

CAPITAL RESOURCES

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

LEADER'S GUIDE



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Sometimes trying to connect with God is difficult. We wonder why he seems so distant or why we have such a hard time breaking unhealthy patterns in our lives. Our prayers seem to go unanswered. Maybe our worship seems stale. What are we to do?

Perhaps the answer is to spend some time discovering (or rediscovering!) spiritual disciplines. God desires a real and authentic relationship with us and he created spiritual disciplines—prayer, community, Scripture, and so on—as a way for us to experience that relationship with him.

Through spiritual disciplines, we learn more about who we are and more about who God is. Through spiritual disciplines, we connect more deeply with community and learn how to love God and love others more deeply. Through spiritual disciplines, God helps us move from stuck to unstuck.

We hope that you grow more deeply with God and one another over the next 6 weeks. Come as you are and get ready to deepen your relationship with God and one another.

Grace and Peace,
Kim Perry and Alison Smith

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

OUR JOURNEYS WITH GOD SO FAR

So, you're interested in spiritual disciplines? Before we get into the "what" of spiritual disciplines, let's get into the why. God desires a real and authentic relationship with us and he created spiritual disciplines- prayer, community, Scripture, and so on- as a way for us to experience that relationship with him. So let's begin by thinking back on our relationship with God so far.

[Refer to Worksheet 1]

Take 5 minutes or so to fill out this page. Permit yourself to be honest- there are no "right" answers.

INDIVIDUAL TIME (5 MIN.)

[Group fills out sheet]

GROUP DISCUSSION (5-10 MIN.)

What struck you or surprised you as you filled out the sheet?
What are you interested in learning about God this year?

SO WHAT THE HECK ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES? (2-3 MIN.)

Spiritual disciplines often involve prayer, reading the Bible and connecting with Christian community. A spiritual discipline isn't something that we use to control God or control our progress with him. Rather, it's a tool that God uses to draw us closer to him. Through spiritual disciplines, we learn more about who we are and more about who God is.

All that a spiritual discipline is is making ourselves available to God. It's not about praying harder or reading more Scripture- those are meaningless if we are not open to God in the process. The only prerequisite is a longing for God.

Richard Foster, pastor and author of "Celebration of Discipline" says it this way: "God intends the disciplines of the spiritual life to be ordinary for human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns."

Over the next 6 weeks we'll be exploring a few spiritual disciplines that God created to help us connect with him. This week, week 1, is an introduction about the spiritual journey to help us have a good foundation before we jump into specific disciplines.

SPIRITUAL TEMPERAMENTS (5 MIN.)

God created diversity! He created endless shades of hair, different pigments of skin, many languages, so it makes sense that we would worship our Creator God, who loves diversity, in many different ways. Yet, we get so wrapped up in how “other people” are experiencing God.

There isn’t a generic “one size fits all” formula for spiritual growth. For this study, we want to invite all of you to enjoy God how you enjoy him, not how someone else enjoys him. You have permission and freedom to experiment with how you connect with God.

But first, we need to figure out how we enjoy God. One helpful resource is called the “Spiritual Temperaments.” Developed by author Gary Thomas (Sacred Pathways) and further explored by Dr. Myra Perrine (What’s Your God Language?), the Spiritual Temperaments are nine main ways of how people most naturally relate to God.

- THE ACTIVIST**
- THE ASCETIC**
- THE CAREGIVER**
- THE CONTEMPLATIVE**
- THE ENTHUSIAST**
- THE INTELLECTUAL**
- THE NATURALIST**
- THE SENSATE**
- THE TRADITIONALIST**

[Refer to Spiritual Temperaments sheet, ask for volunteers to read each temperament out loud]

Now, let’s take just 5 minute to read through this on our own and let it sink in. As you read on your own, circle or underline 2 or 3 temperaments that you most connect with.

INDIVIDUAL TIME (5 MIN.)

[Give group 5 minutes on their own to read over temperaments]

GROUP DISCUSSION (2-3 MIN.)

Which temperaments resonated with you the most and why?

APPLICATION/PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Based on the temperaments you most resonated with, plan one or two ways that you can connect with God through those temperaments. Ex. If you resonated with “Naturalist”, go for a hike or a walk outside and talk with God during that experience.

Pray to close your group.

WEEK 1, **WORKSHEET 1** *YOUR JOURNEY WITH GOD*

What words would you use to describe your journey with God? (e.g. exciting, fun, difficult, weird, etc...)

What are some ways that you've felt connected to God in the past? List a few of them below:

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What are you interested in learning about God this year? How do you think he wants to develop his relationship with you?

WEEK 1, **WORKSHEET 2**

SPIRITUAL TEMPERAMENTS

THE SPIRITUAL TEMPERAMENTS (GARY THOMAS & MYRA PERRINE)

9 Pathways of Experiencing God

ACTIVIST "Loving God Through Confrontation with Evil"

- Activists are bold in their desire to see evil confronted and good prevail. They often get involved in spite of personal costs.
- Energized and rejuvenated by courageously coming against evil and rallying for the good.
- When confronting wrong, has a greater sense of solidarity and fellowship with God.
- Many people who have started ministries or currently direct Christian organizations are Activists. Their vision, tenacity, drive, and vigor keep them moving forward without a lot of affirmation. They are able to progress even in the midst of antagonism.

Biblical Examples: Moses (Ex. 2:11-12); Elijah (1 Kings 18); Habakkuk (Hab.1- 2); Nehemiah (Neh. 1); Amos (Amos 5:24); Jesus (Isa. 11:4-5, 16:5; Mat. 23).

If you are an Activist, thank God now for the gift He has given you of displaying His heart of justice and righteousness to a world that things of Him as absent and indifferent, even tolerant of evil. Thank Him, too, for the gift you are to Him and to others.

ASCETIC "Loving God Through Solitude and Simplicity"

- The life of Ascetics is very much "internal"; they work hard to develop the inner life. Ascetics are often drawn to fasting, prayer, stillness and tranquility.
- For Ascetics, silence is a gift and they sometimes see words as burdensome and a distraction from giving total attention to God. Simplicity in living conditions and environment is highly valued.

- Enduring hardship, suffering, self-denial and hard work are considered means to loving God. All work done unto the Lord is considered worship. They are people of obedience, humility and discipline.
- Many of our spiritual disciplines have been made accessible through the writings of Ascetics who take the quest for godly transformation seriously.

Biblical Examples: John the Baptist (Mat. 9); Daniel (Dan. 9); Joel (Joel 1-2); Jesus (Mat. 4:1-2, 8:20, 14:23; Luke 6:12; Heb. 5:8; 1 Peter 2:23).

