

# TEACH ME

ABIDE REJOICE DENY PRAY

teach them to obey everything I  
have commanded you



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“THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND **TEACHING THEM TO OBEY** EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE.”

**MATTHEW 28:19-20**

## FROM PASTOR NATE

*Friends, I am excited that you are opening this journal! I would like to take a moment to tell you about the thoughts behind its creation.*

*Some of the last words Jesus spoke to His followers are found in Matthew 28:19-20.*

*Some time back I was reflecting on this passage and the last portion stood out dramatically in my mind. “**Teach them to obey...**” Jesus does not instruct us just to teach—He asks us to teach and to obey.*

*My hope is that through your interaction with these pages we each learn how to obey—moving beyond knowledge and information toward putting the teachings of Jesus into practice. We don’t want to just know what Jesus said; we want to obey what Jesus said.*

*Throughout the Teach Me Journal, keep in mind that the goal is not completion of the book but the internalization and follow through of each section. Read slowly. Continually ask yourself, “How can I do this? How can I put into practice what Jesus is teaching?”*

*Together, let’s **do** what Jesus asks.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Nate". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

This journal is arranged in four sections correlating with each command. Each section has four parts to help you engage and process in different ways.

You can go through the journal quickly or slowly—whatever works for you. The process includes a combination of learning from Scripture, others, and spiritual disciplines.

This isn't exhaustive—yet we hope that it acts as a catalyst for all of us to obey everything Jesus commanded.

## RULE OF LIFE

You may have heard this term—or maybe it's new. A rule of life is the structure that creates the rhythms and patterns that form you and set you on a trajectory. It can be as specific as your calendar and your schedule and what time you get up in the morning, and as broad as the phrases and concepts you live by. We hope this journal helps you evaluate the current rhythms of your life and inspires adjustments so you can walk in obedience.

## J-CURVE

As you go, expect to get worse before you get better. Often when we begin new things it can feel awkward, clumsy, or downright uncomfortable. That's okay—it's normal. Keep going and keep trying. As you pursue putting Jesus' words into practice, you'll find that aligning yourself to Him becomes your natural response.

## START AGAIN

You may find one day you're doing great, and then the next you're completely out of your rhythm. That's okay. Depending on the season of life you're in, give yourself grace and pick it back up. The goal here is transformation, not behavior modification. Since this is a process, expect that sometimes you may have to start again.

## WHAT IS THIS?

We are constantly being formed by everything we do. Sometimes that's to be more like Jesus, sometimes it's to be more like the world.

This journal is intended to help you live out what Jesus said and make His teachings a part of who you are. There are many direct commands from Jesus, and in this journal we will tackle four of them and help you absorb them so they become part of your nature.

The heartbeat is that we would lean into Jesus' commands and that we would be taught how to:

abide • rejoice • deny yourself • pray

## OUTLINE

Each command is broken up into four parts.

**Part 1 | You, The Scriptures, & Repetition** // Spend time understanding what Scripture says about the command.

**Part 2 | Quotes, Teachings, How-To** // This is a primer on the concepts and an introduction on how to live out the command.

**Part 3 | Practical Ideas** // Ideas focused on ways to live it out.

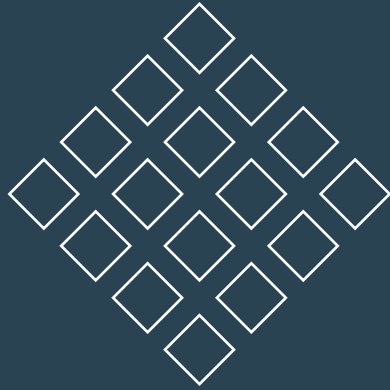
**Part 4 | Keeping the Rhythm** // How can you make the command part of your ongoing rhythm and rule of life?

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Here is a list of the pastors and leaders that helped shape and mold the content you're about to engage:

Jennie Poetzl • Beau Nutting • Marc Johnson • Shane O'Brien • Evan Cook • Kelsey Keating • Jordan Steingraber • Brooks Rice • Rachel Gilligan • Jennifer & Will Phillips • Yas & Mo Handall • Zach Balon • Dan Haesemeyer • Shannon Gardner • Ben Poetzl • Robert Nelson • Amy Mitchell • Chris Smith • Mikey Wall • Glen Grove

ABIDE



Abide—often meaning to remain or stay.

As we look into this command, we will dive into several different passages, strategies, and thoughts as we aim to stay tethered to the vine that is Jesus.

The world will pull us toward entanglement with things outside of Jesus, but those things will ultimately lead to empty places.

We want to continually become people who understand that the best source is *the* source.

**Jesus.**



# ABIDE ◊ PART 1

YOU, THE SCRIPTURES, & REPETITION

To begin living out this command, we partner with the Holy Spirit to teach us to abide.

To remain.

One of the ways we can do that is through “soaking” in the Scriptures that have to do with abiding and remaining in Him.

As you engage, spend time reading and re-reading these Scriptures and see what you notice.

What changes through repetition? What stays the same? What jumps out to you? What holds your attention? What has new meaning?

day 1

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

JOHN 8:31-32



Pay attention to your thoughts right now. Where have your thoughts been going already today?

Are your thoughts “holding to Jesus’ teaching”? Are they in alignment with what Jesus says is true, so that you are experiencing the freedom He offers? What does that look like?

In this passage: 1) What are God’s promises? 2) What is our partnership?

# day 2

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

JOHN 15:4



What does a fruitful relationship with Jesus look like?

What aspects of your life seem fruitful to you? Pause and give thanks to God for the areas where His character has become a part of your life as a result of your connection to Him.

What aspects of your life do you need to reconnect to the vine? Prayerfully surrender those areas to Jesus.

# day 3

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”

JOHN 15:9-10



Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal any agreements you have been making with lies in your life—lies that have kept you distant from God.

Now break the agreements you have made with these lies, naming them one by one.

Today, spend time telling God of your commitment to discover and follow all that He says is true! Thank Him for reminding you of His love, and offer Him your commitment to remain in His love.



# day 4

“I am the grapevine, and my Father is the gardener . . . I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

JOHN 15:1, 11

“But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

LUKE 8:15



How would you describe the difference between joy and happiness?

Is it possible Jesus is offering His joy even in the midst of the rolling waves of difficulty?

What are the components of good soil in Luke 8? Is anything keeping you from becoming “good soil?”

# ABIDE ♦ PART 2

QUOTES, TEACHINGS, HOW-TO

We grow through learning from one another.

From those who have gone before us, to those who are still with us—we can learn so much from others' experiences.

This section of the journal is intended to help us all grow from the collective wisdom of people who have put Jesus' words into action.

You will hear from pastors, leaders, thinkers, authors, and theologians (sometimes all wrapped up into one person).

As a result, there will be challenges and encouragement to engage with these Scriptures tangibly—sometimes in new and uncomfortable ways.

Let's learn and grow together.

# day 1

What does it mean to “abide” in Jesus? It’s kind of a funny word. I love some of the imagery that extends from the idea of a vine and branches. I don’t think it was unintentional for Jesus to use that idea, for several reasons. 1) I think He’s using language they would have understood. 2) It speaks of what is happening when someone is connected to the source.

When we are cut off from the source, we lose connection to health, life, and the mind of the thing we’re separated from. Our connection as “branches” to the vine gives us the ability to constantly be infused with life, truth, and wholeness from the Vine.

To remain in Him means that He is our source. Some ways this might play out in a given day:

**Constant Prayer //** Through every moment of your day, invite God’s voice and input.

**Daily Office //** Find specific times throughout the calendar of your day to pray and remind yourself of who you are in relation to God.

**Memorizing Scripture //** Our minds are powerful things when aimed in the right direction. Redirecting our energy toward spiritual truth connects us to who God is.

Try the following outline this week as a primer to a rhythm of abiding.

**Jordan**



**Wake up** | Recite John 15:4

**Drive to work** | Pray for someone in your life

**Before lunch** | Pray for someone in your life

**Midday** | Pray, "Have mercy on me, O God"

**Drive home** | Pray for someone in your life

**Dinner** | Pray with your [family, roommate, spouse]

**Before bed** | Pray John 15:4

**Tip:** Use apps like Echo Prayer to set reminders, or put reminders in your calendar.

# day 2

by **Evan Cook**

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

## **Galatians 2:20**

Christ lives in me.

I live by faith in the Son of God.

There was a union made on Calvary. An eternal payment made, so that you and I could live for eternity, not just with Jesus around, but *in* actual relationship with Him. It is an invitation to come close.

I have been following Jesus for 30 years, and the idea that Jesus would want a relationship with a broken man like me is more mind-boggling now than it was when I gave my life to Jesus. At the same time, that truth is even more comforting to me today than it was the day I stepped into it.

We are working through the command of abiding—a word that we really do not use very often, but a word that holds incredible weight.

So, abiding in Jesus. What does it mean? Left unpacked, these words are in danger of becoming another stagnant statement that followers of Jesus just nod their head at. Why? Because it sounds

nice and it sounds Christian. Just the way we like it.

However, when we dig into what it really means to abide in Christ, we find truths that we cannot allow to simply become pretty phrases hung on the walls of our homes.

The Greek word for abide is “menō.” As is common when you translate from Greek to English, there is not a simple, one size fits all translation. So, let’s look at a few different ways in which menō was commonly used.

*If you want that splendid power in prayer, you must remain in loving, abiding union with the Lord Jesus Christ.*  
**Charles H. Spurgeon**

Menō was often used when talking about remaining. As followers of Jesus, we are called to remain in Him. There was life before Jesus for each of us, and that is not the place that we want to remain. For many of us, we have made the decision to surrender our lives to Jesus. Abiding in Christ means that we are called to remain surrendered—firmly planted by the faith that we hold in Jesus and the calling that He has placed on us.

Menō was also used to describe a steadfast



endurance or resoluteness. One of the best ways to endure is to put ourselves in proximity to Jesus. He will, without a doubt, help us find strength and courage to keep moving forward when we feel like we are unable to do so under our own power. Abiding allows what has been spoken into us to take root and then produces the ability for us to speak it over our situations.

The Apostle John speaks about this in the book of 1 John.

*Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

**1 John 2:24 (ESV)**

*There is no condition of life in which we cannot abide in Jesus. We have to learn to abide in Him wherever we are placed.*  
**Oswald Chambers**

If our desire is to be people who can endure, let us not lose focus on where we need to be abiding—not in our own wisdom, strength, or abilities, but in the One who has created us. Everything we do is done better when we are attached to Jesus.

Lastly, let's look at another English word that is

often attached to *menō*. That word is *dwel*.

I don't know about you, but I usually associate the word *dwel* with something quite peaceful. As people, we rarely want to dwell in places that cause us anxiety or stress. Instead, we want to dwell in safe places. Holy places.

The encouragement found all over Scripture is for us is to abide, remain, or dwell in Jesus. It is an invitation from God to His people to find not only rest, but restoration. We do not find just peace when we abide in Christ, we also learn who we are. More importantly, who we are *in Him*.

