

Here at YC we believe that the strategy for spiritual growth is to follow the Connect, Grow and Serve model. When you connect with God daily, Grow with others in community and serve with the use of your talent time and tithe you will experience growth at a deeper level. This year I ask that you pray with your group about being on mission in the way we serve. There are many ways to be on mission and we here at YC will do our best to provide a few ways and places to serve. God Bless your group this year.

- 1) Keep our group open to newcomers-Anyone can Invite a new person to join
- 2) Be open to serve on a team using my spiritual gifts
- 3) Be open to love my neighbor in some practical way
- 4) Be open to meet the need of someone in crisis
- 5) Be open as a group to serve our community
- 6) Be open to opportunities to be financially generous.
- 7) Share your testimony

January Mission opportunities

1. Does your group want to serve? Do you enjoy landscaping, irrigation, janitorial or building maintenance?. If your group is interested in getting involved please reach out to Dave Weaver at dave@yosemitechurch.com
2. We need weekend greeters. Would your group be willing to serve one weekend a month for 1 or 2 services? We want to make the very first impression on our guest as warm and welcoming as possible and we need you! If your group is willing please contact Bre at bre@yosemitechurch.com
3. YC supports D St shelter by serving dinner to the homeless on the 4th Wednesday of every month. How awesome would it be for your group to serve our vulnerable? Jesus said in Matthew 23:5, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat." If you or your entire group would like to schedule an opportunity to serve please contact Bre for more information at bre@yosemitechurch.com

Under the Influence Week 1

Matthew 3 & 4

Jesus' Invitation to come under His Influence Small Group Study Guide

The goal or objective of this series:

Together, through our series, Under the Influence (and The Common Rule) we will build a personalized "Rule of life" that will empower and equip each of us to **Follow Jesus well**; in such a way that we learn to live Under His Influence.

Here's the problem:

We fail to **follow Jesus well** because we are too busy following something else. We follow the news, we follow the weather, we follow sports, we follow politics, we follow people on FaceBook, but **we don't follow Jesus well**.

I am NOT (we are not) inviting you to add more things to your already full life. I am (we are) inviting you to learn along with us how to let go of lesser things for better things.

**Ronald Rolheiser in his book Sacred Fire say,
“Today, there is a climate within which it is difficult to not just think about God or to pray, but simply to have any interior depth whatsoever.**

We, for every kind of reason, good and bad, are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.

It is not that we have anything against God, depth, or spirit, we would like this, it is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens. We are more busy than bad, more distracted than nonspiritual, and more interested in the movie theater, the sports stadium, and the shopping mall, and the fantasy life they produce in us than we are in the church. Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.”

Jesus modeled the solution:

The term the Bible uses for people to come under the influence of Jesus (God) is called **Discipleship**.

Disciple, Mathetes in the Greek, means to be a **learner, pupil, student or apprentice** of another. Essentially **to come under the influence** of a Rabbi or teacher.

The word “Christian” is used 3 times in the Bible

The word “Disciple” is used 269 times in the Bible

Today, on a theological side, we'll explore and discover that all of God (the trinity-Father, Son and Spirit) were at work in Jesus (and want to be at work in us) in order to bring us into a deepening relationship with God. And, on a super practical side we'll explore and discover that we are all under the influence of something and that we can (if we want) become people who literally, learn to live under the influence of Jesus day by day.

- I. All of us have been discipled; been learners, students, pupils, apprentices, (been under the influence) of something.**

Sometimes Good things

Sometimes Bad things

- II. To be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him, learn from him, emulate him, to **become like him**, (being under his influence).**

Luke 6:40 (Jesus) “*The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*”

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT) “*All of us...can see and reflect the glory of the Lord—who makes us more and more like him....*”

- III. From the beginning, Jesus has modeled for us what it looks like to be under the influence of God.

When we follow Jesus we learn:

1. That in baptism we are loved by the Father.

Matthew 3:16-17 (84) “*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’*”

Most of us simply don’t know how to live under the influence of the Father’s unconditional love, so we strive, instead, to get someone else to love us.

2. That in temptation we can be led by the Spirit to wholeness.

Matthew 4:1 “*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted...*”

Matthew 4:3 & 6 “*If you are the Son of God...*”

Temptation always wants to influence you away from your true identity, and out from under God’s influence.

Most of us don’t know how to live under the influence of the Spirit’s guidance, so we regularly fall into (or under the influence of) some temptation.