If you are an Ascetic, thank God now for the gift He has given you of seeing Him in the midst of simplicity. Thank Him, too, for the grace to be committed to careful obedience in a world where defiance, greed, and self-indulgence are the order of the day, and for the gift you are to Him and others

CAREGIVER “Loving God Through Serving Others”

- They are hands-on servants and doers of the Word. They feel most alive and close to God when in volunteer service to others, knowing that in this way the work of the Kingdom is being advanced.
- Though many people feel close to God (and others, for that matter) when they are serving, for Caregivers these times markedly increase their awareness of God's presence. They also experience shouldering the burdens of others as a form of prayer.
- Caregiving is clear evidence that God is in the house. Those with Caregiver temperament are wearing signs around their necks that read, ‘Come watch God at work as I care for people.’

Biblical Examples: Mordecai (Est. 2:7); Ruth (Ruth 1-2); Women who came to the tomb after Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:1); Jesus (Mat. 4:23-24, 9:35-36; John 13:4-12).

If you are a Caregiver, thank God now for the gift He has given you of displaying His heart of compassion and kindness to a world that views Him as aloof and too busy for them. Thank Him, too, for the gift you are to Him and to others.

CONTEMPLATIVE “Loving God Through Adoration”

- Contemplatives enjoy spending extended periods of time simply delighting in the warmth of God’s presence and love.
- All of life is about developing greater intimacy with Jesus. They are often the ones who compose heart-stirring songs or write deeply insightful books about God. Contemplatives feel right at home with spiritual mystery.
- Some think that contemplatives are wasting time with all their deep thinking. ‘Get busy!’ they want to say. But mature leaders understand that contemplatives need to spend considerable time outside the mainstream. They need to protect their thought life. Eventually their reflections will lead to something wonderful that will bless the whole church.
- Contemplatives need to give themselves an extra measure of grace. They need to give themselves permission to spend long hours in quiet reflection, even if others view it as inappropriate or strange, because for them that’s the door that opens into the presence of God.

Biblical Examples: John the Beloved; Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42; John 7:1-7); Jesus (Mat. 3:17; John 17:23-26).

If you are a Contemplative, thank God now for the gift he has given you of displaying His heart of affection and nearness to a world that thinks of Him as cold and distant. Thank Him, too, for the gift you are to Him and to others.

ENTHUSIAST “Loving God Through Mystery and Celebration”

- Loving God with gusto, they are cheerleaders for the faith, rarely shy in expressing their love for God publicly. They feel close to God when they gather people to sing and worship.
- Like contemplatives, they also feel right at home with spiritual mystery and welcome supernatural works of the Holy Spirit.

- The world has been given a marvelous gift through Enthusiasts. Not only do they give us wonderful worship music, they also add a sense of fun, optimism, and zest to any group. These faith-loving, glass-half-full types remind us of what heaven will be like when all the saints meet at the throne to adore God. They help us get our eyes off ourselves and onto Jesus.

Biblical Examples: King David (2 Sam. 6:21); Miriam (Ex. 15); Samaritan Leper Luke 17:15-16); Children (Mat. 21:14-16); Jesus (Luke 19:38).

If you are an Enthusiast, thank God now for the gift He has given you of displaying His joy and celebration to a world that thinks of Him as a straitlaced killjoy. Thank Him, too, for the gift you are to Him and to others.

INTELLECTUAL “Loving God Through the Mind”

- Though not necessarily highly trained academically, they love God best through using their minds to deeply think and study about Jesus and Truth.
- They see faith as something to be understood as much as experienced. For them, right thinking is essential, and they love learning new things about God and His Kingdom. In fact, they get bored when their minds are not stimulated.
- Just as Ascetics need extended periods of solitude and silence and Contemplatives need time to rest in the Father's arms, so Intellectuals need to come to God with an inquiring mind.
- Intellectuals are a gift to the body of Christ. The church has been greatly enhanced by those who are willing to study for long seasons in order to write commentaries, prepare lectures, or expound on the essential doctrines of the faith.

Biblical Examples: Solomon (1 Kings 4:29-34); Paul (Rom. 12:2); Gamaliel (Acts 5:34, 22:3); Apollos (Acts 18:24-25); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:25-26); Jesus (Mark 1:22, John 18:33-38).

If you are an Intellectual, thank God now for the gift He has given you of loving truth, and for your commitment to relentlessly hold on to the God of the Bible, who is both reasonable and rooted in history. Thank God, too, for your part in displaying His truth to a world that believes in a deity who can be morphed into anything humankind imagines him or her to be, and for the gift you are to Jesus and to others.

NATURALIST “Loving God Through Experiencing Him Outdoors”

- Naturalists come alive and experience a great awareness of God when surrounded by the splendor of His creation (Rom. 1:20).
- God’s creation reaches down into the soul of the Naturalist, becoming a classroom to teach about God’s rhythm, timing, and the seasons of life and death.

Biblical Examples: David (Ps. 19:1-2; 121:1; 23:1-2); Isaiah (Isa. 42:5); John the Baptist (Mark 1:3-6). Jesus (insert reference)

If you are a Naturalist, thank God now for the gift He has given you of loving the outdoors and seeing His hand in the smallest detail of what He’s created. Thank Him, too, for fashioning you to call others to slow down and notice His handiwork. Thank Him, too, for the gift you are to Him and to others.

SENSATE “Loving God Through the Senses”

- Sensates use all their senses—taste, touch, smell, sound and sight—to focus more fully on Jesus. Easily lost in the awe and splendor of God, Sensates find themselves particularly drawn to God when they are in the presence of beauty, such as intricate architecture, classical music, formal language, incense, icons or stained glass.
- Sight, smell and sound are important. Just as beautiful music and visual displays can bring them closer to God, poorly performed worship, jarring smells, or lack of ambience can distract them from God.
- For many, being physically active and on the move helps to connect with God. For some, movement becomes a “sacred space.” Examples: Driving, running, walking, jogging, working with the hands, sports activity.

Biblical Examples: God (Num. 13; Ex 24:16-17, 40:34; 2 Chron. 7:1-3; Lev. 3:5; Deut. 33:10; Ex. 35:31-35; Psa. 150; Ezek. 1:4, 1:26-27, 3:1-3, 3:12-15); Jesus (John 9:6; Mat 8:3, 9:29; Rev. 1:10-16).

If you are a Sensate, thank God now for the gift he has given you of creating and appreciating beauty and form. Thank Him, too, for the part you play in displaying to a world that overemphasizes the cognitive just how important it is to worship God with our whole bodies by using all the senses, and thus for the gift you are to Jesus and to others.

TRADITIONALIST “Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol”

- Traditionalists enjoy worship, prayer, Communion, Bible reading, and other faith practices when they are done in familiar ways, realizing that these rituals help them join hands and hearts with the saints of old. Something about continuity and sameness ushers in the presence of God for the Traditionalist.
- Church and family customs, rituals, traditions or symbols repeatedly experienced help us to remember that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His character and goodness can still be trusted today.

