have a radio or any other digital device at the time. I would get into my truck and clear a spot on the passenger seat as if someone was riding with me. I would save that seat for Jesus to ride with me.

I know what you are thinking, this is super cheesy! I know I didn't need to leave this seat open for Jesus to be with me. I know that God is with me at all times, but it helped me actively think about Christ so that I might pray more freely as I actively acknowledged His presence with me there in the truck.

What was the last thing Jesus said to His disciples in the Great Commission (v. 20)? Why do you think they needed this reminder?

Clearing off the seat next to you in your car or at the table might not help you or it might be too cheesy for you. However, here is what I know, you need to constantly remind yourself of God's presence in your life. One of the last things Jesus said to His disciples was that He would always be with them (Matt. 28:20).

We need to actually believe that Jesus is with us. We need to realize that we are never truly alone—as Christ followers, our Savior is with us at all times.

How might you more actively acknowledge Christ's presence in your daily life?

Solitude is about creating space for God. Creating a place for you and Him to meet and spend quality time.

How can you create space in your life to be alone with God?

NOW MOSES TOOK A TENT AND PITCHED IT OUTSIDE THE CAMP, AT A DISTANCE FROM THE CAMP; HE CALLED IT THE TENT OF MEETING. ANYONE WHO WANTED TO CONSULT THE LORD WOULD GO TO THE TENT OF MEETING THAT WAS OUTSIDE THE CAMP. WHENEVER MOSES WENT OUT TO THE TENT, ALL THE PEOPLE WOULD STAND UP, EACH ONE AT THE DOOR OF HIS TENT, AND THEY WOULD WATCH MOSES UNTIL HE ENTERED THE TENT. WHEN MOSES ENTERED THE TENT, THE PILLAR OF CLOUD WOULD COME DOWN AND REMAIN AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE TENT, AND THE LORD WOULD SPEAK WITH MOSES.

EXODUS 33:7-9

Moses created space for solitude. He followed God's lead in building the tent of meeting which allowed him to be alone with God.

You can see that when Moses purposefully had solitude with the Lord, God came and spoke "face to face." Amazing! I wonder what it was like to meet face to face with God. To hear God's voice face-to-face seems so incredible! You may not see God face-to-face but, in faith, you can know that He is near, He is listening and He is ready.

I want to meet with God and hear Him talk to me like He did with Moses. I want to hear from God like a friend. I can't imagine how incredible it was for Moses to just hang out with God like a friend. I long for the day that I can sit face-to-face and have a conversation with God and actually see Him. But until then I will be satisfied with making time to be alone with Him here. His presence still brings joy even if it doesn't come with a cloud over the entrance of our door.

How would it feel to talk to God face-to-face?

How can you create space for solitude?

What is one step you will take this week to make space for time alone with God in prayer and in His Word?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *FIVE*

THEN HE SAID, "GO OUT AND STAND ON THE MOUNTAIN IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE." AT THAT MOMENT, THE LORD PASSED BY. A GREAT AND MIGHTY WIND WAS TEARING AT THE MOUNTAINS AND WAS SHATTERING CLIFFS BEFORE THE LORD, BUT THE LORD WAS NOT IN THE WIND. AFTER THE WIND THERE WAS AN EARTHQUAKE, BUT THE LORD WAS NOT IN THE EARTHQUAKE. AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE THERE WAS A FIRE, BUT THE LORD WAS NOT IN THE FIRE. AND AFTER THE FIRE THERE WAS A VOICE, A SOFT WHISPER. WHEN ELIJAH HEARD IT, HE WRAPPED HIS FACE IN HIS MANTLE AND WENT OUT AND STOOD AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE CAVE.

1 KINGS 19:11-13

Here is the backdrop for this story. Elijah was on the run, hiding from those who were trying to kill him. The Lord led Elijah into a mountain cave where he spent the night and the most incredible thing happened! There was an earthquake, a tornado, a fire, and then a small whisper.

I love this. God spoke to Elijah with a whisper. There was the power of a tornado, earthquake, and even a fire, but God chose to speak in the form of a whisper. The contrast was obvious. Imagine the loud roar of a tornado. Imagine the rumble of an earthquake. Think about the blazing sound of a big fire. Compare these to a soft whisper.

God is whispering to us every time we read His Word. If God whispers, we must get still to hear it. That's why solitude is so important. Uninterrupted solitude is one of the best ways to hear from God. Solitude minimizes distractions, clears our minds, and helps us focus on seeking God in prayer and Bible study.