3. That in discipleship we can learn to be like Jesus.

Matthew 4:18-20 “*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.*”

Mark 8:34-36 (Jesus) “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?*”

Jesus is saying that we have to come out from under the influence of self, and willing come under his influence.

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

(NLT) “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

Without coming under the influence of Jesus we live lives that are very full but lack fulfillment.

How do we learn to stay under the influence of the Father’s love? By following Jesus.

How do we learn to stay under the influence of the Spirit’s leading (and not fall under the influence of temptation)? By following Jesus.

How do we learn to live and love like Jesus did? By following Jesus.

This relational journey, to be under the influence of Jesus, is solidified first, by a wholehearted acknowledgement and acceptance of who Jesus is, and second, by participating in the life he has modeled for us, and called us to follow.

Small Group Discussion:

1. Share appropriately if you have ever been under the influence of anything other than Jesus. What would you say were some of your character traits? How did that influence cause you to treat others or spend your time?
2. From Ronald Rolheiser’s above quote (in blue) how would you define “pathological busyness”?
3. Have you ever thought about Jesus as a model for how to live, and if so, how have you tried to follow him in some way-please describe?
4. Discuss why you would not be able to be influenced by both Jesus and the world or self at the same time. What would be the conflict?
5. What would you say your “Rule of Life” has been?

Soaping suggestions

Monday- Soap John 10:10

Tuesday- Soap Mark 8:34-36

Wednesday- Journal- What would you enjoy doing if your life was less busy?

Thursday- Soap Romans 8:6

Friday- Soap Matthew 11:28

Close your group in prayer

Under the Influence #2
Small Group Study Guide
Sermon Notes

Building our Rule of Life, in order to practice His presence

The sermon in a nutshell: We have bad habits, we need good habits that bring us under the influence of Jesus, so we can live and love like him.

Our series fits into what often drives New Year's Resolutions, which is our internal hopes of being better (in some way) than we currently are. This must start on the inside but it has to work its way out into the real world to become reality.

IT STARTS ON THE INSIDE

Jesus said- "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart..."

Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart."

Proverbs says, "Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Peter said, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."

Paul Prays, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

What forms you are your habitual behaviors, what you practice, and give your attention to; what you do and don't do from day to day affects whether your heart is in a healthy or unhealthy place.

There's a popular business axiom that says, "Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets."

Oswald Chambers wrote, "God can give you a pure heart in an instant, but He cannot quickly bring you Christian character, that takes time and can come only through a series of right moral choices/practices."

First, by **examining** our habits and practices.

Lamentations 3:40 “Let us examine our ways...and let us return to the Lord.”

(MSG) “Let’s take a good look at the way we’re living and **reorder our lives under God.**”

Transformation always start with an honest look at reality

Scott Peck writes, “Human beings are poor self-examiners, subject to superstition, bias, prejudice, and a profound tendency to see what we want to see rather than what is really there.”

Are your habits (the system of your life) bringing you (your heart) under the influence of Jesus or something else?

Our habits, the little things we consciously, or more often than not, unconsciously do, either reinforce what we say we believe and value or contradict or clash with what we say we believe and value.

“Good and evil increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions that you and I make every day are of such infinite importance; the smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point, from which we may go on to victories we never dreamed of.” - C.S.Lewis

“We are what we repeatedly do.” - Aristotle

“The law of the harvest is to reap more than you sow.” James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*

“Sow a thought, reap an attitude. Sow an attitude, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Simply put - **We make our habits, and then our habits make us.**

Our habits, our intentional or unintentional, ‘Rule of Life’ bring us under the influence of something or someone.

Annie Dillard “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

Secondly, by becoming intentional about our habits and practices.

Let’s revisit some definitions of a Rule of Life

The word “Rule” comes from the Latin ‘regula’ which means “a straight piece of wood”, a ruler to help measure and train you to grow in a certain way.

Marjorie Thompson, director of The Pathways Center, and author defines

“Rule of Life as a **pattern** of spiritual disciplines that **provides structure** and direction for growth in holiness.”

Our symbol for our series and a Rule of Life, is a Trellis.

Jesus’ favorite description of our spiritual connection to himself is a grapevine.

*John 15:5-8 “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.... If you **remain in me** and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much **fruit**, showing yourselves to be **my disciples.**”*

Rule of Life:

“A tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, by learning to practice His presence-learning to be with Jesus.”