Biblical Examples: Abraham (Num. 15:37-40); Moses (Num. 21:9); Ezra (Ezra 7:16- 17, 8:21); Disciples (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 11:17-34); Jesus (Luke 4:16, 24:30)

If you are a traditionalist, thank God now for the gift of grace He has given you to embrace ceremony and hold tightly to the community of faith that is grounded in centuries of well-established practices. Thank the Lord, too, for the part you play in displaying the ageless One to a world that values the new and novel, and for the gift you are to the Lord and to others.

WEEK 2: PRAYER

WEEK 1 RECAP & GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

Last week, we discussed the Spiritual Temperaments. Our Application/Practice for the week was to consider the temperaments you most resonated with, and to plan one or two ways that you can connect with God through those temperaments. How did that go? [If people are hesitant to share, the leader should begin with his/her experience]

This week will look at the spiritual discipline of Prayer.

GROUP DISCUSSION

In your church background and/or personal journey with God, in a word or phrase, what type of prayer have you learned about? (examples might include: The Lord's Prayer, congregational prayer, intercession, praying scripture, supplication, etc.)

INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER (5-10 MIN)

The way we approach prayer reflects greatly on our view of God and what we have been taught. Some of us may have been raised with the idea that God is an impersonal being watching us from heaven. You may have been taught that you need a mediator (religious figure) in order to reach God's ears. While we hate to admit it, some of us may think of God as Santa Claus, and when He doesn't deliver, we give up on prayer. Or, perhaps you've had a positive experience in your prayer life. One thing is certain: prayer is something Jesus wants to teach us, and we need to be taught!

Luke 11:1 states, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him," Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

We can imagine the disciples, after several times observing Jesus praying, thinking or speaking amongst themselves, "What do you think he's saying? Should we be doing this? Didn't John teach his disciples how to pray? Maybe we should ask him to teach us."

If the disciples needed to ask Jesus how to pray, then so do we!

"One of the first things to learn about prayer is to know that it's hard. That it takes learning. One of the worst things you can do is to walk into the Christian life thinking praying is easy. Thinking that prayer is natural." - Tim Keller

"In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught

to see things from his point of view. We must never wait until we feel like praying before we pray for others. Prayer is like any other work; we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working. We may not feel like practicing the piano, but once we play for a while, we feel like doing it. In the same way, our prayer muscles need to be limbered up a bit and once the blood-flow of intercession begins, we will find that we feel like praying.” Richard Foster

GROUP DISCUSSION

- What are your thoughts on either of those quotes?
- What has been your greatest challenge when it comes to prayer?
- Share a positive experience you’ve had with prayer (this can range from a specific prayer being answered to a daily practice).

This week we will look at two types of prayer that we will practice in the upcoming week. The first is “The Lord’s Prayer” from Matthew 6:9-13, and the other is the Prayer of Examen, a spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).

THE LORD’S PRAYER (5 MIN)

[Refer to worksheet 1a with the three translations of the Lord’s Prayer. Have different members read each version aloud.]

GROUP DISCUSSION

Which versions do you most connect with and why?

The Lord’s prayer offers us a simple yet powerful way to connect with God and make a difference in our world. Let’s look at what it says, what it means, and how we can apply it to our life.

[Use the worksheet 1b to break it down with the group.]

Prayer of Examen (5 min)

[Note: If you are short on time, read the overview, share your personal experience of the Prayer of Examen, and summarize the handout. If you have more time, read the handout in detail, and look at some of the scriptures as a group.]

The Prayer of Examen is a spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), who encouraged his followers to engage in the practice for developing a

deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognizing and receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the practice is increasingly becoming aware of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's movement throughout your day.

PRACTICING THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

This Prayer of Examen is primarily an exercise in remembering. One is invited, through four portions (preparation, invitation, investigation, and reconciliation), to concentrate on experiences and encounters from the past 24 hours. The beauty of the practice is its simplicity; it is more a guide than a prescription. If some portion feels especially important on a given day, feel the freedom to spend all or most of your time in that portion. The purpose is to increase awareness and sensitivity, not to finish or accomplish a task.

FOR THIS PRACTICE

A comfortable and relatively quiet location is likely most conducive for reflecting. The experience doesn't need to be a certain length—as little as ten minutes could be sufficient, and you could spend more time on certain portions compared to others. It might be helpful to journal your thoughts and recollections or to write out what you notice during your times of prayer. (Adapted from The Hills Church, Denver, CO)

CLOSING ACTIVITY (5 MIN)

Option 1: Pray the Lord's Prayer together as a group.

Option 2: Allow people to silently pray the Lord's prayer.

Option 3: Allow people to choose one section of the Prayer of Examen and pray silently for 5 minutes or so.

APPLICATION

Encourage your small group to pray through the Lord's prayer a few times this week, stopping at each verse for personal application. In addition, encourage participants to take time to work through the Prayer of Examen this week.

Pray to close your group.

WEEK 2, WORKSHEET 1A

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Matthew 6:9-13

New International Version (NIV)

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

Matthew 6:9-13

New Testament for Everyone (NTE)

⁹ 'So this is how you should pray:

Our father in heaven,
may your name be honoured

¹⁰ may your kingdom come
may your will be done

as in heaven, so on earth.

¹¹ Give us today the bread we need now;

¹² and forgive us the things we owe,
as we too have forgiven what was owed
to us.

¹³ Don't bring us into the great trial,
but rescue us from evil.

Matthew 6:7-13

The Message (MSG)

7-13 "The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;

Do what's best—

as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals.

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You're in charge!

You can do anything you want!

You're ablaze in beauty!

Yes. Yes. Yes.

WEEK 2, **WORKSHEET 1B**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Discuss the meaning of each verse as a group: **Matthew 6:9-13**

⁹ This, then, is how you should pray

Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name

¹⁰ Your kingdom come

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread

¹² Forgive us our debts

As we have also forgiven our debtors

¹³ And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from the evil one

WEEK 2, **WORKSHEET 2**

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN (FROM CAPITAL CHURCH):

PREPARATION

Take a few moments to center yourself in God. Remind yourself that he is with you and he loves you. You may want to briefly meditate on a favorite verse from the Bible that reminds you of his presence (Psalm 139 or Joshua 1:9) or his love (Romans 8:38-39 or Jeremiah 31:3).

INVITATION

Ask God to lead the way as you review your day.

Ask him to show you evidence of his presence.

Ask him to show you what is true about you. You may want to simply pray Psalm 139:23-24.