God whispered to Elijah and gave him direction. God met with Elijah in solitude. It was a powerful moment.

How can you make sure you hear the whispers of God?

How has God been whispering to you lately? How will you respond?

ON THE SEVENTH DAY GOD HAD COMPLETED HIS WORK THAT HE HAD DONE, AND HE RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORK THAT HE HAD DONE. GOD BLESSED THE SEVENTH DAY AND DECLARED IT HOLY, FOR ON IT HE RESTED FROM ALL HIS WORK OF CREATION.

GENESIS 2:2 - 3

Every Tuesday, I do something a little out of the ordinary. I make it my Sabbath. Let me explain.

I am traveling almost every week to do ministry in some part of the world. Almost every weekend, including Sunday, I am working at a church. Most times I am traveling back home on Monday. Therefore Tuesday is generally the day I find myself needing a break from work. Truthfully, there is never a natural time for me to rest. I always have work to do. I always have someone needing me to answer a call or an email. The same is probably true for you. However, I force myself to rest because I know it's good for me. To make time to rest, however, I have to have a plan. My plan looks something like this.

I take time off and devote it to three things. The morning is for me and God to hang out. I use this time to read Scripture and other devotional books. Then I just allow time to be still and meditate and listen for the whispers of God. I make sure that my phone is turned off and I stay away from computers. I will oftentimes find a coffee shop or a place in nature to get this day of solitude and rest kicked off. The afternoon is for time by myself doing something I enjoy, like a hobby. In the evening, I have a date night with my wife. I have learned that I need to invest in this relationship in the same way I invest in my spiritual life. I have found these days to be tremendously rejuvenating. The flesh will try and tell me that I can't afford to take a day off. The truth is, spiritually speaking, I can't afford not to take a day off.

I have to plan for solitude, otherwise my tendency to overwork myself will take over. I must find a day that I can set aside to rest and focus on God. The point of the Sabbath is not the day of the week, but that we set aside time to rest, worship, and focus on God. Solitude feeds the Spirit.

READ JOHN 15:1-11.

What time can you designate to have a restful Sabbath?

What might your Sabbath routine look like? How could you start this week?

SESSION **6**

FASTING



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

TEAR YOUR HEARTS, NOT JUST YOUR CLOTHES, AND RETURN TO THE LORD YOUR GOD. FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE, SLOW TO ANGER, ABOUNDING IN FAITHFUL LOVE, AND HE RELENTS FROM SENDING DISASTER. WHO KNOWS? HE MAY TURN AND RELENT AND LEAVE A BLESSING BEHIND HIM, SO YOU CAN OFFER GRAIN AND WINE TO THE LORD YOUR GOD.

JOEL 2:13-14

How do we know that it's time to fast?

Simply put, fasting is about growing in your desperation for God.

There have been times in my life where I felt the nudge from the Holy Spirit to fast. Sometimes I was wanting to fast to seek His will for my life and ministry. There have been times when my priorities seemed to be out of focus, or maybe straight up rotten. I remember being so desperate to be with God that I needed to fast. Fasting is such a beautiful thing. I can think of no better way to reset our hearts and priorities.

Joel lived among people who had turned their backs on God. They were seeing an agricultural plague of locusts that motivated him to call the people to repent and fast to avoid the coming destruction and further damage. The answer as to when to repent is always now—don't put off turning away from sin and seeking God's face. When God nudges you to fast, then the time to obey is now. Let Him prepare your heart for a fast. Always fast carefully and with accountability. If you sense the Lord leading you to fast, share this with a Christian mentor or parent and start thinking and praying about what that might look like.

How might fasting help you focus on drawing near to Christ? How might it help you grow in your desperation for God?

Have you ever discussed whether a short fast might be appropriate for you with a parent or adult Christian mentor? Make plans to do so this week?

THE GREATEST AMONG YOU WILL BE YOUR SERVANT.
WHOEVER EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, AND
WHOEVER HUMBLLES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED.

MATTHEW 23:11-12

What are the benefits of fasting? This may seem like the wrong question to ask, but let's explore this further.

The first benefit is obedience. Faithful obedience to God is always a blessing, it brings freedom. It frees the mind of guilt and lessens the power of temptation. Obeying God can have a momentous effect. When you are doing what's right, it's easier to continue doing what is right. When you are living in sin, it's easy to continue living in sin. During times of fasting you will notice your heart and brain begin aligning with God. Obedience will always naturally follow.