Thirdly, we come under the influence of Jesus by building habits that empower us to practice His presence.

Brother Lawrence

“That we ought not be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not

the greatness of the work but the love with which it is performed. That we should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors, but that at last we should gain a habit, which will naturally produce its acts in us, without our care, and to our exceeding delight.”

“The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to **keep God before our minds**...This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in this **practicing the presence of God** is to **direct and redirect our minds constantly to him**. In the early time of our practicing we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God (Or even antithetical to God). But, these are just habits - not the law of gravity - and can be broken.” - Dallas Willard

When Jesus invites us to follow him he is inviting us to be in His presence.

But, Jesus isn't here anymore?

Good point....So how do we practice his presence if he's not here?

John 14:15-21 (84) *“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another counselor** to be with you forever— **the Spirit** of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. **On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.**”*

Galatians 5:16-17 & 26 (84) *“So I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want....Since we **live by the Spirit**, let us **keep in step with the Spirit**...”*

“A new grace filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the North.” - Dallas Willard

Small Group Discussion questions

What are the fundamental differences between good and bad habits?

Share in your group if appropriate, what are some of the habits (good or bad) that are currently directing your life.

Are your habits bringing you under the influence of Jesus or something else?

What is that something else?

If anyone in your group has stopped a bad habit, have that person share what the process of identifying and changing that habit consisted of?

Are you ready to replace bad habits with Jesus building habits? What are you willing to add to your “rule of life” that will get you influenced by Jesus?

Soap/Journal suggestions

Monday- Journal What habits are controlling your life?

Tuesday- Soap Lamentations 3:40

Wednesday- Soap Galatians 5:16

Thursday- Soap Galatians 5:17

Friday- Soap Galatians 5:26

Under the Influence Week 3 Small Group Study Guide

What's shaping your life?

A Rule of Life is a matrix for spiritual growth and formation.

Principle: What you focus on, fills you, and what fills you, forms you.

LAST WEEK

Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks"

Proverbs says, "Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

A Rule of Life:

"Is a tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, by learning to practice His presence-learning to be with Jesus, to live and love like Him."

Three prerequisites:

I. You have to be willing to follow (Change your focus to) Jesus

Being a disciple-a learning, student and apprentice of Jesus.

If we don't practice what Jesus practiced, we cannot expect to experience what Jesus promised.

Following Jesus' invitation into the life we long for.

You were made for an intimate relationship with God and when you resist that, no matter what is filling your life, you are left empty of true peace and satisfaction. Your life may be filled but your heart is unfulfilled.

"The correct perspective is to see following Christ not only as the necessity it is, but as the fulfillment of the highest human possibilities and as life on the highest plane."

- Dallas Willard

"Christianity, if false, is of no importance. If true, it is of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." - C.S. Lewis

“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by any created thing but only by God the creator.” - Blaise Pascal

“God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in him.”
- Augustine

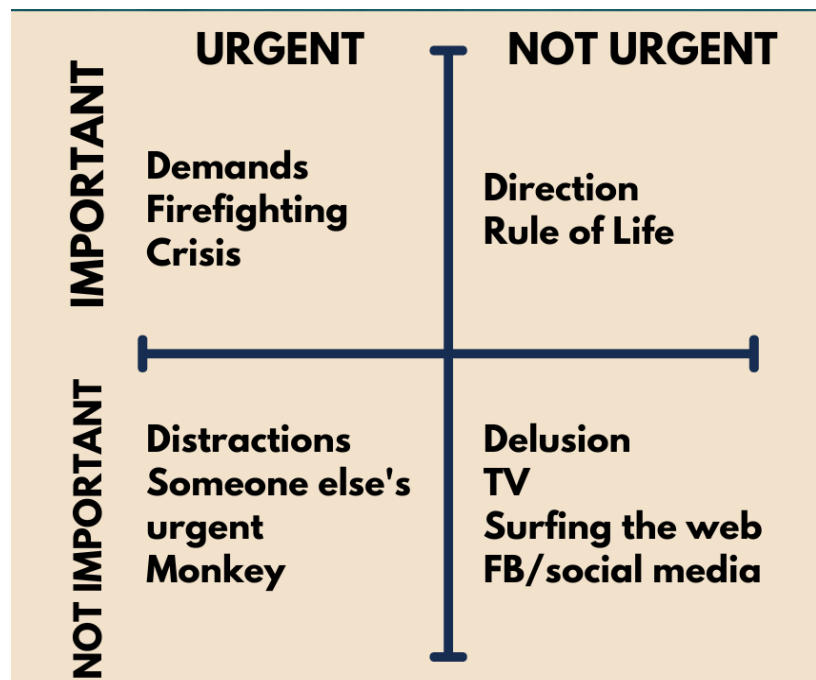
Matthew 11:28-30 - Jesus: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you **rest**. Take **my yoke** upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls**. For **my yoke** is easy and my burden is light.”