INVESTIGATION

Reflect on the major moments of your day (meetings, meals, spiritual practices, conversations, etc.). You may find it helpful to list them in order.

Thank God for something in each part of your day.

Ask God to bring to mind any attitudes or actions that did not reveal the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).

Did you fail to love someone today?

Reflect on any strong emotions you may have felt:

What irritated you today?

What worried you today?

What discouraged you today?

Does God want to show you anything about your heart?

Do you observe any patterns?

Ask God to help you see moments when you bore the fruit of the Spirit.

When did you love?

When did you find peace in spite of your pace or pressure?

When were you patient with difficult people?

Whether you saw it in the moment or not, where do you see that God was working in your day?

Do you notice anywhere God was showing you his love?

WEEK 2, **WORKSHEET 2**

PRAYER OF EXAMEN (CONT'D)

RECONCILIATION

If you haven't done so already, ask God to forgive you for any sin you may have committed. Be specific.

Invite God to help you see the patterns of your responses and ask him to "lead you in the way everlasting."

Ask yourself these questions:

Is there anyone who needs your apology?

Is there anyone you need to forgive?

Consider finding a Bible verse to memorize or a simple prayer to pray throughout your day that will help you live better tomorrow.

WEEK 3: SCRIPTURE

WEEK 2 RECAP SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

Were you able to pray the Prayer of Examen or the Lord's Prayer this week? What went well? What challenges did you face? What did you learn about yourself through these practices?

INTRODUCTION QUESTION

What is your favorite story- movie, book, tv show? Why is it your favorite?

[Before showing the video, refer to the "The Bible at a Glance" Illustration handout so that the group can look at this while watching the video.]

Watch The Bible Project Video, "How to Read the Bible: The Story of the Bible" (5 minutes)

<https://thebibleproject.com/videos/the-story-of-the-bible/>

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

How have you engaged with the Bible?

What's challenging about the Bible? Why is it worth it to read the Bible?

WHY SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE? (5 MIN.)

God, who created everything in the universe with just a word, is eager to relate to us. Fortunately, he doesn't make us guess at his character and intentions. God doesn't play hard to get! He desires for us to know the breadth of who he is- how great, awesome, powerful and sovereign he is. He desires for us to know the depth of who he is- how relational, intimate, generous and loving he is. And he does this through what we know as the Bible.

Through the various books of the Bible, we encounter God's words to us through narrative (story form), poetry, letters, laws, prophecy and more. All of these books come together to tell one beautiful epic story about a Creator who loves his world and people so much that he will stop at nothing, even our own rejection of him, to restore and renew it. In short, everything from the Old Testament points to God creating and redeeming the world through the coming Messiah. And everything in the New Testament reveals that Jesus is that Messiah- God in the flesh who came, died, and defeated death so that we might live and all of creation might be restored.

In order to really get to know this Jesus person, we need to engage with Scripture. We need to see what was said about him. We need to hear what he himself said and see what he did and how he interacted with people. We need to enter into this story ourselves so that we might learn to live like him and follow him.

The Bible is God's great invitation for us to experience and become a character in the greatest epic in history.

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

What do you think about what we just read? What stood out to you?

What do you most want to get out of the Bible?

WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE BIBLE (5 MIN.)

So now that we've talked about "what" the Bible is and "why" we read it, let's get into "how." The Bible can feel really intimidating- how do we possibly engage with a text that is thousands of years old? The good news is, you don't need a seminary degree or a PhD in ancient literature to understand and apply the Bible to your lives. But it does take some work.

Here are two main ways that we can engage with God's Word. Both are necessary to get the full picture of God's breadth and depth.

STUDY

Bible "study", the act of investigating what Scripture means and how to apply it to our lives, has been an important part of our faith starting from the very beginning. Ancient Jewish Rabbis enjoyed discussing religious texts, debating their meaning, and teaching them to their synagogues. Jesus himself taught in the synagogues and regularly referenced the Old Testament when speaking to his disciples and teaching the crowds.

In the book of Acts, when the early church gathered together in homes, they would read aloud Scripture together, discussing how to live out God's story in their everyday lives.

In order to truly understand God's Word and how to apply it to our lives, we need a few tools to help us understand the culture it was written to and how to accurately and responsibly discover its meaning for us today. Commentaries, background information, Bible dictionaries, study guides and other resources are very helpful!

MEDITATE

Meditating on God's Word is also all about helping us understand what Scripture means and how to apply it to our lives. The difference here is that meditation combines practices of prayer and silence with engaging with God's Word.

This might look like reading the text several times to yourself or out loud, asking God to illuminate what He wants you to hear. Or it might mean reading a narrative from the Old or New Testaments and imagining you are in the scene- using all of your senses and asking God to show you what He wants you to understand about that scene.

Meditation can also involve choosing passages from Scripture to memorize so that you can remember them throughout your day. Many people practice study and meditation together by first understanding what the passage means through reading and research and then engaging with it through prayer and memorization.

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

Which of these styles of reading Scripture have you tried before? What was that experience like?

Which of these styles are you more drawn to- study or meditation? Why do you think both of these are valuable and necessary in our relationship with God?

LEADER'S CHOICE (15 MINUTES)

A. Introduce Lectio Divina and Inductive study. Read through both as a group. And then ask the group which one they would like to try out.

If they choose Lectio Divina, use the directions on the handout with Psalm 23

If they choose Inductive study, visit <http://howto.bible/thirsty/questions-john>

Choose one of the passages from John. Read the passage out loud together and ask the questions listed with the passage.

Finish with these questions:

How was that experience for you?

What did you learn about yourself and about God through that discipline?

B. Introduce Lectio Divina and Inductive study. Read through both as a group. Discuss these questions as group.

Which of these two disciplines seems appealing to you? Why?

What questions do you have about these disciplines? How can you make time this week to learn more about different ways to explore Scripture?

APPLICATION (5 MIN)

What did you learn about the discipline of engaging with Scripture?

How is God inviting you to explore Scripture this week?

**To prepare for next week, read 1 Kings 19:1-19. Consider studying/meditating on it!

Pray to close your group.

WEEK 3, **WORKSHEET 1**

BIBLE STUDY: INDUCTIVE METHOD

Inductive Bible study is a way to look at Scripture with fresh eyes. Often, if we grew up attending church since we were young or even several years in our adulthood, we tend to get stuck in familiar passages, deciding that we know what they mean because we've a) heard a sermon about them, or b) studied them in a small group or individually. Inductive Bible study encourages us to start first with simply observing the text: What does the text say? Then interpreting it: What does it mean? And lastly, applying it to our lives: What does the text mean for me/the church?

When studying Scripture we want to skip right to application, which can cause us to misinterpret things or assign incorrect meaning. Inductive Bible study helps us to discover what God means in his Word and how HE wants us to apply it to our lives.