God knows that this life will produce trouble and hardship. He is not naïve to what happens in the world that He created and that we then broke. In fact, He understands life on earth from His viewpoint, and from ours as well.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

**John 1:14 (ESV)**

Jesus dwelt among us and we are being invited to dwell in His presence. His availability to us is... always. So, let's be dwellers. Dwellers who unashamedly get close to Jesus and open ourselves up to whatever it is that He wants to do *in* our lives. And to whatever He wants to do *through* our lives.



# day 3

by Jennie Poetzel

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

**John 15:9-11 (ESV)**

Complete joy—now there's a promise. But what are we supposed to make of this statement in a world filled with so much heartache and sorrow? How was Jesus able to say it, knowing the cross was just around the corner? These types of questions can consume me.

I had a unique opportunity to attend a retreat on the Oregon Coast. It was contemplative, which meant much of it was spent in silence and stillness, simply meditating on the Bible and being in prayer. Watching and listening to the waves crashing along the shore was a balm to my soul and brought the rest I desperately needed, but it was what I experienced afterwards, on the trip back to Billings, in the most unexpected place imaginable, that has stayed with me.

The layover in Seattle was long, the airport chaotic, and I was hungry, so I popped into one of those overpriced and underwhelming terminal

eateries for a bite, pulling out my Bible to journal and reflect a bit. Before long, though, I was pulled into that ever-popular airport pastime—people watching; observing as the multitudes zoomed past, cellphones at their ears, ID tags flapping away, each one wrapped up in their own worries and timetables, just like I so often am.

When suddenly, there it was—inexplicable, indescribable, unexpected joy. In the middle of all the bustle, everywhere I looked, the world seemed electric with the goodness and love of God. For just a moment, I believe God gave me a glimpse of each person as HE sees them—unique, a precious soul, stamped in the image of God, loved and bought by Jesus for the ultimate price. Oddly, though, at the same time, I felt a deep interconnectedness with the whole; that everyone I saw was created to worship and love God together, around His throne for eternity. In that moment, I loved everyone.

I'm not really sure how long I sat there before the pull of departure times and my hamburger brought me back. And to be honest, I'm still wrestling through what to make of the experience. What I know is I want more. I do think my time of intentional abiding at the coast prepped my spirit to receive this precious gift of seeing things as they really are. The question now becomes, am I making space to connect with Jesus deeply in my everyday life, and what does that even look like?

Andrew Murray, in his book *Abide in Christ*, puts it this way – "It is only into the thirst of an empty soul



that the streams of living water flow. Ever thirsting is the secret of never thirsting.”

I am empty without Jesus. Adults like to pretend they don't have needs, but children never do.

When I recognize my deep need for Him, I respond as a child would, crawling up onto my Father's knees to simply be with Him. As we sit on Abba's lap, we can be confident in the assurance that our Father delights in us. This is true and abiding joy.

*However strong the branch becomes, however far away it reaches round the home, out of sight of the vine, all its beauty and all its fruitfulness ever depend upon that one point of contact where it grows out of the vine. So be it with us too.*

**Andrew Murray**

Although my trip was lovely, it doesn't take a retreat to experience the joy of abiding. However, it does take intentionality. I realized something after paying the bill and moving back into the bustling airport crowds. The intensity of the moment had

faded, but a deep sense of gratitude and peace remained. And now, what am I left with? A thirst for deeper connection and intimacy with God.

Whether on a mountaintop, in our living room, or at a traffic light, we can purpose in our hearts to move towards Him. God delights in our abiding.

Things to consider:

Do I wake up daily aware of my own deep need for His living water to quench the dry places in my heart?

Do I long to obey, not to earn my salvation or God's approval, but as the grateful response to His love for me?

What step is God asking me to take to draw nearer to Him?

Is He asking me to give something up? Get up earlier?

Is there something God is calling me to carve out?

In John 15:11, Jesus invites us into full joy. Our relationship with Him, connected to the vine, is our true source of joy. It transcends grief and sorrow but doesn't dismiss or invalidate them. Sorrow and joy can exist simultaneously because Jesus experienced both as well.

# ABIDE ♦ PART 3

PRACTICAL IDEAS

Abiding looks a little different for everyone. In the next pages, you'll find some ideas on how to implement this based on what we have learned ourselves.

We don't want this to be a "one-off" thing that we did that one time. We want this to become second-nature. That as we practice this, it becomes absorbed into our character and our natural response would be to live in a way that reflects the character of Jesus. We hope and pray that for all of us, obedience is our muscle memory.

The ideas in the following pages are ways that you can "try on" how to live out this command. Maybe set aside one day of the week to try one of them and see what you learn, what clicks, and how you'd like to work it into your rhythm.

# how we abide

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## TIME WITH SCRIPTURE

Here are a few ways I attempt to stay focused on my relationship with God and His invitation for me to abide in Him:

- **Pause App** | There are 8-10 minute prayer devotionals I listen to going to and from work, which serve as a prayer guide for my day.
- **Lectio 365 App** | My wife Denice and I particularly enjoy the evening devotional as a means of processing and as a way to prayerfully end our day.
- **Daily Devotions** | He speaks to us through Scripture and we speak to Him through prayer.

**Marc**

## SILENCE & SOLITUDE

I want to submit to you the practice of silence and solitude. The “simple” act of sitting alone with Jesus.

All my life I had been someone who deeply desired to sit in the presence of Jesus, but seemed to accrue guilt and shame because my mind kept wandering. When I was a kid, it was wandering toward what I was missing out on. As an adult, it often wanders toward what needs to be accomplished. So, when I tried silence and solitude, I unsurprisingly found myself distracted quickly.

Cue guilt. Cue shame.

But then, I read a quote from Rich Villodas that completely changed my perspective.



*“If your mind gets distracted 1,000 times in 10 minutes of prayer, it’s 1,000 opportunities to come back to the loving presence of Jesus.”*

Wait, what? Instead of guilt and shame, I can re-center myself and turn back to Jesus?

If you are like me and have found yourself discouraged because your prayer life often feels distractible, try this. Jesus is always thrilled when we decide to turn to Him. Even if it is in 1,000 small moments, Jesus is patiently waiting for us to abide in Him.

## **Evan**

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# how we abide

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## GO FOR A WALK

A practice I have found helpful to abide and rest with Jesus is to unplug and take a walk. My mind so easily wonders if I am sitting down at the table, but when I am out for a walk, I have found I can stay focused longer.

The important thing for me is to unplug. Often, I am tempted to watch something to take my mind off of how I am feeling, when really what I need to do is bring my needs and worries to Jesus.

On these walks, I simply talk to God. I tell Him how I am feeling and what my needs are. I ask Him to teach me and to bring me rest. These walks remind me God is always with me, all I need to do is simply acknowledge Him and invite Him into my day.

**Beau**

## ENJOYING GOD

- **Work outside** | I love spending downtime with God when me and Him are creating together in the landscape of my own yard or that of someone else. I am abiding in Him in the midst of creative solitude.
- **Exercising** | I also love conversations with God as I'm swimming or riding my bike and it is in those times "I'm just enjoying Him enjoying me."

**Marc**



## DAILY REMINDER

I have a reminder set up in my phone every day. It says “less of me, more of Him.”

John the Baptist is quoted in John 3:30 as saying, “He must become greater; I must become less.” I love reminding myself everyday that I should be inviting more of God’s presence in my life. In the Christian Standard Bible it says, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” And in the Message it says, “This is the assigned moment for him to move into the center, while I slip off to the sidelines.”

All of these point to the idea of Jesus becoming the center of the story. John the Baptist played his role, and now it was time for Jesus to be the focus. Too often in my life, I make my own story and my own ideas the center and the focal point—so this daily reminder of “less of me, more of Him” helps me re-align my heart and return to a posture of surrender and partnership with what Jesus is doing.

### **Jordan**

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?



# ABIDE ◊ PART 4

KEEPING THE RHYTHM

In the next pages you'll find some ideas on how to continue in this practice so that you become someone who "abides" or "remains."

There's a phrase that may be helpful that you might have noticed in the introduction to this journal. It's called the Rule of Life. One of the best illustrations of a rule is a trellis that a vine grows on. The structure is what provides the vine the ability to grow and extend itself toward the sun. Consider these pages your chance to add to your rule of life—the structures you have in your life to form and shape your growth.

# keeping the rhythm

Going through Part 1, we looked at key verses that focus on what it means to abide. The hope is that those Scriptures ignited interest in you when it comes to obeying the command to abide. However, we are not always going to have a formatted journal to tell us what verses to read.

So, what's next? How can you apply this practice to your life in a way that fits your schedule and rhythms? What do you need to do to help you break out of your comfort zones?

We believe that the Bible gives us insight into what it looks like to follow Jesus and be transformed to look more like Him. Our spiritual journey will include engaging with Scripture in ways that help us understand it and then aligning our lives to its invitations. Here are a few specific ways to engage with the Scriptures:

## S.O.A.P.

Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. Use this as an outline for journaling as you read a portion of Scripture. First, write down the Scripture. Then, note what you observe about it. What is it saying? What is the context? Is there an invitation for you or a challenge to change? Then, how will you apply it? What will be your response? And finally, write out your prayer in response to the Scripture.

## S.P.E.C.

First, read a passage in the Bible. Then answer these questions: Is there a Sin to avoid? A Promise to believe? An Example to follow? A Command to obey?

## BOOK STUDY

Pick a book of the Bible and really dig into it. You will undoubtedly have questions. Use commentaries and tools like Logos (there is a free version) and study Bibles to help guide you through.

## TOPICAL

Want to study a word? Maybe something like “abide” or “remain”? Use a Bible concordance to find where the word is used throughout Scripture and watch how the word of God is like one big thread.



What way will you study the Bible next?

When will you do it?

Who will you learn from?

# keeping the rhythm

Part 2 was all about learning from people who have gone before us in their walks with Jesus and from people here in our church community who are doing their best to walk with Jesus, too. We hope that there were lessons learned and moments where the Holy Spirit worked to ignite something within you!

One of the incredible things about following Jesus is that we never have to do it alone. For thousands of years, people have been trying to become more like Jesus. We do not have to figure this out by ourselves.

Along with anchoring to Scripture, we believe that there is value in learning from others. What could that look like in your life? Is it joining church regularly? Reading books? Listening to podcasts? Something else? No matter what it might look like, we are all about tapping into the family of Jesus-followers around us.

Here are several suggestions of people and podcasts you could engage with. Please know that these are just suggestions and are only a fraction of the God-inspired people who could help you learn to follow Jesus well.

## AUTHORS WE LEARN FROM

John Mark Comer, Preston Sprinkle, Andy Stanley, Jackie Hill Perry, Jon Tyson, Priscilla Shirer, Christine Caine, Dallas Willard, C.S. Lewis, Andrew Murray, N.T. Wright, Dietrich Bonhoffer, A.J. Swoboda, Timothy Keller, James Bryan Smith

## PODCASTS WE LISTEN TO

Bible Project, Ask N.T. Wright Anything, Faith Chapel Podcast, Rule of Life, The Teaching Series with Brad Gray



Where is this new practice taking root?