(MSG) “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real **rest**. Walk with me and work with me—**watch how I do it. Learn** the unforced rhythms of grace... Keep company with me and **you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.**”

II. You have to be willing to examine your life and your **time**.

Your life is shaped by what fills your time

Ephesians 5:15-18 “Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as those who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the **best use** of your **time**, despite all the difficulties of these days... understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

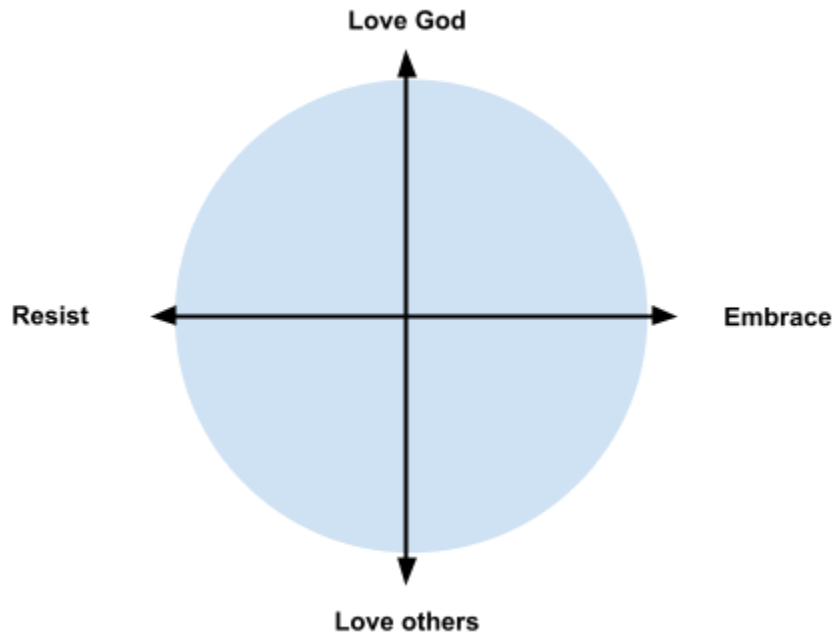


You will never have an effective faith until your faith affects your time.

Annie Dillard (Pulitzer Prize winner)

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

III. You have to be willing to practice what Jesus modeled.



This is what Jesus and His early followers (who wrote the New Testament) modeled for us.

1. The Goal of spiritual formation is to be like Jesus and thereby affect the world around us; by loving God & others.

Matthew 22:37-40 “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

1 John 4:21 (MSG) “The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.”

Galatians 5:14 “The entire Law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

2. The process of spiritual formation is to **resist** what pulls us out from under Jesus' influence and **embrace** the habits and practices that bring us under the influence of Jesus.

Romans 12:1-2 (MSG) “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. **Embracing** what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. **Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.** Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, **develops well-formed maturity** in you.”

Small group discussions

- 1) Thinking about the Principle that Pastor Jeff spoke of this weekend, “What you **focus** on, fills you, and what **fills** you, **forms** you.” Can you give an example of something that you have seen or experienced that fits that description?
- 2) Have you experienced any type of “Spiritual tool” that has helped you to be more influenced by God/Jesus, if so, please tell us about that?
- 3) A matrix is an environment or structure in which something develops. Looking at the two matrices described this week (The time matrix and the Rule of Life matrix), how might either one be a helpful tool for you?
- 4) How challenging it is these days to manage one’s time, do you feel this challenge personally and what is one small thing you can do to leverage your time better for your own spiritual growth?
- 5) The Rule of Life matrix has the (vertical) purpose of spiritual growth and the (Horizontal) process of spiritual growth. Can you describe either of these or both in your own words?

Soap/ Journal suggestions

Monday- Journal what would you say you have spent most of your energy focusing on?