The three steps of Inductive Bible study are: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Here are some ways to try this out!

EXERCISE 1: ABC STUDY

Analyze: Read the text and identify who, what, where, and when? Does anything stick out to you? Next, look for repeated words or themes. List them on a piece of paper. Next, formulate questions based on your observations: ex. "What is the significance of the repeated word (fill in the blank)?" or "Why is the detail that so-and-so is a Samaritan important?" Try breaking up the passage into sections of thoughts/ideas. Title the paragraphs and paraphrase the passage.

Best Verse: Pick the verse that you think best summarizes the passage. Why is it important to you? Commit to memorize this verse(s) this week.

Contract: What does this passage mean for you? How does God want you to apply it? Make a contract with God about how you will act on his Word this week.

EXERCISE 2: BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

There is no shame in using a Bible study guide to help you engage with God's Word! Most of these use the Inductive method and give you helpful questions to observe, interpret and apply the text.

Life Guides from InterVarsity Press

NT Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides

howto.bible – website from InterVarsity on how to study the Bible

WEEK3, **WORKSHEET 2**

MEDITATION: LECTIO DIVINA, “DIVINE READING”

Imagine living in 6th Century Europe. That’s right, 500 CE. You most likely work with your hands in the labor industry. And, like the majority of the culture, you probably cannot read or write. How do you go about studying God’s Word? How do you discover the life changing truth of the Gospel?

Lectio Divina, meaning “Divine Reading”, is a combination of prayer and Bible reading that enables all people, rich or poor, educated or not, to engage with God’s Word. Developed by Benedictine monks to help the brothers reflect on Scripture throughout the day, Lectio Divina is still practiced today by Catholics and a growing number of evangelicals. Lectio Divina is not so much an intellectual exercise but an experiential approach toward God’s Living Word, his very breath.

The goal is not necessarily to gain more knowledge of the Bible, but to connect with the Holy Spirit through the book He inspired; to commune with God through His Word for us. Think of it as a slow, thoughtful reading of Scripture—like savoring a piece of Brie cheese direct from France versus devouring a wrapped slice of American cheese.

PRACTICING LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina has 4 movements: Lectio (read/attend), Meditatio (meditate/ponder), Oratio (respond in prayer), and Contemplatio (contemplate). Between each movement, practitioners pause for a few moments of silence.

Try Lectio Divina for yourself by using one of these passages:

Psalms 23, 1 Corinthians 13, Isaiah 40: 21-31, Colossians 1:15-23

Start by quieting your mind and your heart for a couple of minutes. Take several slow, deep breaths. Allow your muscles to relax. Perhaps pray, “Lord, I want to receive your Living Word.”

Lectio: Read the text once or twice out loud. Or like early church members, gather friends to take turns reading the passage aloud. Simply listen. Let go of the need to figure out what it means. Thank God silently for his Word.

Meditatio: Listen to the text again. Pay attention to any words or phrases that light up for you: words that resonate or seem to stick out. Sit in silence for a couple more seconds, think about the words and phrases that stick out, maybe say them or think them in your head.

Oratio: Read the text again. Be mindful of the words or phrases that are lighting up to you. When the text has been read, respond to God in prayer. Ask Him, “What is your invitation to me?” Listen for his response.

Contemplatio: Read the text a final time. When finished, ponder what God is communicating to you through his Word. Sit in the knowledge that God is with you and that His Word is living and active.

Finish your time by thanking God and lingering in his presence. Carry the word or phrase that God revealed throughout your day, allow its meaning to unfold according to His timing.

AN EXERCISE IN SOLIDARITY

Lectio Divina is a way of engaging with Scripture that forces us to depend on God. We can't force a word or phrase to strike us, we must trust that God is willing and able to meet us in His Living Word. As you practice Lectio Divina, think of it as an opportunity to commune with brothers and sisters around the world without access to education or copies of the Bible. Slow down and savor the Word, the very breath of God.

WEEK 4: SOLITUDE & SILENCE

WEEK 3 RECAP & GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN)

Last week, you practiced the spiritual discipline of Bible reading/study.

How did you engage with Scripture last week? What did you learn about yourself and about God through reading Scripture?

This week, we will be looking at the spiritual discipline of Silence and Solitude.

INTRODUCTION (5 MIN)

Silence and Solitude is not the norm in our society. Screen time- whether it be our phones, computers, television, Netflix, social media, etc.- eats up our free time more than we want to admit. Having our phones attached to us like an appendage removes our ability to be fully present with God and others. Think of how often you are in a conversation only to hear the ping or vibration of an incoming text. This urgency to respond has a price.

According to a survey in “The Atlantic” (01/2018), people mentioned feeling controlled by their phones—bemoaning how dependent they were on the devices, and how the constant connectivity made them feel obligated to respond.

“We need to realize that the world can go on without us for an hour or a day or even longer.” – Adele Calhoun

In her podcast, “A Leader’s Journey into Silence and Solitude”, Ruth Haley Barton explains it this way: “Spiritual transformation is always about finding ways to give up control. It’s about practicing something that we’re not very good at doing. Silence and Solitude gives us a way to practice something that we are not good at doing and that is giving up control.”

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN)

How would you describe silence and solitude?

Do you ever find yourself resisting silence and solitude? Do you like to fill silences with sound or learning – music, news, talk shows, etc.? Explain.

“We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? What might be uncovered as we spend time in silence?

SOLITUDE & SILENCE IN THE BIBLE (10-15 MIN.)

Let's see what the Bible has to say about silence and solitude.

REACTIVE SOLITUDE

Read/review the passage on I Kings 19:1-19.

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

What do we learn from this passage on silence and solitude?

What led Elijah to this place? Describe the progression.

What is the outcome? What difference is seen as a result of his time in solitude?

Eventually, Elijah's willingness to enter into solitude and silence opened room for God to minister to him in ways he had not yet experienced. Here he had the opportunity to face himself, to give up control of his own journey and to experience God's transforming presence.

PROACTIVE SOLITUDE

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. Mark 1:35-39

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN)

What is Mark emphasizing in terms of solitude?

How does Jesus respond to the disciples' urgency?

How might solitude change our response to the urgent demands we face?

[Leader's may want to share a personal example here]

[If time, read these other verses on silence and solitude and invite your group to share which verse(s) resonate with them]

"After [Jesus] had dismissed [the crowds], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was [still] there alone." (Matthew 14:23; see also Mark 6:46) Luke 4:42

"When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place..." Luke 4:42

"Be angry, yet do not sin; on your bed, search your heart and be still. Selah" Psalm 4:4

"I will bless the LORD who counsels me; even at night my conscience instructs me." Psalm 16:7

"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning--more than watchmen waiting for the morning." Psalm 130:6

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Psalm 42:1-2

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

If you were to choose the best time for silence and solitude, what part of the day would you choose and why? Where would you most likely spend time in solitude? What do these verses teach us about silence and solitude?