Another benefit I've experienced from fasting is power. In fasting, your prayer life gets better and with more prayer comes more power. What power? Power over sin, power in ministry, God's power experienced in your life. Why do we see God's power increase in our lives when we pray more often? Simple, when we truly pray, we are humbling ourselves and admitting our weaknesses. We must confess our need for His perfect strength.

Begin with fasting, and let your prayer life grow. During times of prayer and fasting you will see God increase in power over your life. You will see how real He truly is.

READ MATTHEW 23:11-12 AGAIN.

Notice that it says those who are humble will be exalted. Exalted by whom? God Almighty.

READ JAMES 4:6.

Who does God oppose?

Those who are proud. The most obvious symptom of pride is prayerlessness. If you do not pray, then you can be sure of one thing: you are a proud person. But God shows favor to the humble. How do we become humble? The best way I know is to start with prayer and fasting. To fast is to run to Jesus. To fast is to deny the flesh and its desires for the sake of knowing our Savior with greater affection and intimacy.

What are other benefits to fasting you can think of?

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

WHENEVER YOU FAST, DON'T BE GLOOMY LIKE THE HYPOCRITES. FOR THEY MAKE THEIR FACES UNATTRACTIVE SO THAT THEIR FASTING IS OBVIOUS TO PEOPLE. TRULY I TELL YOU, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD.

MATTHEW 6:16

Prayer and fasting. They go together. If you fast without praying, then you are not really fasting. That would be more like a hunger strike.

In 2003, the world famous magician David Blaine locked himself into a glass box over the River Thames in England for 44 days. It was a huge spectacle. Some people were not sure if it was real or an illusion. I saw it on TV and it sure looked real to me. What's interesting about this stunt is that he didn't eat for the entire 44 days. It was self-inflicted starvation that brought about much controversy and attention. It was very a bold stunt to promote his TV show on ABC (please don't ever try doing something like this, by the way). But, Blaine swore off food for a month and a half to promote himself. He lost a significant amount of body mass in the process and at the end of 44 days, he was taken straight to a hospital. The whole thing was quite strange because so many people were watching. It became worldwide news.

That's not a spiritual fast. Fasting really should be more private than this. Blaine had thousands of people watching him and each day he became a little more emaciated. When we fast, we must not make a public spectacle out of it (Matt. 6:16).

Read Matthew 6:16 again. What is the purpose of fasting? What must not be the purpose?

How might you pray and fast and seek God for the right kind of reward?

We need to fast in humility with the emphasis being on prayer. Anyone can fast, but it takes us being very careful to not use fasting as a way to get attention.

MY FLESH AND MY HEART MAY FAIL, BUT GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART, MY PORTION FOREVER. THOSE FAR FROM YOU WILL CERTAINLY PERISH; YOU DESTROY ALL WHO ARE UNFAITHFUL TO YOU. BUT AS FOR ME, GOD'S PRESENCE IS MY GOOD. I HAVE MADE THE LORD GOD MY REFUGE, SO I CAN TELL ABOUT ALL YOU DO.

PSALM 73:26 - 28

The great hunger strike.

Many people have gone without food for a certain cause. Over the past few decades we have seen people use a hunger strike as a method for getting their agenda across to the public or the government. Nelson Mandela had a hunger strike in 1966 to protest prison conditions in South Africa. Hunger strikes are not a new thing. Whether we agree with the cause or not, the truth is hunger strikes get people's attention. Biblical fasting is not a hunger strike. Some people see fasting as a way to get God's attention and compel Him to act on our behalf. God cannot be manipulated into action. Fasting neither impresses God nor shocks Him into action.

God already knows what we need. Fasting is for us. It changes us and should make us more like Jesus. It's not a way to force God to do something. If we are going to fast, we must remember it is a chance for us to become more like Him. We draw near to Him and allow that to be the goal. Sometimes people may be tempted to fast so that a circumstance will change. They may think that if they fast, then God may change a bad circumstance and problems can be avoided. The truth is that may or may not happen. God is in charge and can do as He sees fit. Our hope as we fast should not be that God would change our lives or circumstances, but our hope should be for God Himself—we should long to be closer to Him and more like Him.

Fasting is not a hunger strike to force God to give us attention. He is God, He already knows what's going on. We need to draw close to Him and allow His presence to be the goal.

Read Psalm 73:23-28. How might you draw near to God this week?