Tuesday- Soap Ephesians 5:15-17

Wednesday- Journal how your faith has affected your time or what is in the way of that happening?

Thursday- Soap Matthew 6:33

Friday- Journal how you are focusing on your Rule of Life

Under the Influence #4
Small Group Study Guide
Daily Prayer Habit #1
Morning, Noon, & Night

Why Daily Prayer:

“It is unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God in a casual haphazard manner. There will be a need for some intentional commitment and some reorientation in our own lives. But there is nothing that will enrich our lives more than a deeper and clearer perception of God’s presence in the routine of our daily lives.” - William Paulsell

1. It Defines my relationship with God

Matthew 6:9 “Our Father in heaven...” (Jesus refers to God as Father over 100 times)

Romans 8:15-16 (NIV) “...The Spirit you received brought about your adoption... And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

(MSG) “God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms **who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.**”

- Instead of what the world says about me, I am under the influence of His **perspective** (What He says about me).

2. It Designs my day for God

Psalm 55:17 (TLB) “I will pray morning, noon, and night, pleading aloud with God; and he will hear and answer.”

Daniel 6:10 “[Daniel] continued kneeling three times a day, praying and giving thanks...”

Colossians 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord not for men.”

- Instead of meritocracy, I am under the influence of His **presence** (His love for me).

3. It Aligns my heart and mind with God.

Philippians 4:6-7 “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.**”

- Instead of anxiety, I am under the influence of His peace (His sufficiency).

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

"Prayer frees us to be controlled by God. To pray is to change. There is no greater liberating force in the christian life than prayer. To enter the gaze of the Holy is to never be the same. To bath in His light in quiet wonder and glad surrender is to be slowly transformed. There is a richer inward orientation, a deeper hunger for communion. We feel as if we are being taken over by a new control center, and we are."

- Richard Foster. *Freedom of Simplicity*

4. It **Refines** my character for God.

Psalm 57:2 *"I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me."*

Romans 8:28 (MSG & NIV) *"God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

Romans 5:3-6 (NIV84) *"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." - Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning

- Instead of suffering, I am under the influence of His purposes (His work in me and through me).

What the world says about me



Meritocracy- I am valued by merit



Anxiety is my state of being



Suffering is the result

What God says about me



Loved- I am loved unconditionally



Peace is my state of being



Purposeful living is the result

Small Group Discussion

Let your group look over the questions (make copies or share a link to the questions). After a few people have answered the opening (Icebreaker) question, ask each person to answer any combination of the questions below in two rounds. Go around the circle a couple of times. First ask them to answer from questions 2-4, and then go around again asking them to answer from questions 5 or 6.

ICEBREAKER Q.

1) Share with us a relationship that for you is extremely special and two reasons why the relationship is so important to you. What happened between you and the other person that bonded you?

FIRST TIME AROUND

2) Having a bonding relationship with God also requires effort and intentionality. How have you, or how are you, learning to be more intentional with daily prayer? Are you feeling up to taking on this habit of daily prayer (Morning /midday/night)? Why or why not?

3) If you read about the first Habit in The Common Rule, what stood out to you about Justin's insights?

4) Is it difficult for you to imagine that God/Jesus is thrilled to be with you and is delighted when you pray? How do you think you could develop your awareness of God being pleased and delighted with you?

SECOND TIME AROUND

5) Why do you think Paul in Philippians 4 challenges us to pray when we sense we are anxious? What are the ways he encourages us to talk to God and what is the promised result? Have you ever experienced this for yourself? If so, please share your experience.

6) Can anyone share how you have learned to trust God (Go to God) in times of suffering or difficulty and if your character was affected?

IN CLOSING

If time permits read in The Common Rule (from page 45-46) the overview of this first habit and then ask your group if they can commit to adding this new habit into their daily routine and what they think might keep them from doing so. Encourage everyone to bring someone with them next week and remind your group about the daily video/YouTube devotions from Pastor Jeff and then ask someone to close in prayer.

Soap Journal Suggestions

Monday- Journal how you would rate your prayer life. Where is there room for improvement?

Tuesday- Soap Colossians 3:23

Wednesday- Journal- When you pray, do you find your asking more than listening? Explore that in your journal.

Thursday-Soap Phillipians 4:7

Friday- Journal- If you have practiced praying more this week, how has your connection to God improved?