[Leaders may help in giving suggestions or personal examples.]

It's okay to experiment to find what's best. Some may want to bring candles to their space, while others may want to walk outside. You may want to tell family members or roommates about your new commitment, so they can honor the time by not interrupting you and honor the space by staying out of it during your times alone with God.

A RADICAL DISCIPLINE (5 MIN)

The practices of solitude and silence are radical because they challenge us on every level of our existence. They challenge us on the level of culture: there is little in Western culture that supports us in entering into what feels like unproductive time for being (beyond human effort) and listening (beyond human thought). They confront us on the level of our human relationships: they call us away from those relationships for a time so we can give undivided attention to God. They challenge us on the level of our soul: in the silence we become aware of inner dynamics we have been able to avoid by keeping ourselves noisy and busy. They draw us into spiritual battle: in silence there is the potential for each of us to "know that I am God" with such certainty that the competing powers of evil and sin and the ego-self can no longer hold us in their grip. (Barton, 2009)

CLOSING SILENCE (2-3 MIN.)

[Leaders should decide how long this should be depending on the comfort level of the group.]

Take a moment or two in silence for reflecting on what you have shared and received. Experience gratitude for what God has done in each individual's life and also in the sharing that has taken place. Listen for any encouragement, instruction, guidance or invitation that the Holy Spirit is impressing on your heart, and consider what you want to take with you into the next week.

[The leader can close this time with a brief prayer expressing gratitude.]

(Optional) Ask: How was that for you?

APPLICATION

See Worksheets 1, 2, and 3

Pray to close your group

WEEK 4, **HANDOUT 1**

BEING KNOWN BY GOD

Matthew 11:28-30, Ecclesiastes 5:1, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12-13, Mark 1:35

Solitude is an essential spiritual discipline but often ignored by modern Christians. Jesus himself began his earthly ministry with 40 days in solitude and he regularly went away by himself to pray. If Jesus needed solitude, how much more do we need it!

We live in a society that is increasingly connected; for better or for worse. While technology makes it easier stay in touch with friends across the world, it makes it harder for us to disconnect from the many things that demand our attention- work, politics, events in the community, etc. How can we possibly learn to hear from God and recognize his voice when life is so loud and full?

As Adele Ahlberg Calhoun says, "In solitude the heart waits for God, and God alone. Here the soul opens wide to listen and receive."

IMAGINING GOD'S PRESENCE

Find a safe place. Take a deep breath and imagine yourself in a physical environment that is peaceful and calm. You may visualize yourself beside the ocean or a lake, in the forest, near a mountain, or in a favorite location in your town- anywhere that exudes beauty and tranquility.

Imagine your surroundings. In your imagination, take a few moments to be aware of your surroundings, taking in what you sense. What do you see, hear, feel, and smell?

Invite God to be with you. Next, invite God to be with you in that place. Ask him to help you sense his presence. How does he interact with you? Does he appear in bodily form or do you simply sense that he's with you? If you see him, what does his face look like? What does his voice sound like?

Listen for what God might say to you. When you are ready, ask God, "What do you want to say to me? What do you want me to know?" Is there a word, image, or piece of Scripture that comes to your mind? If you don't hear/see/sense anything, just allow yourself to be in God's presence. Perhaps he just wants to be with you and not say anything.

Hear his truth for you. Sense, if you can, God looking you directly in the eyes as he says, "You are my son/daughter. I love you. I am so pleased that I created you." Do not resist his voice. Allow yourself to be in his presence for several minutes. What do you feel?

Consider practicing this for a few minutes each day for a few weeks.

WEEK 4, **WORKSHEET 2**

SPENDING A DAY WITH GOD

Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 16:7, Psalm 25:4, Habakkuk 2:1, Psalm 119:18, Psalm 77

For many of us, remembering is difficult. We as humans have a conveniently short memory when it comes to God (and our friends and spouses!). We easily forget on what God has done and who he really is. Journaling is a great way to pray to God and reflect on what he's been doing in our lives. It helps us stay focused and organize our thoughts. Here are a few ideas for you:

Idea 1

As you read magazines and newspapers, cut out articles or photos that touch your heart. Paste them in your journal. Use these clippings to help you pray and join in God's care for the world.

Idea 2

Develop a journal for quotes, poetry and Scripture that have touched you. Reflect on these words and their significance to you.

Idea 3

If you enjoy art, create a collage journal. Express your thoughts and feelings to God through pictures, textures and colors.

Idea 4

Keep a prayer journal: record requests, prayers, answered prayers

Idea 5

Use your journal as a place for your unedited thoughts, feelings and reactions. Out of this overflow ask the Holy Spirit to form a godly response in you. Write the response you hear from God. Ask for grace to live out of this graced place.

Idea 6

It can be helpful to divide your journal into sections that reflect

- a. Your journey with God
- b. Events of the day
- c. Prayers for the world
- d. Prayers for those you love
- e. Desires of your heart

WEEK 4, **WORKSHEET 3**

SMALL MOMENTS IN THE DAY

Matthew 11:28-30, Ecclesiastes 5:1, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12-13, Mark 1:35

Solitude is an essential spiritual discipline but often ignored by modern Christians. Jesus himself began his earthly ministry with 40 days in solitude and he regularly went away by himself to pray. If Jesus needed solitude, how much more do we need it!

We live in a society that is increasingly connected; for better or for worse. While technology makes it easier stay in touch with friends across the world, it makes it harder for us to disconnect from the many things that demand our attention- work, politics, events in the community, etc. How can we possibly learn to hear from God and recognize his voice when life is so loud and full?

As Adele Ahlberg Calhoun says, "In solitude the heart waits for God, and God alone. Here the soul opens wide to listen and receive."

HOW TO EXPERIENCE SOLITUDE THROUGHOUT YOUR DAY

1. Recreational Activities

Do you bike, swim, run or participate in other recreational activities? Rather than listen to music, be silent and invite God's presence into your exercise with you.

2. Errands and "Boring" Daily Tasks

Driving to and from work. Driving to the grocery store. Picking up the kids. Doing the dishes. Mowing the lawn. All of these are places that you can take advantage of silence, even for 10 min. Consider leaving the radio off in the car a few times a week. Light a candle while you do the dishes and invite God to be with you.

3. Day to day routines.

In the quiet of your shower, meditate on how Jesus is the living water that nourishes our souls. Talk with God about the spaces in your life that you long to be made whole and "clean."