What should you expect from Him as you do so?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY FIVE

BUT AS THE ONE WHO CALLED YOU IS HOLY, YOU ALSO ARE TO BE HOLY IN ALL YOUR CONDUCT; FOR IT IS WRITTEN, BE HOLY, BECAUSE I AM HOLY.

1 PETER 1:15-16

Fasting helps us see our sin. Fasting gives us the opportunity to repent.

Fasting can help us slow down enough to focus on God's presence in our lives. In His presence we can see how holy He is—more holy than we can comprehend. In the presence of a holy God our sin becomes very evident. In those moments we have the opportunity to repent and experience freedom from sin.

How holy is God? In the Book of Revelation there are angels who constantly sing “holy, holy, holy.” When a word is repeated in Greek three times in a row, it's like saying that it's the most extreme. So when we see “holy, holy, holy,” it communicates that there is none more holy. He is the epitome of holiness to the extreme. What does holy actually mean? It literally means *without sin, set apart, or without blemish*. When something even slightly unholy comes near something holy, then the “slightly unholy” thing will quickly be seen as completely unholy. In Exodus 19:12, because of God's holiness, people are not even allowed to go near the mountain where God gave Moses the Law. If someone even touched the edge of the mountain, he or she would die. That's how serious His holiness is. He is beyond anything we can imagine, therefore repentance must be a central part of our fasting experience.

What is repentance?

How might fasting, when approached carefully and humbly, lead to repentance?

We don't usually hear the word *repentance* outside of church. What is it?

It means to change direction. It's a change of attitude. When our heart takes a 180 degree turn, that is repentance. However, repentance is not just a change of direction physically. We must also have a change of mind and heart. We must look to Christ to change our hearts so that we will begin moving and living in the direction He has for us.

We need to turn from sin. Fasting gives us a chance to see our sin and repent. When we fast out of a humble desire for Christ, it leads to godliness.

THEN JESUS LEFT THE JORDAN, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS FOR FORTY DAYS TO BE TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL. HE ATE NOTHING DURING THOSE DAYS, AND WHEN THEY WERE OVER, HE WAS HUNGRY. THE DEVIL SAID TO HIM, "IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, TELL THIS STONE TO BECOME BREAD." BUT JESUS ANSWERED HIM, "IT IS WRITTEN: MAN MUST NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE."

LUKE 4:1-4

READ LUKE 4:1-13.

Why do you think Jesus fasted prior to beginning His public ministry?

How might fasting help you to lean more heavily on God? How might it help you trust Him more?

Fasting is the beginning. It reminds us of how desperately we need God for everything. No one likes to be needy but in our relationship with God, neediness is a good thing. Our neediness honors God when we look to Him to fill us with what we are lacking. In other words, in admitting our neediness, we are acknowledging God's sufficiency. When we fast with the right motive—to draw near to God—He blesses us with more of Himself and launches us out into the world with a renewed sense of hope, strength, and purpose.

Jesus' fasting was a launchpad for His public ministry. It all began with fasting.

He went into the desert and met with God. He returned full of the power in the Spirit.

As Luke 4:4 references how we "must not live on bread alone," we are reminded of the importance of being fed spiritually. One of the best ways to launch a ministry is by fasting. The best way to continue ministry is fasting. Fasting is good for your walk with Christ and for your ministry. We are all called to ministry in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and around the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

Talk to a parent or church leader about fasting as a means to grow in your walk with Christ so that you might live more fully on mission for Him. As a teenager, your body is growing and changing rapidly and involving an adult in your fast will help you make sure you fast in a manner that is safe and does not do harm to your body.

SESSION **7**

MINISTRY



1 DEVOTION STUDY DAY ONE

AS HE PASSED ALONGSIDE THE SEA OF GALILEE, HE SAW SIMON AND ANDREW, SIMON'S BROTHER, CASTING A NET INTO THE SEA—FOR THEY WERE FISHERMEN. "FOLLOW ME," JESUS TOLD THEM, "AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISH FOR PEOPLE." IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM. GOING ON A LITTLE FARTHER, HE SAW JAMES THE SON OF ZEBEDEE AND HIS BROTHER JOHN IN A BOAT PUTTING THEIR NETS IN ORDER. IMMEDIATELY HE CALLED THEM, AND THEY LEFT THEIR FATHER ZEBEDEE IN THE BOAT WITH THE HIRED MEN AND FOLLOWED HIM.