Under the Influence #5
A Meal with Others - Habit #2
Small Group Study Guide

A Rule Of Life

A Rule of Life helps to build the kind of habits and practices that reflect and maintain our heart for God. In the absence of healthy habits, practices and disciplines (an intentional Rule of Life) we will revert back to, and be held captive by, distracted and destructive patterns of behavior (habits).

Ephesians 4:20-24 *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off** your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be **made new** in the attitude of your minds; and to **put on** the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

A Rule of Life, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is training your brain (and your family's brain) how to be emotionally, spiritually healthy or unhealthy.

Ephesians 4:20-24 (MSG) *"...That old way of life has to go... then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and **working itself into your conduct** as God accurately reproduces **his character in you**."*

The habits of your household (the notion behind a meal with others) puts your family **under the influence** of either **functional** or **dysfunctional** behavior.

What does "healthy" look like?

A healthy individual, family, church, organization or team has the **humility** and **objectivity to see themselves as they are** and the **courage** to make the necessary adjustments and changes to **become what they need to be**.

A meal with others helps to:

1. **Define** what our relationship with God and spiritual community looks like.

Our YC Vision: "We are becoming a **loving community of growing disciples** mentoring the next generation to live the mission of Jesus through the power of the gospel."

The Last Supper

John 15:5 & 15-16 *"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.... I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called*

you friends, for everything that I learned from the Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear much fruit.”

Revelation 3:20 (NLT) “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will **share a meal together as friends.**”

2. Redesigns how your family functions.

Acts 2:46 (NASB) “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together** with gladness and sincerity of heart.”

3. Align your family (and relationships) with your faith.

Matthew 9:10-12 (ERV) “Jesus **ate dinner at Matthew’s house.** Many tax collectors and others with bad reputations came and ate with him and his followers. The Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with these people. They asked his followers, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and other sinners?” Jesus heard them say this. So he said to them, “It is the **sick people who need a doctor,** not those who are healthy.”

Proverbs 22:6 (ESV) “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

- We teach what we know but **we reproduce who we are.**
- We cannot expect our children to listen to our advice and **ignore our example.**
- Values are more **caught** than taught.

4. Refines your ability to give Jesus away (to live and love like Jesus):

Matthew 5:9 (MSG) Jesus: “You’re blessed when you can **show** people how to **cooperate** instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and **your place in God’s family.**”

- **Show (model) gratitude to others**

John 6:11 (ESV) “Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had **given thanks,** he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.”

1 Timothy 4:4-5 “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with **thanksgiving,** because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

- Your meal could include:
Prayer of thanksgiving/gratitude

Sharing something you are each grateful for

- **Show (model) hospitality to others**

Luke 7:34 “*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’”*

He made outsiders feel like insiders

Mark 8:6 (ESV) “[*Jesus*] directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to **set before the people**; and they **set them before** the crowd.”

Romans 12:13 (Paul) “*Practice hospitality.*”

1 Peter 4:9 (Peter) “*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*”

- **Show (model) a Servant's heart others**

John 13:4-5 (NLT) “*So [*Jesus*] **got up from the table**, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet ...”*

John 13:15 (NIV) “***I have set you an example** that you should do as I have done for you.*”

- **Show (model) forgiveness to others**

Matthew 26:26-28 “*Now **as they were eating**, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness** of sins.’” (ESV)*

Small Group questions:

Opening (Mixer Q):

When you think back to your family of origin (Birth Family) and the meals you shared together, what was the experience like? Were there any values or behaviors that were modeled, either good or bad? If you feel comfortable, can you share an experience that illustrates something that you would like to either replicate or not replicate?

Go around your circle of group participants and have them choose one of the following to think about and answer and then go around a second time and answer a second question.

- 1) We often replicate what has been modeled for us. Pastor shared a few statements that reflect this truth. Which of these statements stands out to you and why?
 - We teach what we know but we reproduce who we are.
 - We cannot expect our children to listen to our advice and ignore our example.
 - Values are more caught than taught.
- 2) Looking at the following definition of a Healthy individual or family, what stirs in you from this definition; do you agree or disagree and why? If you agree, can you give an example of something you are trying to exercise more courage to address?
 - A healthy individual, family, church, organization or team has the humility and objectivity to see themselves as they are and the courage to make the necessary adjustments and changes to become what they need to be.
- 3) Talk a little bit about this idea of a Rule of Life. What is making sense to you and how are you trying to incorporate new habits into your daily routine?
- 4) What role do you think gratitude plays in emotional health and how have you or are you trying to practice gratitude?
- 5) Can you share an experience that you have had where you were shown hospitality in such a way that it drew you toward a deeper more intimate relationship, or friendship?
- 6) How can this habit, A meal with others, be applied in this season of your life? Do you plan to add it to your rule of life?