Where are you struggling?

What are you going to keep doing? Change?

# building a rule of life

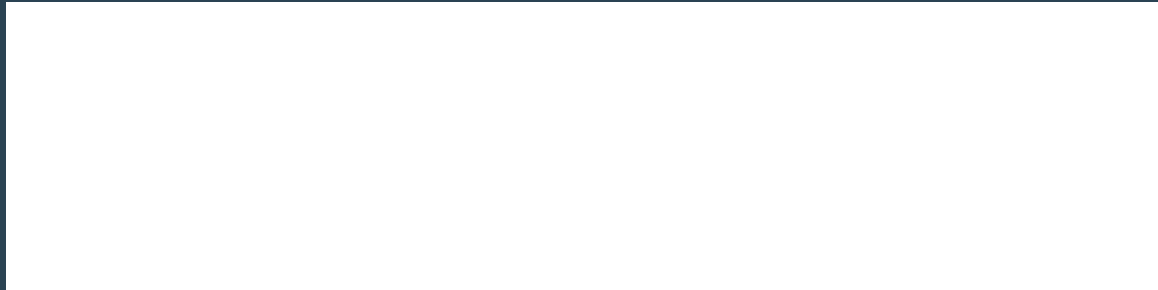
What will you add to the structure and rhythm of your: day, week, month, year?

The rule of life is all about building a framework around how the rhythms, patterns, and routines of our lives help us live out our discipleship. Use the following questions and fill-ins to create your rule of life.

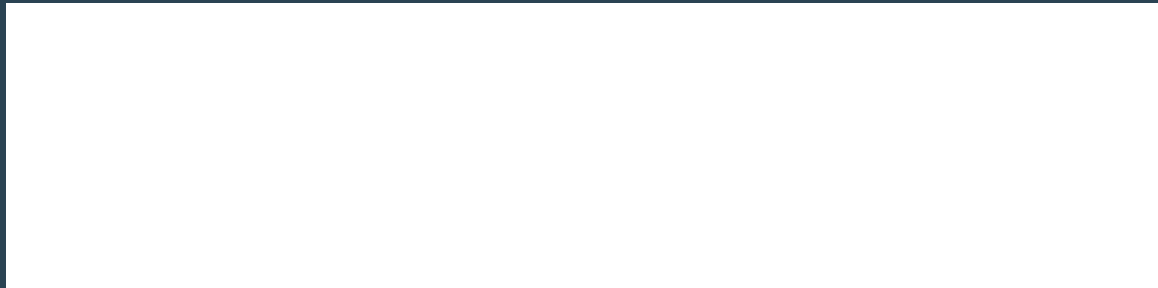
If abiding is part of your rule of life, then you will have structures to help you live that out.

*Example: I abide by creating space at the beginning of every day for time with God.*

Briefly outline the rhythms of your life—do you currently have any structure that helps you abide?



Which elements have helped you the most so far? How can you adopt them into your life?



What is one practice you will make a habit?

What is the first step you can take to make this happen?

Write out a draft of your rule of life that will help you abide:



notes & thoughts





REJOICE



The idea that we need to be taught how to rejoice seems counter-intuitive. Isn't this something we already know how to do pretty well?


Our culture provides all sorts of ways for us to pursue pleasure, fun experiences, and cheap thrills. Rejoicing, however, is harder—but infinitely better. While happiness can always be stolen by life's circumstances, joy is robust, resilient, and rich—like water from a deep well that can't be dried up by the scorching sun.

We are invited to rejoice in God because it changes our perspective, lifting our vision off our present (sometimes painful) circumstances. It helps us to see God's hand in our lives, generates gratitude, and transplants our sense of stability off of our current situation and places it on God's unwavering promises. We must choose to rejoice, and therefore we must cultivate the spiritual discipline of training our eyes to recognize all the reasons we have to rejoice.

Rejoicing can take many forms, including worship, prayer, giving, and spending time with others. Worship allows us to express our love and adoration for God through singing, dancing, and lifting our hands in praise. Prayer allows us to talk to God, confess our sins, and ask for His guidance. Giving allows us to demonstrate our gratitude by sharing our resources with others, and spreading God's love in the world. Spending time with others allows us to encourage and support one another, and to share in each other's joys and victories.

# REJOICE ^ PART 1

YOU, THE SCRIPTURES, & REPETITION



Paul encourages the Philippian church to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4). Thankfully, the Biblical writers understood the difficult tension this presents: How can we rejoice in the Lord *always* when life gives us consistent reasons to be sorrowful and distressed? What happens when I don’t feel like rejoicing?

The Bible doesn’t shy away from confronting these questions. Take a look at the following passages of Scriptures over the next few days. Follow the prompts and ask yourself: What insights can we learn from these Biblical authors who wrestled with the tension of rejoicing even in difficult circumstances?

# day 1

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. \*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9



“Let your gentleness be evident to all.” How are you growing in gentleness? Is gentleness a value in your life?

How can anxiety steal your joy?

Reread verse 8\* — take a moment to focus on those things. Jot down a list of things that reflect those qualifications.



day 2

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17



What does it mean for the Lord to rejoice over you?

Picture in your mind the Lord rejoicing over you—what does that look like?

How is that going to change your day?

day 3

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18



What does it mean to rejoice always?

What would be different about your day if you were praying continually? Schedule four times today for you to stop and pray.

List three things you're thankful for. What might be a fourth thing that is hard to be thankful for?

# day 4

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

PSALM 96




What does it mean to worship in your day-to-day life?

What questions do you have about this psalm? Write them down so you can see how God answers them in the future.

Start your day (or end it if you're doing this at night) by engaging with two worship songs.

# REJOICE ^ PART 2

QUOTES, TEACHINGS, HOW-TO



Brilliant minds have talked about what it means to rejoice and have joy over the years. How do we rejoice during the trials? Can we change our focus to the rose instead of the thorns?

So many have thought through what it means to rejoice in all circumstances, but how do we do that? Let's learn together from those who have talked about what it means to rejoice.



# day 1

It's a natural tendency to connect our ability to rejoice with our present circumstances. When these two things become too entwined, our lives can feel like a rollercoaster. When things are going well—we rejoice. When things are hard—we can be tempted to question God's good character.

However, it is possible to “rejoice in the Lord always,” regardless of our circumstances, by remembering all the things that are true about God. When we focus on those things, we can rejoice no matter the ups and downs. Here are some of things you can contemplate that are always-accessible fuel for rejoicing.

## **Brooks**



**Rejoice** in who and Whose you are (Child of God, Beloved...our identity isn't determined by failures and scars).

**Rejoice** that you can trust God and His timing.

**Rejoice** that Jesus became human and entered into our experience (Incarnation, Christmas).

**Rejoice** in Jesus' work on the cross (forgiveness and payment of our sins).

**Rejoice** in Jesus' resurrection (new resurrection life).

**Rejoice** in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (God is in us to help us walk in resurrection life).

**Rejoice** that God will one day make all things right and all things new (He's coming back!)

**Rejoice** that fear and death no longer have to control us.

**Rejoice** that God is willing and able to transform us.

**Rejoice** that we can confidently approach God with our requests (Hebrews 4:16).

**Rejoice** that you've been adopted into a new spiritual family (community).

**Rejoice** that God is sovereign and His ultimate plan to reconcile the world will never fail.

# day 2

by Kelsey Keating

*Rejoice always.*

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16

If you've ever seen Pixar's *Inside Out*, you've met Joy, an emotion who feels a gamut of other emotions: anger, sadness, annoyance, happiness, confusion, and, of course, joy.

One of my favorite things about Joy is the lesson she learns by the end of the film: joy and sadness can walk hand in hand.

Rejoice always.

Do you remember what it felt like, that first moment when you heard the truth of Jesus and what He did, when your heart leapt and the spirit within you sparked with that first drop of joy? Rejoicing felt natural; it was easy to respond to the truth and grace you received. Joy walked with happiness, filling you with buoyant, overwhelming, worshipful response.

Much like Joy in the film, those of us in western culture confuse joy with happiness. When we're happy, joy feels natural and we can bind the two together when they were never meant to be synonymous. It's easy for us to rejoice when things are going well, when we're feeling happy. But what about when we're facing difficulty, pain,

and even death?

Biblical joy isn't confined only to happiness and can be experienced even in the most difficult times. Biblical joy and rejoicing (the act of showing great joy) happens regardless of circumstances:

When David's son died (2 Samuel 12:19-20) he went to the house of the Lord and worshipped.

During His sermon on the mount, Jesus said *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* We rejoice even when we're persecuted.

In 1 Corinthians 1:24, Paul says, *"Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church..."* He's in prison when he writes to them, but he rejoices despite his circumstances.

Our joy isn't found in happiness. It's found in Jesus. That's how David worshipped in spite of his grief, how Paul rejoiced in his chains, and how Jesus chose death to save us all. Joy that is found in who God is, who He says we are, and what He's doing and has done goes beyond feeling.

Rejoice always.



*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

**John 15:10-11**

*...for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

**Nehemiah 8:10**

Abiding in Jesus gives us joy that goes beyond our momentary emotions. Whether I'm happy or sad, angry or amused, heartbroken or living in abundance...joy can be present in each and every one as long as I am abiding in who Jesus is.

*Joy is the serious  
business of heaven.*  
**C.S. Lewis**

Rejoicing always isn't easy. It's not second nature. It's something that we have to work at—a muscle to build and grow over time. The good news is that it's not a muscle you're building alone. We've been given a personal trainer in the Holy Spirit who wants to help us cultivate the fruit of joy.

I don't have all the answers, but here are three simple steps to try for the first time or, as in my case, to get you back on track.

**Step 1**—Make a choice. We have a part to play. Just like an unplanted seed can't grow, you have to

make the choice to start the process, to seek joy.

**Step 2**—Get rid of the weeds. When we talk about cultivating joy, we have to get rid of the things that steal our joy: comparison, greed, self-loathing. Comparison can steal our joy faster than anything else. When we compare, we lose. Instead of comparing yourself to the successes or circumstances of others, rejoice in their success.

**Step 3**—Take care of your joy. Plants need watering, sunlight, and proper soil to grow. So do you! As you're making choices and pulling weeds, make sure you're putting in the good things to help you rejoice. That can be worshiping, reading Scripture, or journaling through what you're feeling, high or low. God will help you find your joy in Him.

No matter what you're feeling, God has joy that is accessible to you. That joy, no matter your circumstances, will make it easier to do what Paul has commanded.

Rejoice always.