4. Find a "quiet place."

Is there a special chair in your home that you can dedicate to quiet space? Or a corner at work? Think of physical spaces that can help you find quiet moments in your day.

5. Some advice from Richard Foster.

"The first thing we can do is to take advantage of the 'little solitudes' that fill our day.

Consider the solitude of those early morning moments in bed before the family awakens. Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the work of the day. There is solitude in bumper-to-bumper traffic during the freeway rush hour. There can be little moments of rest and refreshment when we turn a corner and see a flower or a tree... Find new joy and meaning in the little walk from the subway to your apartment. Slip outside just before bed and taste the silent night."

WEEK 5: **SERVICE**

RECAP FROM WEEK 4 & GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

Were you able to practice solitude and silence this week? How and when?

"When we make room for silence, we make room for ourselves . . . the unknown, the untamed, the wild, the shy, the unfathomable."

How did silence make room for more parts of you to find expression?

"Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us." -John Ortberg

Did you experience this kind of freedom in your time of solitude? Explain.

How did you experience God with you (or not) during your times of silence? Are there any other questions or observations that surfaced?

INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE (5 MIN)

At Capital, one of our values for our small groups is serving (Play, Pray, Study, and Serve). Many of us have been involved in various opportunities to serve such as an area of the church, the Rescue Mission, short term mission trips to Guatemala and eSwatini, Bennion Elementary School, and meals for families and individuals, to name a few.

Richard Foster states, "Service as a Christian spiritual discipline is difficult to capture in words. We learn about service best by watching it in action over an extended period of time.

When we see someone intently listening to another human being, we are witnessing service in action. When we see a person holding the sorrows of another in tender, loving care, we are witnessing service in action. When we see someone actively guarding the reputation of others, we are witnessing service in action. When we see simple, everyday acts of kindness, we are witnessing service in action. It is in these actions and many more like them that we begin to get a picture of service.

These tiny corners of life are the genuinely significant realities in the kingdom of God. There is no flash, no glitz, no titanic anything. Today's celebrity culture, captive to its pretentious egoism, simply finds such realities hard to grasp." (The Making of an Ordinary Saint, Richard Foster)

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN)

How would you define service as a spiritual discipline?

Dallas Willard gives us further insight to the spiritual discipline of serving: “Not every act that may be done as a discipline need be done as a discipline. I will often be able to serve another simply as an act of love and righteousness, without regard to how it may enhance my abilities to follow Christ ...But I may also serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life”. (The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard)

How does serving train us away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness, and have you ever experienced serving in this way? Explain.

READ JOHN 13:1-17 (10-15 MIN)

¹ It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When is this taking place? Name everything that Jesus is facing as he provides this act of service?
2. In this culture, the washing of feet was necessary to maintain cleanliness. But this necessary ritual was reserved for only the lowest of slaves. Why do you think Jesus chooses to do this for his disciples, even for Judas who later betrays him? What motivates Jesus to serve under these circumstances? What is his purpose?
3. From this passage, is it convenient to serve? Was it ever convenient for Jesus? What does Jesus actions tell us about how and who we are called to serve?
4. Look back at the quotes by Dallas Willard and Richard Foster. Is this account more like Foster's or Willard's explanation of service?

APPLICATION (5 MIN)

What are some practical ways that we can serve those around us? Who comes to your mind? Consider your co-workers, family members, friends, and neighbors.

CLOSING (5 MIN)

Go over some of the ideas adapted from Adele Calhoun on serving (Worksheet 1), and allow the group some moments of silence to allow God to speak to each person about a person and a way they can serve this week.

Pray to close your group.

WEEK 5, **WORKSHEET 1**

THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE EXERCISES

1. Every morning for the next two weeks, ask your spouse, roommate or a colleague "What can I do for you today?" Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you see about yourself?

2. Practice the service of guarding the reputation of others (Titus 3:2).

3. Practice hospitality. Peter urges us to "Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Pet. 4:9). Paul does the same and even makes it one of the requirements for the office of bishop (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). There is a desperate need today for Christians who will open their homes to one another.

4. Divide a paper into three columns. Above one column write, "For Me." Above another column write "For Others." Above a third column write "For God." Review the past week or month. Jot down in each column the things you have bought and done for yourself, others and God. What does this inventory reveal about your life? Take time to read Luke 23. Gaze at Jesus on the cross. What has God given because he loves you? How would you like to see the answers in your column change over the next months? Listen to your longings and God's promptings.

5. Service in the Marketplace: Service to be service must take form and shape in the world in which we live. Therefore, we must seek to perceive what service looks like in the marketplace of our daily lives. At the outset there is the service of hiddenness. Even public leaders can cultivate tasks of service that remain generally unknown. How can you practice the service of hiddenness in your workplace?

*Adapted from *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Calhoun, and *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster*

WEEK 6: SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP & WRAPPING UP

WEEK 5 RECAP & GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

What are some of the ways you served others last week? What did you learn about yourself and about God through serving?

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

This is the last week of our spiritual disciplines study and we're going to spend this session talking about how to move forward and implement this disciplines in your everyday life. But first let's discuss a few questions as a group:

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

Think back on the last 5 weeks- which disciplines resonated with you the most? What have you learned about God and yourself as you have practiced these disciplines?

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP (5 MIN)

As we seek to practice spiritual disciplines, there is one thing that we all need- community. We need friends in our lives that help point us to Jesus- spurring us on in our faith, encouraging us and even correcting us when we need it!

It may sound a little corny to talk about friendship as a spiritual discipline but I think all of us may need some pointers on how to have healthy, Christ-centered relationships.

Read these two quotes aloud:

"Friendship is one of God's special gifts to humans. Remarkably, friendship is one of the terms God uses to describe the relationship he desires with us. Friendship therefore is no ordinary relationship." – David Benner "Sacred Companions"

"Ordinary friendships are generally characterized by intimacy, trust and mutual enjoyment of one another. Spiritual friends share those qualities, of course, but are also characterized by another element: spiritual friends actively help us pay attention to God. Similar to the way other spiritual practices connect us to God, our soul friends help us to sit with him. They have the capacity to help restore life to the soul" – Mindy Caliguire "Spiritual Friendship"

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

What stands out to you in these quotes? Why do you think that stood out to you?

What's been your experience with spiritual friendships? (good, bad and ugly!)

What's most challenging about friendships? Why are spiritual friendships worth pursuing?

CREATING LASTING FRIENDSHIPS (5-10 MIN)

Let's be real for a minute. Making deep friendships is hard. Even the most raging extrovert struggles to move a surface level friendship to one that is characterized by depth and vulnerability. So here are a few important points for making spiritual friendships:

1. Take Initiative

If you want to develop deep friendships, take the leap and invite someone to do something. Grab a cup of coffee. Go for a hike. Share a meal. Don't wait around for someone to initiate friendship with you. Be the person that seeks out and pursues others.