Soap/Journal Suggestions

Monday - Journal what you do or don't do to demonstrate hospitality to others

Tuesday - SOAP John 4:31-34

Wednesday - Journal what is holding you back from community and relationship

Thursday - SOAP 1 Corinthians 8:8

Friday - SOAP Matthew 23:8-12

Under the Influence Week 6
Habit #3 Phone Off for 1 Hour
Small Group Study Guide

Identity statement #3 “I am Loving” statement: “I will seek to eliminate whatever distractions that are in my life and schedule that interfere with living and loving like Jesus.”

In the scriptures Intimacy with God, and blessing from God, (as well as with others) is pictured as turning toward and meeting face to face in friendship.

Exodus 33:11 *“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”*

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NLT) *“For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

Numbers 6:24-26 *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”*

A Rule of Life

“Is a tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, by learning to live and love like Him.”

We have to train our brain. We cannot experience significant spiritual formation or transformation without rewiring the circuitry in the brain/mind.

Romans 12:2 *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

When we are out from under the influence of Jesus the Resist and Embrace spectrum gets reversed (or turned around). Instead of resisting bad (unhealthy) things and embracing good (healthy) things we find ourselves resisting good things and embracing bad things.

Colossians 3:1-2 *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*

(MSG) *“So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground,*

absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective."

I. The **Resist** Goal

The resist goal of Habit #3 is to eliminate the power of a covert and incessant intruder that we have abdicated to and invited into our lives to repeatedly hijack our ability to be fully present - the cell phone/smartphone.

The smartphone increases our aptitude for dumb things.

1. The smartphone is **powerful** because it is:

- **Ubiquitous**, there everywhere
- **Utilitarian**, there highly useful
- **Undermining**, there highly addictive

2. The Smartphone **Undermines**:

- Our **values** - what we believe matters most

"There is a powerful monetary incentive that frames the functionality of our devices...they are not neutral in the slightest. And that means we have to do the hard work of governing them, because they will not govern themselves and they would love to govern us." - Justin Early, *The Common Rule*

- Our **relationships** - what we were made, by God, to need the most
 - We cannot correct what we will not acknowledge.
- Our ability to **be present**

One of my highest values is to be fully present, in other words, wherever I am, to be all there.

II. The **Embrace** Goal

The embrace goal of Habit #3 is to commit to the kind of practices that will empower us to be more present (face to face) with ourselves, God and others.

The Practice of Phone Off for One Hour can be a tool to be more powerfully:

1. Present with **Self** (the discipline of silence and solitude)

"Most of man's miseries are derived from not being able to sit in a quiet room all alone."
- Blaise Pascal

- **To get out from under the influence of self-deception.**

Jeremiah 17:9 *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

Ephesians 4:22-23 *“...put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God...”*

- **To get out from under the influence of self-justification**

Luke 16:14 (NASB) (Jesus to the Pharisees) *“You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts...”*

- **To get out from under the influence of self-criticism fueled by comparison.**

Galatians 6:4 *“Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else...”*

- **So we can come more fully under the influence of Jesus and His love.**

“Genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us.” David Benner

Jeremiah 31:3 (NLT) *“I have loved you... with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.”*

“Selfishness must be discovered and understood before it can be removed. It is powerless to remove itself, neither will it pass away of itself. Darkness ceases only when light is introduced; so ignorance can only be dispersed by knowledge; selfishness by love.” - James Allen

Romans 8:31, 35, 38-39 (NIV84) *“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

2. Present with **God** (Obedience as turning toward the one you can trust the most)

John 14:23-24 “Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.’”

My prayer “Lord, I turn toward you in openness and trust.”

3. Present with Others

There are 52 “One another” passages in the new testament.

1 Peter 1:22 “Now that you have **purified yourselves by obeying** the truth so that you have **sincere love** for each other, **love one another deeply**, from the heart.”

Small Group Questions:

Opening (Mixer Q):

When you think about our relationship with our phones, have you experienced them “Undermining” some aspect of one's values, relationships or being present? If so, can you describe the effects?