*The joy of God has gone  
through the poverty of the  
manger and the distress  
of the cross; therefore it is  
invincible and irrefutable.*  
**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

# day 3

by Zach Balon

Okay, so we are talking about joy, but what happens when we find ourselves in deeply challenging times, when we are battered by negative ideation, when emotionally we just aren't doing well? Are we really expected to rejoice in such a situation? Is that realistic? Can we amp up enough willpower to overcome the obstacles we face? It seems a bit much, doesn't it?

Before we can answer these questions, it is helpful to understand what God wants to do in us through the trials we find ourselves in. God is working in any and every situation we face, including the really rough ones. This provides hope, brings meaning to the suffering, enables us to see where God is ultimately taking us, and even gives us a picture of where we might end if we walk through the trials hand-in-hand with God.

In the book of James, we see that he is writing to followers of Jesus that have been scattered throughout the region from the persecution that began with the stoning of Stephen. Even though the timeframe puts us at only around 15 years after the death of Jesus, the church was already wavering in their faith and struggling to maintain perspective in the midst of persecution. Trials and troubles have a way of bringing disorientation, no matter how strong our faith might be.

Here's what James says to those going through a bit of a rough spot.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

**James 1:2-4**

You might notice that James doesn't pull any punches, he gets right to the heart of the matter. Surprisingly, he offers a way out of their emotional distress that is counterintuitive to anyone facing struggles. He has the audacity to say in the midst of their troubles, "Consider it pure joy". The gaul! Clearly he doesn't understand—or does he?

It would appear that James knows how the trials they are facing can actually shape them and take them to a place in Christ which they actually are longing to reach—one of growth, maturity, and completeness. James is not a new believer, he is the leader of the church in Jerusalem and likely faced many trials in his life. He is speaking from a place of maturity that could only come through the fiery tests that life affords.

Yes, he can say "consider it pure joy" because he has a crystal clear picture of what God can do through them in the midst of their trials. You see, this is our starting point when we also face struggles and difficulties in our lives today. It's called vision—vision for the end, vision of a new you, a better you, a more complete and mature you.



And so we rejoice. Yes, we choose to boldly rejoice, no longer without vision, but with purpose, knowing that trials lead to testing which leads to

*The daily decision to rejoice—to cultivate a way of seeing our lives in God’s good world, not through the lens of our phones, news apps, or flesh, but through gratitude, celebration, and unhurried delight—will over time form us into joyful, thankful people who deeply enjoy life with God and others. What starts as an act of the will eventually turns into our inner nature. What begins with a choice eventually becomes a character.*

**John Mark Comer**

perseverance and then to maturity. There is a glorious shaping and molding that Jesus Himself does in our lives with the tenderness of a craftsman’s

hands which have produced many good works.


We take that very bold first step of rejoicing in the midst of the darkest of situations, declaring God’s goodness right when hell thought it had us. We upend the script and change the plotline, refusing to be a victim of our circumstances. We align ourselves with divine strategies and overcome when others thought all was lost. We boldly rejoice, knowing God is not far from us, no, the very opposite—He is intimately involved in our situation and working in us to produce a good work.

Rejoicing is an audacious volition of the will inspired by divine vision. It belongs to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who long to live out a radical life that is ever changing, ever growing, ever pleasing to the Father. Rejoicing isn’t sporadic, neither does it have a beginning or an end, for Scripture says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 “Rejoice always.” It is a perpetual song that hell has no answer for. It is the very answer for the moments when we find ourselves in deeply challenging times, when we are battered by negative ideation and emotionally struggling to keep up. In rejoicing is victory, in rejoicing is a way out, in rejoicing is completion. It leads us to a maturity that lacks nothing. It is a bold defiance to the plans of hell. It is the Christian’s way to overcome in any and every situation.

Let us rejoice, again and again, for in our unbridled joy, Christ works wonders in us and through us.

# REJOICE ^ PART 3

PRACTICAL IDEAS



This next section is a chance to try something new. The goal is finding a new way to follow the command to rejoice. We serve a God who commands us to rejoice. That is unique, isn't it?

The thought of being commanded to rejoice invites a smile—there is irony and humor there.

Over the next couple of days, read through these things to try and choose one to do. If it doesn't resonate with you, try another. Or come up with your own idea.



# how we rejoice

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## HELPFUL

*Rejoicing always* doesn't mean pretending difficult things aren't happening. When they do happen, it is good to acknowledge them and identify how you feel.

Take time to talk to Jesus or write down how you are feeling. You may even think of ways you're wanting to cope with those difficult circumstances, like: eating, blaming others, withdrawing, avoiding, or isolating. Instead, take time to focus on what is true—that you are loved and never alone. Ask Jesus to help you take action that is helpful. Sometimes it's through acknowledging that God's Spirit is with you and asking Him for help that takes us closer to rejoicing in the Lord.

**Brooks**

## ALL DAY LONG

Try applying 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 throughout your day. For example, "Rejoice always, pray continually"—take a moment while you're at work, home, or while you're doing the dishes to talk to Jesus for a quick moment. Or when you feel an anxious moment or thought, thank God for that thought—and ask Him to help you with that thought or feeling. Confess that you need Jesus' help knowing He is with you and gives guidance and wisdom freely. Try thanking God for as many things as you can, all day long.

**Kelsey**



## REJOICE THROUGH SONGS

Songs give us several ways to respond to God. They help us memorize truths about who God is, they reinforce solid theology, and they give us words that we can say to God—often in ways that we wouldn't otherwise be able to articulate.

Find a song that has words that you want to say to God, that expresses praise for who He is. Put this song on repeat or have it as a song that you come back to day after day for a while and see how it changes your posture toward praise and gratitude.

### **Jordan**

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# how we rejoice

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## REMEMBER

One of things I do to realign my heart is by remembering all of the ways God has moved throughout my life. I look back on all the things He has done, the ways He has proven Himself true, and the grace and mercy He has extended to me. By thinking over large sections of my life, I'm able to remember His goodness and find myself rejoicing in response.

**Jordan**

## WRITE IT DOWN

Spend a moment writing down things you are thankful for.

Now choose one and try to break it down into more detail. For example, "I am thankful for work—but why? It keeps me on track, helps me buy food and comforts like light, heat, flushing toilets, helps me provide for others through giving, it's fun, makes me stronger because there are always problems and difficulties to overcome, I typically learn new things at work, meet new people, make friends, celebrate achievements at work, receive a certain satisfaction of purpose and meaning, etc."

**Ben**



## THREE MOMENTS OF JOY

Today, when something brings you a smile or a moment of joy, take note of it. At the end of the day, write down the top three things that brought you joy. Then take a moment to write down a prayer of praise and gratitude for those moments.

**Shane**

## 60 SECONDS OF GRATITUDE

Try to write down as many things that you are thankful for in less than 60 seconds. Try this for a week and see how many things you have listed this. Take a moment to repeat these lists in your head or out loud as a prayer throughout your day.


**Dan**

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# REJOICE ^ PART 4

KEEPING THE RHYTHM

A decorative graphic consisting of several nested, downward-pointing triangles. The triangles are formed by thick, light teal lines. The innermost triangle is the smallest, and each subsequent triangle is larger, creating a sense of depth and a central white space where the text is located. The lines are parallel to each other within each triangle, and the overall shape is symmetrical.

You've made it to Part 4—congratulations! So far, you've meditated on Scripture, dug deeper into what rejoicing is, and tried out practical ways of rejoicing in your day-to-day life.

But we can't stop there.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that we want to cultivate in our lives, and rejoicing is a way of expressing our joy. You have the opportunity to start putting all that you've learned into practice to make rejoicing a part of who you are at your core.

# keeping the rhythm

Think back on the last three sections:

What helped you rejoice and what challenged you most?

What practices made the most impact?

What was hard? What was helpful?

Now think forward—who do you want to be in five years when it comes to joy and rejoicing? What changes can you make now to make that person a reality?

And don't worry—God is going to go with you every step of the way! You can always look back on what you've learned, change things up, and recommit your roots.



Where is this new practice taking root?

Where are you struggling?

What are you going to keep doing? Change?



# building a rule of life

What will you add to the structure and rhythm of your: day, week, month, year?

The rule of life is all about building a framework around how the rhythms, patterns, and routines of our lives help us live out our discipleship. Use the following questions and fill-ins to create your rule of life.

If rejoicing is part of your rule of life, then you will have structures to help you live that out.

*Example: I rejoice by spending time once a week doing something that reminds me of the goodness of God.*

Briefly outline the rhythms of your life—do you currently have any structure that helps you rejoice?

Which elements have helped you the most so far? How can you adopt them into your life?



What is one practice you will make a habit?

What is the first step you can take to make this happen?

Write out a draft of your rule of life that will help you rejoice:

notes & thoughts





DENY



Deny.


What a cold, hard word. It can cause feelings of rejection, shame, or fear. Denial can also imply the idea of trying harder or striving.

Fortunately, this is not quite what the Bible is talking about. Over the next few weeks, the hope is you would learn how to replace lies with truth and learn to choose what is eternal over what is temporary.

To begin, one element of denying yourself is embracing new understandings and perspectives. The command to deny yourself is more than just removing something; it's important that what is removed is replaced with something new. Whenever we deny something, it is to create space to choose something else.

# DENY ∨ PART 1

YOU, THE SCRIPTURES, & REPETITION



We live in a world where messages of selfishness and self-gratification surround us. “You deserve this” has become the marketing message to entice you to think about one thing—*you*.

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.*

**Isaiah 55:8**

As you spend time reading the following passages, ask God to reveal His heart to you. Ask for clarity and understanding. Denial without God is only about the self—denial with God is all about Him. What you are focused on will determine the outcome of the next few days of reading.

Pause to make sure your focus is in the right place.



day 1

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

MATTHEW 16:24-26



Reflect on the difference between trying to save your life on your own and losing your life to find it in Jesus.

What comes to the forefront of your mind as you think through these contrasting approaches?

In what ways do we try to save our own lives? How do you?

# day 2

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

MARK 10:29-31



Am I living for today or eternity?

What is God asking me to lay down?

What is a current choice I'm making that I should deny?

# day 3

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:13



Where am I leading others by how I live my life?

Am I considering others' weaknesses or only my freedoms?

Am I choosing what I am allowed or what is good?

# day 4

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

GALATIANS 5:13-18 (NLT)



Am I living in the freedom that God offers me?