MARK 1:16 - 20

When I was 18 there was a commercial on TV for the Marines. The slogan was "a few good men." I later heard a friend of mine say that God was not looking for perfect people, or talented people, or the most intelligent people, but He just needs a few good men.

When God called the disciples, who did He choose? Average dudes. Nothing special. We know from Mark 1:16-20 that many of the disciples that Jesus called were fishermen. These were not highly educated or extremely qualified individuals. But they were called. They were obedient. They were available. Jesus was looking for a few good men and women. He was looking for people He could personally teach so they could replicate and multiply.

I remember when God called me to full-time ministry. I was already doing ministry with every opportunity at my university, and at work.

He began to get my attention. I realized He was looking for a "few good men."

That statement stuck with me. I realized that I am not perfect, but I am available to be used by God. Sign me up. You can sign up too! He wants to build His kingdom by using a few average men and women. That's you and I. Let's go. Let's obey His call.

Who does God want to use to build the kingdom?

Will you enlist? How will you participate in and spread His kingdom?

JESUS CAME NEAR AND SAID TO THEM, “ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO, THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

What is ministry?

When Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He called some young men who were fishing and said, “Come follow me, and I will make you fish for men.” They simply left their nets and followed Jesus and began loving and reaching people. They did everything they could to meet the physical needs of people. But most importantly, they pointed people to the truth. Jesus set a great example by both showing love and speaking truth.

Sometimes people get confused on this issue. Some people find it easy to feed the homeless or provide clothing for people in need. It’s great to help people with physical things, but what do the people we serve need more than anything else? They need a relationship with God. Our acts of service should be coupled with speaking the truth of the gospel.

Ministry is always gospel-focused. If we give people food and water, but neglect to give them Christ—we’ve engaged in charity work, not missions. There is nothing wrong with helping people, but true ministry involves spreading the good news of salvation that is only found in Jesus Christ. What good is it to help someone with a physical need and ignore their spiritual need? We must do both.

READ MATTHEW 28:18-20 AGAIN.

Jesus and His disciples were devoted to ministry—they loved people and spoke truth to them. When Jesus left the disciples, He left them with the command to go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them all He had commanded. Ministry can be summed up in this statement: Show love, speak truth.

What is one way you could engage in ministry in your school or neighborhood?

Who will you show love and speak truth to this week?

3 DEVOTION STUDY DAY *THREE*

ACCORDING TO THE GRACE GIVEN TO US, WE HAVE DIFFERENT GIFTS:

IF PROPHECY, USE IT ACCORDING TO THE PROPORTION OF ONE'S FAITH; IF SERVICE, USE IT IN SERVICE; IF TEACHING, IN TEACHING; IF EXHORTING, IN EXHORTATION; GIVING, WITH GENEROSITY; LEADING, WITH DILIGENCE; SHOWING MERCY, WITH CHEERFULNESS.

ROMANS 12:6-8

God gave you gifts. It's like Christmas morning. You need to open the paper wrapping and discover what He has given you.

God uses people to carry out ministry. How does He do this? He has given every follower spiritual gifts. You are to use those gifts to minister to other people. Those in your church and in the community should be receiving ministry from you as you use your gifts. And you should also be empowered by others using their gifts to minister to you.

All Christ followers possess gifts for ministry. They are called spiritual gifts. They are what God has given us in order for us to build the Kingdom. Here are some examples:

- 1 Corinthians 12:8-10
- 1 Corinthians 12:28
- Ephesians 4:11

You can find your spiritual gift by serving in different ways as needs and opportunities arise. As you serve, you will notice that some things come naturally. Some things will give you great joy. Pay attention to what these things are and let your gifts grow and develop.

What are your spiritual gifts? Name 2-3 things that rise to the top.

What is one practical way you could use one of your spiritual gifts to help or serve someone this week?

Pray for strength to begin using your gifts deliberately and consistently to serve others and build Christ's kingdom.

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME
ON YOU, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, IN ALL
JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH.

ACTS 1:8

When should I start?

You may be asking yourself, “When can I start?” Maybe you should wait to start until you are older? Maybe you should wait until you know the Bible inside and out?

You don’t need to reach top-level spiritual status before you can be used by God. Start serving right where you are and allow God to work through you in your home, school, and community. I see many Christians who say, “I’ll wait until I am a mature Christian,” or “I’ll wait until I get properly trained,” or “I’ll wait until I have my life all figured out.” Some never start for fear of failure. Some never start for fear of being embarrassed. We need to get past our fears. Such fears are tools used by the enemy to paralyze you and make you ineffective. If you have been saved by God, then you are ready. You can serve, love, and share your testimony of God’s work in your life.