2. Be Intentional

Think about the Christian friends in your life. Do you seem to connect with one or two of them and want to get to know them better? If so, follow step one and meet up with them. Ask deeper questions like, "What is God up to in your life lately?" or "How did you become a Christian/What is your story of coming to faith?" Don't hang out in the shallow section of conversations because you are afraid of the depths. Take a risk and go deeper.

3. You Don't Have to Be Friends with Everyone

You won't foster deep connections with everyone that you meet and that's ok. It is absolutely ok to be discerning about the people that you go deeper with. One of our core beliefs as Jesus followers is that we are messy, sin-filled people that Jesus loves and saves! Not every Christian that you meet will be in a healthy place to serve as a deep, spiritual friend to you. Be vulnerable when pursuing people but don't bare your whole soul too quickly with someone that may not be ready to be a trustworthy friend.

4. Not Everyone Will Want to Be Your Friend

We all like to think that we are the most amazing people ever. But just as everyone else in the world is messy, we are too! Not everyone will want to pursue a deep friendship with you, and that's ok! If someone is not reciprocating your pursuit of friendship, it's ok to let the potential for a deep friendship with them go. We are called to love all people but we don't have to like or be friends with everyone we meet. Don't take it personally (and don't hold a grudge!) if someone does not want to go deep with you. Take it as a sign that God has a deep friendship for you with someone else.

5. Conflict Isn't a Bad Thing

Many of us grew up in environments where conflict was handled poorly. It was either avoided all together, resulting in resentment and bitterness, or it was handled with rage and forcefulness, resulting in deep hurt and unforgiveness. The truth is, because we are messy, sinful people, conflict is inevitable! Conflict is actually a sign that our friendships are going deeper. Surface level friends never argue and therefore never get real with each other. Deep friends disagree with each other, might even hurt each other, but they always pursue forgiveness and reconciliation. God wants to heal the way we deal with conflict. If you fear conflict or if you find yourself picking a fight way too often, talk with God about this. Commit yourself to learning how to deal with conflict in healthy ways this year!

6. Be Patient & Persistent

Deep friendships take a long time to develop, especially in the post-college years. Be patient with the friendships that you are hoping will go deeper. If a friend won't open up to you like you want them to, take a step back. If a friend responds poorly when you share something deep, give them plenty of grace and consider talking with them about how you felt (see tip 5!). And, as in tip 3, be cautious about who you open up to and how much you share with them. Also, be a trustworthy friend yourself. Keep pursuing them even when you or they have busy seasons. Keep their confidence when they share private things. And keep showing up in their lives!

GROUP DISCUSSION (5 MIN.)

Which point stands out to you? Why do you think it resonates with you?
Are there any tips you would add? If so, what?

APPLICATION (5 MIN.)

Are there people you know that you want to form a deeper, Christ-centered friendship with? Consider initiating with one of them this week. Invite them to share a meal with you or do an activity. Prayerfully ask God to deepen this relationship.

WRAPPING UP CREATING A SPIRITUAL PLAN (15 MIN.)

[Note for leader: fill out the spiritual plan sheet on your own before your group. Use your plan as an example]

Moving forward, it's very helpful to have a plan. This is not meant to be overwhelming and it doesn't have to be followed to a "t". Rather, think of this plan as a loose structure to apply to your lives so that you can get into a regular routine of connecting with God through spiritual disciplines.

[Refer to "Spiritual Plan" handout]

Take 10 minutes or so to work through this sheet. Answer the questions and consider which disciplines you'd like to incorporate daily, weekly, monthly or annually. [Leader, briefly share your spiritual plan with the group as an example]

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (5-10 MIN)

What stood out to you as you filled out your spiritual plan? Did anything surprise you?

Share a few things you put into your plan. What are you most looking forward to as you put this plan into practice?

APPLICATION

Invite a Christian friend to meet up with you this week- for a meal, activity, etc. Tell them about the spiritual disciplines study you just completed and share something from your spiritual plan with them.

Pray to close your group.

WEEK 6, **WORKSHEET 1**

SPIRITUAL PLAN

Reflect over the last 6 weeks, what have you learned about God? What have you learned about yourself?

How are you most longing to connect with God? What to you desire to learn about him?

In what areas are you most aware of your need for transformation? Which practices would help you connect with God and allow him to begin transforming you?

Which spiritual disciplines lead you to feel close to God? Are there practices you enjoy that we didn't discuss?

CRAFTING YOUR PLAN

Daily: Are you able to carve out time each day to connect with God? How much? When and where? Which practices do you think you would like to do daily?

Weekly: Which practices could you see yourself incorporating on a weekly basis? Is there a day that can be a “Sabbath” to you, one where you cut out work and do only those things that restore your soul?

Monthly/Quarterly: What are you interested in that may take more intentionality and time that you might not do every week? A half-day retreat? A self-care activity that is a special treat? A book club? A service project?

Annually: What practices would open your heart to God that might only fit into an annual rhythm?

An overnight spiritual retreat?

A conference?

Short-term mission trip with your family?

Write out your plan on the backside of this sheet, indicating the steps you need to take to make this happen.

FURTHER RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION, WEEK 1

What's Your God Language, by Myra Perrine

Sacred Pathways, by Gary Thomas

Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster

PRAYER, WEEK 2

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God, by Tim Keller

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook (Examen and Lord's Prayer) by Adele Calhoun

With Christ in the School of Prayer, by Andrew Miller

SCRIPTURE, WEEK 3

Meditating on Scripture

Pray as You Go App and Website (pray-as-you-go.org)

Dwell Bible Reading App

Hearing God by Dallas Willard

Shaped by the Word, by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.

Opening to God, by David Benner

STUDYING SCRIPTURE

The Bible Project, <https://thebibleproject.com>

InterVarsity's Bible study website: <http://Howto.bible> and <http://howto.bible/thirsty/>

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

Bible Study Handbook, by Lindsay Olesberg

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE, WEEK 4

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership Podcast (season 1, ep. 2), by Ruth Haley Barton

An Invitation to Solitude and Silence, by Ruth Haley Barton

Celebration of Discipline, chapter 7 "Solitude", by Richard Foster

SERVICE, WEEK 5

Capital Church's service opportunities <http://capitalchurch.com/serve/>

Community is Messy, by Heather Zempel

The Spirit of the Disciplines, by Dallas Willard

The Making of an Ordinary Saint, Richard Foster

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP & WRAPPING UP, WEEK 6

Spiritual Friendship, by Mindy Caliguire

Sacred Companions, by David Benner

Life Together in Christ, by Ruth Haley Barton




Community is Messy, by Heather Zempel



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