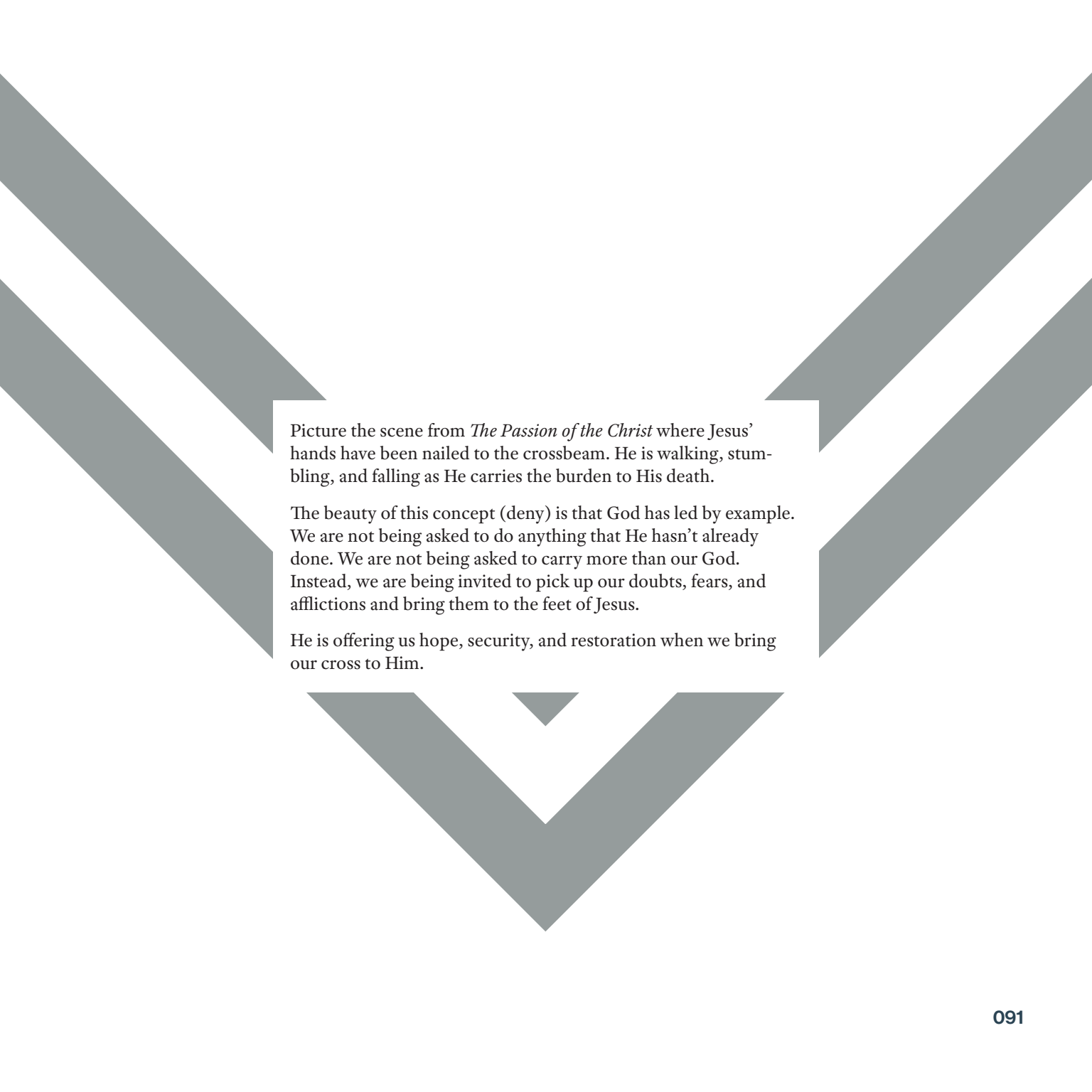
Am I trusting God with my new identity?

How is God calling me to serve others?



# DENY ∨ PART 2

QUOTES, TEACHINGS, HOW-TO



Picture the scene from *The Passion of the Christ* where Jesus' hands have been nailed to the crossbeam. He is walking, stumbling, and falling as He carries the burden to His death.

The beauty of this concept (deny) is that God has led by example. We are not being asked to do anything that He hasn't already done. We are not being asked to carry more than our God. Instead, we are being invited to pick up our doubts, fears, and afflictions and bring them to the feet of Jesus.

He is offering us hope, security, and restoration when we bring our cross to Him.

# day 1

Growing up, my sister and I lived in constant fear of quicksand. We played imaginative games about being stuck in quicksand and we had a plan for if we ever did run into quicksand.

To this day, we have never seen quicksand.

To be trapped in quicksand means you are stuck and slowly sinking into the unknown. Your only hope when stuck in quicksand is a vine or stick to grab hold of or for someone to come along with something for you to grab as they pull you out of the sand.

Our own minds can be quicksand sometimes. We get stuck in negative thoughts, anxiety, and lies, and as a result, we start to slowly sink.

Denying ourselves can include denying our thoughts: the negative mindsets and lies that we believe. Luckily for us, God is standing with a rope ready to help pull us out of the quicksand—all it takes is grabbing on. The solution is to fill our minds with the new mindsets found in Scripture.

Take some time practicing this, write down the old mindsets that trap you, and then find a verse in the Bible that helps fight that. Deny yourself of these old thoughts and replace them with the truth of Scripture.

**Rachel**



We are called to deny ourselves, and while that includes some of the desires of our hearts, it also includes the condition, actions, and thoughts of our sin, heart, and mind. We need a heart and mind overhaul, and it can only be done through God and the help of Scripture.

Write down four mindsets that you need to deny in yourself, and replace them with God's truth and what He is calling you to do.

Old mindset	New mindset
Anxiety	Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <b>Phil. 4:6</b>

# day 2

One of the things that helps me deny myself is to identify the bad habits that I want to remove, so that I might say “yes” to the right things and “no” to the things that don’t bear the right fruit in my life.

I have found it immensely helpful to understand the cycle of a habit. It starts with a cue—something that begins the cycle. Let’s use an advertisement as an example. The cue might be seeing a slice of pizza or a hamburger and that begins the entire cycle.

Next is the craving—I’ve seen the pizza, I crave the pizza.

Next is the response—I call up the pizza place and ask them for a delivery.

Then there’s the reward—I get the pizza and I eat it.

There are so many habits in our day that we are unaware of—it saves us mental energy. Some of the things we do we may want to change, yet it can be hard because of how powerful the cycle of a habit is.

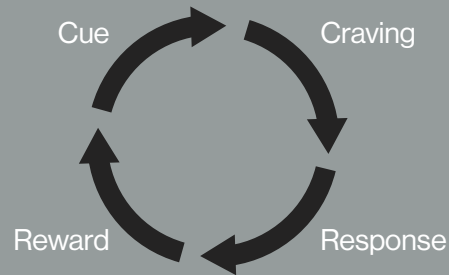
For a while I had a habit of opening social media apps after responding to a text. I didn’t do it on purpose—it just happened. I had a cue—a notification. I had the craving—“I wonder who texted me.” I had the response—I opened the notification. And then the reward of reading the text. The problem was another habit kicked in. I would see social media apps which gave me a cue, a craving, a response, and then a reward. And before I knew it, I’d have wasted time on something I never intended to.

This is how I’ve learned to deny myself: I create friction around the cues. When I find a bad or undesirable habit, I create natural friction so that it’s harder for me to either receive the cue, or harder for me to respond to it once the craving hits. The beauty of this is that the opposite is true when you want to build a good habit—reduce friction by making it easy to do the thing you want to.

Here is a short list of some things I’ve done on either side.

**Jordan**





## CREATE FRICTION

- Remove apps from home screen or delete altogether
- Don't buy the food/drink that I want to cut out of my diet
- Put my phone on the other side of the room when I'm home with the family
- Put the TV/entertainment in the den
- Put passwords and restrictions on content that I don't want in our home/on our devices (includes time limits, etc.)

## REMOVE FRICTION

- Hang my guitar in my living room so I can just pick it up
- Mount a reading light above my headboard so I can read before bed
- Have chilled water in the fridge to replace high-sugar alternative
- Pack my gym clothes the night before, plus pick my workout
- Have lunch supplies (including how to transport it) on hand so I don't eat out

# day 3

by Will Phillips

One of the most profound illustrations from Matthew 16 is the interaction that Peter has with Jesus. It begins in verse 18 where Jesus tells Peter he is a rock—a rock that He will build His church upon. Then in verses 21-23, Jesus reveals that He will submit to suffering and death, and Peter reacts with frank disbelief. Jesus now responds to Peter quite differently, saying, “Get behind me Satan.”

How many of us, if we were Peter, would have stopped right there, given up, and quit? How many of us would have been crushed under the weight of shame and guilt, feeling like a failure?

This is where denying becomes so significant. There are times when we have to deny our flesh and choose to view ourselves through God’s perspective. If Peter allowed himself to be defined by the shame of failure, or if Peter had embraced the idea that his mistake was too great to overcome, then the rest of the story would have become irrelevant.

The beauty of Peter’s story is that it doesn’t end with this remark. In Matthew 26, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane and Peter draws a sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest. Jesus heals this man and tells Peter that anyone who lives by the sword dies by the sword.

Then shortly after this encounter in the garden, Peter denies ever knowing Jesus—three times. After realizing what he has done, Peter weeps.

What I am struck by is that the very next passage describes a man who is hopeless and in great despair. However the man isn’t Peter, this man is Judas. Peter still had hope because he clung to Jesus. Judas was the one who betrayed Jesus, and therefore lost all hope.

*To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-denial can say is: “He leads the way, keep close to him.”*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

We pick the story back up in John 21. After Jesus’ ascension, He reveals Himself to the disciples and Jesus and Peter have another interaction.



Peter is out in a boat fishing and sees Jesus on shore, so he removes his outer garments and jumps overboard in an attempt to swim to shore.

This story ends by contrasting Peter's three denials with Jesus giving Peter three opportunities to reaffirm his love and faith. Each time Peter says, "Yes, you know I love you," and Jesus once again invites Peter to, "Follow Me."

*We aren't occasionally called to pick up a certain cross; we are called to an entire way of life.*

**Christy Gambrell**

This story reveals God's heart for each one of us. God doesn't expect perfection, He expects brokenness and mistakes, and He still continues to lovingly pursue us.

*Self-denial corrects two evil tendencies ever attacking Christian ethics. There is a tendency to give more attention to outward standards than to the inward state of the heart. And there is a tendency to be strict with others and lenient with oneself... These two dragons are slain by the sword of self-denial when their heads appear in the land of Christian liberty.*

**Walter J. Chantry**



# day 4

by Rachel Gilligan

Have you ever tried to walk with a large group of children? Unless you're a teacher, or spend time in Kids Ministry, probably not, so I'll explain it to you.

Every Wednesday night, during youth group, the Kids Ministry team walks nearly one hundred 4th and 5th graders to a different room in the building for their worship time. One leader is tasked to lead the group, and every week the students are told the same thing, "Stay behind the leader, do not run ahead."

As you start walking, kids are immediately trying to run past you, they are crowding you, yelling at you to walk faster, and by the end they have most definitely passed you and are sprinting off to the main sanctuary. No matter what we say, once they're walking they can't help but want to be in front, even if they have no idea where they are going—they'd rather run in front and readjust than follow the leader.

Often in my life and relationship with Jesus, I'm just like these 4th and 5th graders. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus tells His disciples, "whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Jesus is calling His disciples, and us, to follow Him, and often I find myself trying to run ahead, preferring to run blindly forward than

sticking behind Jesus.