God wants to use ordinary people like you and me to build the kingdom. He even promised to give us power in the Spirit to enable us to be effective. Look at what He tells the disciples right before He left them to start their mission. Read Acts 1:8 again.

We are His witnesses. He will give us power through the Holy Spirit. Know this and act on it.

When the apostle Paul was saved by Jesus, he immediately began to tell people about the change in his life. He didn’t do everything right; he was far from perfect. But God used him. Ananias helped disciple him in those early years, but Paul was eager to point people to Christ.

What are you waiting for? What is holding you back from engaging in ministry?

If you keep coming up with things you ought to do before you start doing ministry, you’ll never get started. Start now and then develop your gifts as you go.

What’s holding you back from sharing your testimony with a friend? What’s holding you back from serving or volunteering in your church? Or community?

5 DEVOTION STUDY DAY FIVE

WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT FROM THE HEART, AS SOMETHING DONE FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR PEOPLE, KNOWING THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE THE REWARD OF AN INHERITANCE FROM THE LORD. YOU SERVE THE LORD CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

Where should I start? The good news is that you can start where you are right now.

Some people can get bogged down with the idea of having to go to a place to do ministry. Maybe it's going to Africa to work with orphans, or on a mission trip to a needy or unreached people group far away. These are all good things but you don't need to start there. Start at home, at school, at work and, most importantly, at your church.

If you are not currently doing ministry in some way, you need to re-examine the New Testament. Ministry is essential to following Jesus. Start where you are. A college professor of mine used to say, "Bloom where you are planted." Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8 that they would start in Jerusalem and then branch out to the ends of the earth. Start locally before you think globally.

Read Colossians 3:23-24 again and think about the things you do on a day-to-day basis and how you can do the smallest of things for the glory of God.

I was saved when I was in tenth grade. I did not have a seminary degree or a certificate on the wall. I was just a knucklehead teenager who had a heart to serve Jesus. I started doing ministry in my hometown right away. I began praying with friends and reading Scripture with them. I would invite others who were not followers of Christ to join us. I would find creative ways to introduce Jesus to other people. Later I got a little more bold and started to talk to strangers about Jesus. I didn't do a great job, I didn't get it totally right all of the time, but God used me and my friends. Later in life I began to search for other ways to serve in ministry. I now have a ministry that takes me to many different countries around the world but it all started in high school. I've made lots of mistakes along the way but God has used my mistakes to help me grow. I will never regret doing ministry in my small rural town in Louisiana.

Where should you start? Draw a circle around your house, school, or church. Start there.

List a few ways you will start sharing Jesus there this week.

SO WE DO NOT FOCUS ON WHAT IS SEEN, BUT ON WHAT IS UNSEEN. FOR
WHAT IS SEEN IS TEMPORARY, BUT WHAT IS UNSEEN IS ETERNAL.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

How should I get started?

Look for opportunities. If you ask God to give you an opportunity to show love and/or speak truth, He will do it. He wants to use you and He will show you ways you can be used right where you are. He will not ask you to preach a sermon if you aren't ready. God equips and empowers us as we grow. He promises to work through us as we use the spiritual gifts He has given us. I recommend starting small and doing something in your circle of influence.

It starts with opening our eyes. If we walk around blindly and not noticing the world around us, we will miss opportunities to love, serve, and point others to Christ. Be aware of the hurting world around you. Ask God to help you take notice of someone who is broken or in need. When someone is upset or isolates themselves, simply talk to them. Take initiative.

Maybe you will notice a problem or a spiritual need in the community. Maybe it is something that keeps coming up. When you find yourself thinking about that person or need over and over again, then it might just be the Holy Spirit showing you that it's time to act.

Be careful though, for not all problems in the world are ours to solve.

There was a missionary in Central America who posted a picture of a poor neighborhood that she was working in. Some people in the U.S. noticed the dogs in the picture. The dogs were skinny and uncared for. Some people wanted to send money to help save the dogs. They totally missed out on the fact that it was the children who were starving. Remember who and what is most important. If you are searching and praying for God to use you, then I can promise you He will do it. Remember to show love and speak truth, and let's build the kingdom of God together.

***How can we serve our church today? How can we show love to a friend in need?
How can we love our community?***

How will you prioritize your time and energy to serve God and point people to Christ?