The ability to deny yourself and the ability to follow go hand in hand; you can't have one without the other. The act of following is the willingness to release control, and the need to control is hardwired in all of us.

One of the most beautiful examples of denying is the story of Ruth, found in the Old Testament. Ruth is a Moabite woman, who marries an Israelite man whose family moved to Moab to survive a famine. While living in Moab, every man in Ruth's new family dies: her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law, leaving her, her mother-in-law, Naomi, and sister-in-law, Orpah, behind. Historically in this time, being a widow was dangerous and difficult, and Naomi encourages both her daughter-in-laws to return to their own families, and to stay in Moab with their people. This is what it says in Ruth 1:11-18:

*But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!" At this they wept aloud again.*

*Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but*



*Ruth clung to her.*

*“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.*

*At each stage of [spiritual] growth, more self-denial is required, more painful blows to self, more reckless decision to serve the Lord Christ with consequent abandonment of one’s own life.*  
**Walter Chantry**

Ruth had every reason to stay in Moab and not go back to Bethlehem with Naomi; safety, comfort, and chance to remarry a Moabite man. Instead, she chooses to deny herself, to take away the control she could have and follow Naomi. The result is

that God provides for her and Naomi. You can read the rest of the story in the book of Ruth.

While the situation Ruth finds herself in is unique, the heart of it is something we can all learn from.

Instead of choosing comfort, and control, Ruth chooses to follow. We are called to make similar decisions. Within our sinful nature is a need to control, to be comfortable, and a need to determine our identity. Jesus calls us into something different. He calls us to deny all the things we believe we need, and commands us to do what we actually need—to follow Him.

The other night I was struggling, feeling guilty about the mistakes I had made as a parent, fearful of the world and what I was hearing on media, saddened by unexpected twists of life. Through the swirling of anxiety, fear, and anger, my mind went to one question, “Am I actually following Jesus?”

I wasn’t.

I was taking control, I was running ahead. I needed to deny my desire to control, the desire to solve my own problems my own way. What I really needed was to say to Jesus what Ruth said so long ago, “Where you go, I’ll go.”

# DENY ∨ PART 3

PRACTICAL IDEAS



Denying yourself takes discipline.

It takes practice.

And often it takes community to help you engage in a new practice. In the following pages, you'll find ways that we've found help to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

Feel free to borrow these ideas, modify them, or use them as inspiration to step into a new level of obedience.

# how we deny

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## TIME WITH GOD

When we deny ourselves we make room for God. And there are thousands of ways to deny ourselves. Step number one? Quit making excuses that you just don't have time. Deny yourself a few extra minutes of sleep, get out of bed, and into the Bible. It all starts there!

**Marc**

## THE "NO" MUSCLE

I've found that one of the best things I can do to practice denying myself is saying "no" in an area of my life where I need to to build up my "no" muscle.

That can be fasting, that can be screen-time before bed, comfort in a specific form, it can be anything. Once I build some momentum saying "no" to myself in a specific area, it helps me be disciplined saying no in other areas. It also makes space for me to say "yes" to stepping into God's invitation.

When I'm disciplined with exercising and saying "no" to laziness, I'm more disciplined saying "no" to unhealthy foods. Start with saying no to: selfishness, indulgence, laziness, a specific comfort, and then watch how you are better at denying yourself in other areas. Build up your "no" muscle.

**Jordan**



## STEP INTO INCONVENIENCE

When was the last time you denied yourself by being inconvenienced? We live in a world of hurry and constant movement. We like our schedules and our plans. Maybe it would do some good to be inconvenienced. Am I willing to be inconvenienced by the world around me? Am I willing to step into a void or a gap that I see? I was driving to a coffee shop last winter and came across a homeless man sleeping on a bus bench. I felt the Lord present me with a choice: keep going and be on time to my meeting, or buy this man a coffee and breakfast sandwich and risk falling behind. I struggled with the decision before finally being inconvenienced by God and trusting His voice. Where can you be inconvenienced this week by stepping in the gap? What is a need in your neighborhood? In the church? What is tugging at your heart? Deny yourself this week by allowing yourself to serve at your inconvenience.

**Shane**

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# how we deny

Pick one of these practices and try it out.

## FASTING

Giving up food is a very specific way to deny yourself. There are very tangible things that happen in the process of fasting. Here are some of them:

- When we say no to our stomach, it denies our body of being the master over our decision making and emotions.
- Fasting is a constant reminder of where our strength comes from.
- Fasting provides an intensified focus in our prayers and communion with God.

Try doing a 24 hour fast. I try a fast (only black coffee in the morning—no sugar or cream) once a week by eating dinner, and then I won't eat again until I break the fast during the next day's dinner.

**Jordan**

## WHO BENEFITS?

Denying ourselves, like other spiritual practices, takes work. It doesn't come naturally. What comes naturally, for me especially, is selfishness. It is incredibly simple for me to get in a head-space where my wants and desires take precedent over everything else going on around me. As a husband, father, and most importantly, a follower of Jesus, that has to die in me.

Philippians 2:3-4 (CSB) speaks directly to that part of our human nature.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.*



For me, one of the most challenging AND fruitful ways that I step into self-denial is by asking myself “who benefits the most from this decision?” If the answer is me, I need to reassess. If the answer is someone else, I feel free to move forward.

Unsurprisingly, when you or I become selfless instead of selfish, we find our lives to be full of more joy and fulfillment than we ever would have experienced if we had taken the more natural route. Here’s to self-denial!

**Evan**


How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?



# DENY ∨ PART 4

KEEPING THE RHYTHM



Learning how to deny ourselves will take time. It's not easy, yet, it's the invitation that Jesus extends to us.

In this section, decide how you'll take what you've learned up to this point and continue to deny yourself in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

# keeping the rhythm

In Matthew 4, we find a great example of how to live out self-denial through the life of Jesus.

Jesus is in the desert being tempted by the devil. Jesus faces temptations three different times. The first temptation was a physical temptation. Jesus was hungry, and Satan told Jesus to turn a stone into bread. The next temptation was an emotional temptation, where Satan challenged Jesus' identity. The final temptation was a spiritual temptation, where Satan challenges Jesus with who is ultimately in control and has power.

Jesus models self-denial in each of these temptations by replacing the lie of the enemy with the truth of Scripture. One of the best ways we practice denial is by clinging to the life that God gives us through the truth of Scripture where we find nourishment, our identity, and strength.

In Jesus' example, He knew truth. He knew what the Bible said about who He was, and who God was, and that enabled Jesus to resist temptation.

Often our success in denying ourselves is anchored in whether or not we're equipped with truth. Learning and memorizing Scripture is a fantastic way to prepare for moments when there is a crossroads, so that when the time comes, you're ready to deny yourself.



What lies are you believing?

What Scriptures speak the truth about that situation?

How can you lean into and apply that today?

# keeping the rhythm

One great way to live out the principle of self-denial is through examining the roots and fruits in your life.

Generally, fruits are much easier to see. They are your reactions, habits, choices etc. Everyone sees the fruits in your life because they are what others experience in their interactions with you. Roots, then, are the source of those fruits. Matthew 6:22 tells us that “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” Said differently, Jesus says in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

When our roots are unhealthy, our fruits will be poison to others. When our roots are healthy and well nourished, the fruits are life giving. When you find yourself impatient while driving or waiting in the line at the grocery store, or you get home after a long day and don't feel like you have anything to give, a good question to ask is, “What have I been filling myself with?”

Sometimes when we do this in our lives, we find that we've been trading things that are life-giving for things that are easy. We can tend to trade lasting impact for temporary comfort. It's at these times that it's critical to remember who we are and choose His way over our own.



Where is this new practice taking root?

Where are you struggling?

What are you going to keep doing? Change?

# building a rule of life

What will you add to the structure and rhythm of your: day, week, month, year?

The rule of life is all about building a framework around how the rhythms, patterns, and routines of our lives help us live out our discipleship. Use the following questions and fill-ins to create your rule of life.

If denying is part of your rule of life, then you will have structures to help you live that out.

*Example: I deny myself by fasting once a week for 24 hours.*

Briefly outline the rhythms of your life—do you currently have any structure that helps you deny?

Which elements have helped you the most so far? How can you adopt them into your life?



What is one practice you will make a habit?

What is the first step you can take to make this happen?

Write out a draft of your rule of life that will help you deny:



notes & thoughts





PRAY



John Bunyan urges us to “Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan.” Martin Luther called prayer “the very business of Christians, just as it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes.” I desire to “make sense of my life in the light of eternity,” as put by Terry Glaspey.

Yet, what is prayer? Why should I pray? And, how should I pray? Jesus’ disciples once asked Him to teach them how to pray. This is what He said:

*“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**

# PRAY ◊ PART 1

YOU, THE SCRIPTURES, & REPETITION

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He taught them a significant and purposeful pattern.

*“Every petition creates a context for the next one...praying this prayer...in the right order allows us not only to know and believe the good news but to become part of it ourselves.”*

**N.T. Wright**

**The Five “P”s of Prayer (Based on Matthew 6:9-13)**

Praise (vs 9) Purposes (vs 10) Provision (vs 11) Penitence (vs 12)  
Protection (vs 13)

Each of the entries this week will feature Matthew 6:9-13 as recorded in two different Biblical translations. A quick note on Bible translations: word-for-word translators focused on each individual word in the ancient texts, while thought-for-thought translations focus more on the complete meaning of the different phrases in the original texts. As you read over the words, pause at specific words and unique phraseology.

Let’s join the disciples at the feet of Jesus as He teaches us to pray.

# day 1

“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.”

## MATTHEW 6:9-13 (THE MSG)

“Therefore, you should pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. 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 do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

## MATTHEW 6:9-13 (CSB)



Ask God to reveal who He is to you. Write what you hear here.

What is amazing about God?

How has God revealed His goodness to you this week?



# day 2

“Pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, Your name is holy. May Your holy nation come. What You want done, may it be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the bread we need today. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not let us be tempted, but keep us from sin. Your nation is holy. You have power and shining-greatness forever. Let it be so.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NLT)

“After this manner therefore pray ye: ‘Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (KJV)



List some ways you can submit your purposes to God's good plan today.

How can you partner with God specifically?

What of God's will in heaven can you pray to be done on earth?

# day 3

“Pray along these lines: ‘Our Father in heaven, we honor your holy name. We ask that your kingdom will come now. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food again today, as usual, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Don’t bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen.’”

## MATTHEW 6:9-13 (LIVING BIBLE)

“Your prayers, rather, should be simple, like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, let Your name remain holy. Bring about Your kingdom. Manifest Your will here on earth, as it is manifest in heaven. Give us each day that day’s bread—no more, no less—And forgive us our debts as we forgive those who owe us something. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [But let Your kingdom be, and let it be powerful and glorious forever. Amen.]”

## MATTHEW 6:9-13 (THE VOICE)



What needs do you have?

Blank space for writing answers to the question: What needs do you have?

Where do you need God to show up?

Blank space for writing answers to the question: Where do you need God to show up?

Write down a time when God demonstrated His provision for you.

Blank space for writing answers to the question: Write down a time when God demonstrated His provision for you.

# day 4

“Pray then like this—‘Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured; May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need, Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (JB PHILLIPS)

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NASB)



How have you experienced God's forgiveness?

What offenses are you holding on to?

Who do you need to forgive today?

# day 5

“So you should pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (JERUSALEM BIBLE)

“Pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.’”

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NLT)



Do you believe that God can protect you?

Blank space for response to the first question.

In what ways are you trying to protect yourself?

Blank space for response to the second question.

What would it look like for you to trust God for your safety?

Blank space for response to the third question.



# PRAY ◊ PART 2

QUOTES, TEACHINGS, HOW-TO

In this section, we are going to cover a specific way to pray. If you're new to prayer, this is going to be a great place to begin. This section will provide a "primer" so that you have a working model. If you're a seasoned prayer – this will be a great reminder and a return to the "roots".

Prayer can take many different forms and doesn't always include words. We'll cover some other ways to pray in the next section.

While you're in this section, we encourage you to try this outline and see how it affects your prayer life over the course of a few days.

# day 1

One of the most significant ways for me to pray is through the outline that Jesus gives in Matthew. I've found there is nothing that centers my prayers more than this.

Several years ago, I was part of a small group that met weekly to pray this outline over and over again, and it was one of the most impactful prayer groups I've been a part of.

Since then, any time that I need to focus my prayer, this is the outline I turn to.

At the right, I've outlined the sections I go through, however, they aren't as memorable as what has been outlined prior to this. Whether you use the words I've assigned or the Five P's of Prayer—the concept is the same.

Either by yourself or with others, pray through each section.

**Worship //** Spend some time praising God for who He is.

**Your Kingdom Come //** Ask and intercede for others for God's kingdom character and aspects to invade situations.

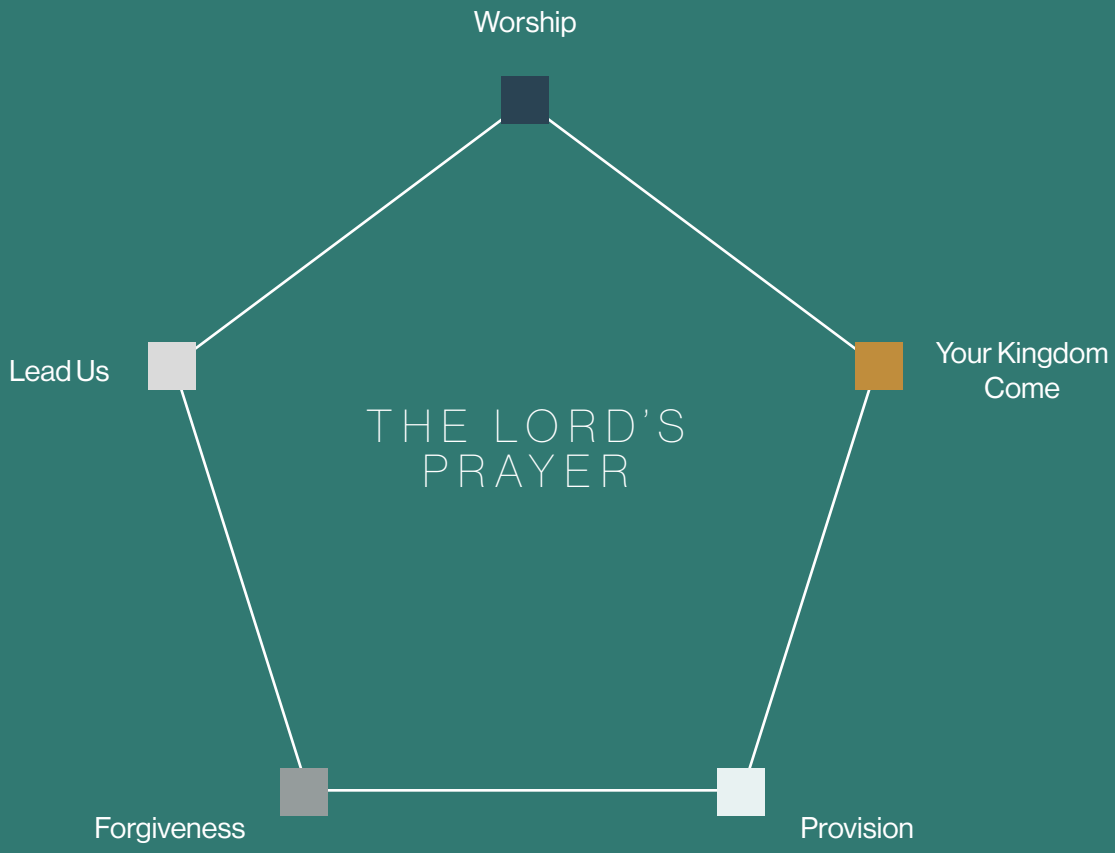
**Provision //** Ask God for what you need today.

**Forgiveness //** Where do you need forgiveness? Who do you need to forgive?

**Lead Us //** There is an enemy that wants to steal, kill, and destroy. Pray against his plans and ask God to deliver you.

**Jordan**





# day 2

by Yas & Mo Handall

*Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.*

**Luke 6:47-48 (ESV)**

As missionaries to Native American reservations, we find ourselves going back to the early days of our walk with Jesus, 25 years earlier, still relying on the “HOW TOs” that were taught to us by our mentors. We relied on them to show us how to read the Bible, apply it to our daily life, and teach others to do the same. One of the most essential things that we learned how to do was pray.

Of all the acts that Jesus did—the miracles, the signs, the wonders—the disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. Then Jesus modeled it for them in the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13. It was the first prayer we memorized and the prayer we continue to pray today. As we matured in our spiritual walk, we have learned how to pray with our own words.

As we know, communication requires speaking and listening as an exchange. Many times, we speak to God by asking, requesting, and petition-

ing. Yet, prayer is much more than that. A Hebrew Scholar wrote, “Gd does not need our prayer; He can do without our prayers, but we cannot do without our prayers. It is good for us to acknowledge our dependence on Gd for our very life, our health, our daily bread, and our general welfare.” As we pray and acknowledge our dependence on God, we have the opportunity of making our lives more stable.

That stability in our lives requires the other side of communication, which is listening. In Hebrew, the word for listen is “schema” and in its definition, the word “listen” is tied to the word “do.” In this sense, if we do not do what we have heard, we have not listened. When we learned this, the way we prayed expanded to include, “God what would you have us do with what we learned or are sensing You say?” In Luke 6:47-48, Jesus is describing how our lives become stable when we “Come...Hear...and Do.” Jesus is teaching us to schema His voice.

We schema His voice when we come to the Bible by reading or hearing it, then praying and asking His Holy Spirit to reveal to us how to put His commands into practice. The act of obeying what God says is to truly listen to Him. When we listen to God continuously, our life will not fall apart when the storms of life come.

When we first started following Jesus, we lived in a two-bedroom apartment with two babies that were a little over a year apart. That meant double diapers which meant double the money. We were



both in school and had minimum-wage jobs, so making ends meet was difficult. We prayed and asked God to show us how to be ahead. We read the Bible and learned about tithes and offerings. We asked our mentors how to give with a right heart, then we applied what we learned. The result was astonishing. Our situation did not change, yet we'd come home, and, on many occasions, would find bags of food or boxes of diapers and even new clothes. Our funds seemed to stretch. To this day, we have never been without. Our finances and occupations became stable as we learned to be obedient.

*I don't often spend more than half an hour in prayer at one time, but I never go more than half an hour without praying.*  
**Smith Wigglesworth**

God has even brought stability to others through us when we've come to Him in prayer, sensed God telling us what to do, then doing what God said. Yas was once in a small prayer meeting with other pastors on the second floor in a church in South Dakota. There was a knock at the door and when someone opened it, there stood a Native man, towering over everyone at 6'4", pleading for prayer. The pastors stopped to attend to him. As their

prayers went on, Yas ran out of words in English and began to pray in Spanish. He came to a point when he did not know what else to pray in Spanish, so Yas prayed to God to give him the right words. He sensed inside of him a language that he did not understand, but knew that God was asking him to speak these words to the desperate man. In an act of obedience, Yas took a step of boldness and prayed the words that seemed to just flow out of his mouth. The Native man began to weep profusely. Yas wanted to stop but felt the urge to keep speaking. Suddenly, the man stood up and asked Yas, "Who are you?" Yas answered quietly, "I'm Yas from Mexico City." The man asked again, "No, who are you?"

In astonishment, the man said, "Pastor Yas, you don't understand. When you were praying, you spoke a prayer over me in Lakota. You called me by the name that my grandfather called me." Then he wept again, "God speaks Lakota! My God speaks Lakota!"

That evening, through prayer, listening, and obeying, that man realized that God knew him personally and his life has never been the same since.

Reading the Bible, praying, and listening have been foundational to us. Obeying what God says has made us followers and has stabilized our ministry. Prayer is essential for our spiritual walk as we Come, Hear, and Do.

# day 3

**by Glen Grove**

Several years ago, I had the great privilege of being invited to join weekly with a group of guys who have been meeting regularly over the last 15 years for prayer and encouragement, wise, Biblical counsel, and just for fun. Initially, they had started to gather because they all had sons (only one girl in the bunch) and were looking for some help on how to best raise these boys to become strong followers of Jesus. Now, most all of the kids are out of the house and some are even married and having little ones of their own. But these guys continue to meet.

The men are not terribly formal, and neither are our Saturday morning coffee shop meetings. Currently, we are working, sporadically, through a discipleship oriented book. In the past, there have been well planned camping trips and even the occasional, intentional service project designed to be a teaching tool. When I moved to a new house, they coordinated trucks and trailers and showed up with a plan.

But sometimes, on Saturdays, we just sit together nursing hot drinks and showing off hunting pictures. For the whole meeting. In fact, it's not uncommon for us to sit and talk trucks, fish, and home improvement for an hour and then somebody jumps up, says, "I gotta go" and we slowly start to disperse.

But, somewhere between talking about trout and floor tile installation, trust has been deeply fostered. Going to each other's kid's weddings, shooting groundhogs together, watching another guy's son play football, doing birthday parties and Superbowl bashes, have all been vehicles for engendering a deeply held belief that these guys individually want the best for each one of the others.

After five years with these fellows, I am still the rookie and the only one without kids. I've got a cat, but in this crowd that doesn't count for too much and my "dad" credibility is remarkably low. I don't know much. But, what I do know is that I have learned that anyone in the group can come to the guys with anything. They listen and often offer some great, Bible-based advice proven through experience. And they pray. Sometimes right in the meeting, sometimes one-on-one in the parking lot, sometimes over a group text or a personal phone call.

They pray over the things that concern each other. They pray over basketball injuries a son has suffered, they pray over marriages, over personal challenges, over finances, over a child who is losing his way, over a wife who is having surgery, over a project at work, and a puzzling passage of Scripture. They pray for their church, for our nation, for pastors and politicians, and for local leaders who guide us. They pray over public problems and over personal pain. And they pray without judgment.

All the coffee, camping trips, church services,



book studies, and ball games have forged them into a group who care and pray for each other. Without prejudice or aspersions, prayer requests are brought to one another. Sometimes to the whole group, sometimes to an individual, but there is always a place, a time, and a way to share deep issues and to find prayer.

After 15 years of prayer, they would not pretend that their lives are perfect, that their marriages are flawless, or that their walk with Jesus is without the occasional stumble. But I have come to regard these gentlemen as some of the finest men I know. They don't seem to be very "religious," just authentic followers of Jesus. I have often shared my fears, doubts, and insecurities with one or all of them and they have never betrayed that trust, have always encouraged me, and always prayed for me. I did not plan to love them this much, to trust them this deeply, or to be so confident in their capacity for prayer. They just kind of surprised me.

As I said, "I don't know much." But I know this, from this point on in my life, if God ever moves me, I will ask Him to help me find or build a group of people like these men. People who love Jesus, are willing to grow in trust with each other, and who will be committed to prayer.

*All Christian prayer, then, and supremely the Lord's prayer, enables us to be fully at home in God's house, whichever door we come in by. But we don't come in simply to rest and be refreshed. We enter in order to learn and share God's plans and purposes. Prayer is one way we do both these things. Only with prayer at the center will the work of the kingdom go forward. Once we are grasped by the good news, we must learn to be shaped by the good news. In prayer, we learn to become the good news.*  
**N.T. Wright**



# PRAY ◊ PART 3

PRACTICAL IDEAS

The following is a non-exhaustive list of some ways you might want to practice prayer. During each day this week, you will choose a way to pray and journal about your experience.

# ways to pray

Try praying in these different ways.

## GO ON A PRAYER WALK

Walk around your community while praying for the lives that are impacted in the spaces around you. Pray over homes, pray for God's kingdom to come, and remain sensitive to how He would be leading you.

## P.R.A.Y.

Use the acronym PRAY:

Praise, Repent, Ask for others, Yourself  
Try using it at the start of your day, before a meal, when you see someone hurting, or when you are excited about something and need to celebrate.

## CONTEMPLATIVE

Spend time just sitting in God's presence. It doesn't have to be productive or focused in any way except to be with Him. Deep relationships reflect the ability to be in one another's presence without saying anything. Practice just being in the presence of God and when your mind wanders, gently bring it back to focus on Him.

## JOURNALING

It's easy to get distracted while praying. Journaling can help you stay focused, but it can also help us clarify and take ownership of our thoughts. To write in ink, "God, I don't trust you in this," seems more bold than the same whispered thought. Yet, the bold confession of doubt can lead to a bold confession of faith. "I choose to trust you in this" or "You are worthy of my trust." Try writing out your prayer. Pause with your pen, wait for Him to respond to you, then, write that down, too.



## LAMENT

Often our prayers can stagnate because they get stuck in the same rhythm. Have you ever found that you're requesting a lot? We are not always good at lamenting and bringing the difficult things before God.

In the Psalms and Lamentations, we see examples of what it looks like to bring the most heart-wrenching and ugly things before a God who can handle it.

What hurts do you need to bring before God? Injustices? Frustrations? Allow yourself to recognize that sometimes things are not as they should be, and then anchor to a God who stepped into our suffering and made a way for all things to be made new one day.

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# ways to pray

Try praying in one of these ways.

## POSTURE

Change your posture as you pray. Try kneeling or raising your hands. Often, our posture is an outward expression of what's going on inside. And sometimes, it's the inverse. Our posture helps change our inward state. Bowing in prayer can help our hearts surrender and lift up our prayers to King Jesus.

## FIND A QUIET PLACE TO PRAY

Find a place where you won't be interrupted. Maybe it's your favorite place to be alone or a place that you can return to on a regular basis.

*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.*

**Mark 1:35**

## SUPPLICATION/ PETITION

The nature of petitionary prayer is rebellion against the status quo—the state of the world in its sin and fallenness. Petitionary prayer flourishes only if we believe three things: First, that God's name is hallowed too irregularly, His kingdom has come too little, and His will is done too infrequently. Therefore, petitionary prayer expresses the hope that life as we encounter it can and should be different.

## PRAY THE PSALMS

Praying the Psalms means we take the words from the psalmists and use them as our own. Pray them back to God, and try doing so out loud.



## BREATH PRAYER

Find a prayer that you can say in a breath. Say it over and over. It could be as simple as “Have mercy on me, O God.” Or it could be something that you’re asking God for – “Jesus, show me the depths of your love.” Use this prayer anytime you think about praying and try to make it a habit. It’s supposed to be short and to the point and is a helpful way to make a rhythm of prayer.

## SIMPLE PRAYER

The idea of simple prayer is that you don’t try to clean up the prayers or requests you are making to God. It’s a prayer that allows you to simply be, feel, and say what you need to say. Express even the “ugly” parts that you may sometimes try to “clean up” before you approach God. The same way a child would talk to his/her parents, bring the real you to Jesus.

How did it go?

What clicked? What was awkward?

# PRAY ◊ PART 4

KEEPING THE RHYTHM

For each day this week, we will focus on one heart posture that will help prayer become a lifelong practice.

They are:

surrender • solitude • community • thanksgiving



# keeping the rhythm

## SURRENDER

Prayer necessitates a trust that God *is*, and that God is good. We trust that He can hear us and wants to hear us. We trust that He can provide and will provide. We trust that He wants to communicate with us and will communicate with us. This surrender gives us hope, and that hope leads us to pray dangerous prayers, like heaven coming to earth.

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**Hebrews 4:16**

We find sheep language in the Old Testament as the psalmist uses it to describe God's posture toward us.

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

**Psalms 23**

And then Jesus says of Himself,

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."*

**John 10:14**

If prayer is conversation between me and God, it isn't the stilted formal conversation between business partners or between a slave and master. It is the intimate conversation between a sheep who trusts the Shepherd to lead to good places. The sheep's ears are attuned to the Shepherd because the sheep trusts that the Shepherd has good things, life, and love in store. And the ears of the Shepherd are attuned to the needs of His sheep because of that love. This is prayer and it starts with surrender—that God *is* and that God is good.



How would trusting God more change the way you pray?

What does it look like for you to come boldly to God's throne of grace?

What is a "dangerous" prayer you could pray right now?

# keeping the rhythm

## SOLITUDE

In the quiet spaces, ask Jesus to speak, and wait for Him. If a worry comes, say, “I trust you in this,” and be still. If distraction comes, say, “you have my attention, God,” and be still. We don’t always hear what we’re expecting to hear, and sometimes we don’t hear anything. Check that your heart is soft, that your ears are open, that your attention is available, and that your feet are ready to obey. Then, go in peace.

*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.*

**Psalm 37:7**

*In silence and solitude, our souls finally come home.*

**John Mark Comer**

*Solitude with God repairs the damage done by the fret and noise and clamour of the world.*

**Oswald Chambers**

Busyness and distraction are enemies to the pursuit of intimacy with God through prayer. A protected time of solitude is vital to learning the voice of the Lord. Jesus regularly found quiet, solitary places to pray. His mission would fail without this time in communion with His father.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God...Silence is nothing else but waiting for God’s Word and coming from God’s Word with a blessing. But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned.”

*“But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.”*

**Matthew 6:6**

“We can only survive solitude,” warns Dallas Willard, “if we cling to Christ there.”



Are you comfortable with silence and solitude? Why or why not?



How can you find and protect time for solitude this week?



What are you going to keep doing? Change?



# keeping the rhythm

## COMMUNITY

Prayer is evidence that a part of the very character of God is His desire to commune with us and commune with each other.

*Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*

**Revelation 3:20**

Chad Veach makes the observation that "Jesus wants to be with us. Not as a judge putting us on trial, or a boss doing an employee review, or an emperor berating a servant. As a friend. Jesus wants to stroll through the door of our hearts, sit down next to us with the drink of His choice, and just hang out. He wants to hear what's on our hearts and minds. He wants us to express what is worrying us or inspiring us or challenging us. And He wants to share with us the peace, perspective, and power of God."

Not only does God want to commune relationally with us, He wants to partner with us through community to accomplish His will here on earth.

*"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

**Matthew 18:18**

*A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Jesus said that the world would know about God and His love for His people through the demonstration of the Church's love for one another. And that love is bred in the act of prayer (John 17:23).



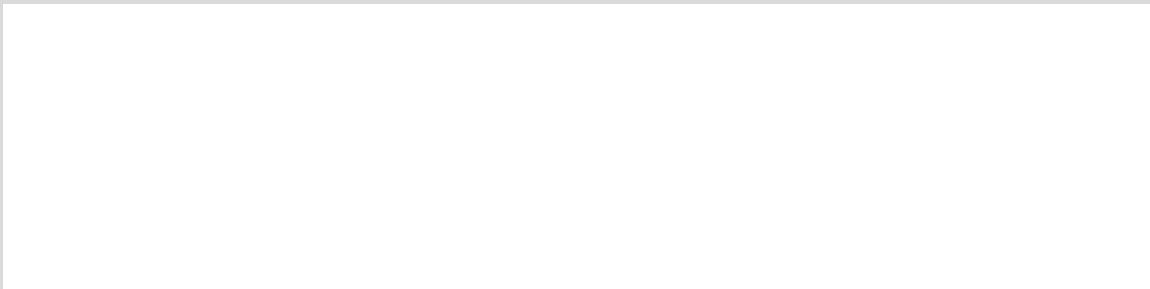
How can you invite your friends and family to join you in prayer this week?



How might your love for your community grow through the practice of prayer?



What are you going to keep doing? Change?



# keeping the rhythm

## THANKSGIVING

It can be so easy to lose sight of eternity. When I am distracted by this world's concerns, the first thing I lose is gratitude, and without gratitude, I can't worship.

Grateful prayer trains our hearts to appreciate God's presence in the ordinary moments of your days.

*Every good and perfect gift is from above.*

**James 1:17**

*God has promised to supply all our needs. What we don't have now, we don't need now.*

**Elizabeth Elliot**

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

**Philippians 4:6**



Start an ongoing “awesome things list” you can give thanks to God for:





# building a rule of life

What will you add to the structure and rhythm of your: day, week, month, year?

The rule of life is all about building a framework around how the rhythms, patterns, and routines of our lives help us live out our discipleship. Use the following questions and fill-ins to create your rule of life.

If praying is part of your rule of life, then you will have structures to help you live that out.

*Example: I communicate with God by praying at several specific intervals throughout the day.*

Briefly outline the rhythms of your life—do you currently have any structure that helps you pray?

Which elements have helped you the most so far? How can you adopt them into your life?



What is one practice you will make a habit?

What is the first step you can take to make this happen?

Write out a draft of your rule of life that will help you pray:

notes & thoughts