As time permits, choose a few of the following questions for your group to answer together..

1) Describing the Rule of Life matrix, Pastor made the following observation. “When we are out from under the influence of Jesus the Resist and Embrace spectrum gets reversed (or turned around). Instead of resisting bad (unhealthy) things and embracing good (healthy) things we find ourselves resisting good things and embracing bad things.”

Have you ever seen this in your own experience? If comfortable, can you share an example?

2) Look together at Romans 12:2 and Colossians 3:1-2 below. How do these passages impact you as you think about the idea of renewing or rewiring our minds?

Romans 12:2 *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Colossians 3:1-2 *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*

(MSG) *“If you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.”*

3) What are your thoughts about the idea of turning toward or away from someone as a way to build more or less intimacy with others & God? Can you give an example from your own experience? Why do you think we turn away?

4) How would you describe the idea of being present and how challenging is it to be present amid all of life's destruction? How does the cell phone contribute to this challenge?

Do you think turning off your phone for a period of time would help you develop a healthier habit of being present and loving to yourself, God or others, if so, can you speak to each one (yourself, God & others)?

In closing

As your group time closes, remind everyone to invite someone to join us next week and then ask everyone if they are willing, or could commit, to “trying on” this habit for the next week and share back next week how this habit impacted their relationships and their ability to be more present.

Have someone close your time in prayer.

SOAP/Journal Suggestions

Monday: Journal what you have done/could do with a dedicated hour away from a phone.

Tuesday: SOAP Ephesians 5:15-16

Wednesday: Journal about the differences between being intentional and simply being present.

Thursday: SOAP 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Friday: SOAP Matthew 6:24

Under the Influence #7
Habit #4 SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE
Small Group Study Guide

A Rule of Life

Is a tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, to be formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.

The resist goal of Habit #3 & 4 is to resist the power of a covert and incessant intruder that we have abdicated to and invited into our lives to repeatedly hijack our ability to be fully present - to know who we are and why we are here.

This habit (Scripture before phone) is designed to enable us to resist our dependence on our phone and increase our dependence on God.

The smartphone is a tool that can be used for good but has been abducted by a culture (and industry) that values entertainment over integrity, pleasure over principle, comfort over character and instant gratification over disciplined transformation.

The smartphone increases our aptitude for dumb things.

What we give our attention to controls us.

What we consume, controls us.

What fills us, forms us.

What we take in, takes over.

“We are what we repeatedly do.” - Aristotle

We make our habits and then our habits make us.

Our Identity is shaped and formed by how we see ourselves. When we cannot differentiate ourselves, as Christ followers from the world around us, we will invariably be drawn into the world's system of values.

When our identity, sense of being, is formed apart from God; based on what the world says instead of what God's word says, our relationship with culture instead of our relationship with Christ, we will experience a fragmented, insecure sense of self (Identity).

This is why the scriptures remind us:

By Paul in Romans 12:2 “Do not conform any longer to the **pattern of this world**...”

By John in 1 John 2:15 “Do not **love the world** or anything in the world.... **Love of the world** squeezes out love for the Father.” (NIV&MSG)

& by Jesus in John 17:16 “They are no more **defined by the world** than I am defined by the world.”

Justin Early (*The Common Rule*) points out that we wake up to the wrong question. It is not what am I going to do today? But, Who am I? And, who am I becoming?

“These are the questions our morning routines are inevitably asking and answering for us. But no words except the words of scripture (the words of God) can bear the weight of a response to these questions.

The story of Scripture is clear. We do not know who we are apart from the God who made us, and we do not know who we are becoming apart from the God who is renewing us.”

Consequently, we have a thousand different versions of ourselves all in disagreement with each other. There are the versions of ourselves that we think we should be, versions our spouse thinks we should be, versions our parents think we should be, versions our culture thinks we should be—and the list goes on....when we turn our eyes toward Jesus, only there do we finally see the kind of person we were made to be like.”

Principle: Our relationship with God’s word (scripture & truth) is always about spiritual formation not religious education.

Education is about more Information and can still leave you spiritually bankrupt. Formation is about more Application and will make you spiritually blessed.

James 1:22-25 “**Do not merely listen** to the word, and so **deceive** yourselves. **Do what it says.** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but **doing it**—they will be **blessed** in what they do.”

The gap between knowing and doing is significantly greater than the gap between ignorance and knowledge.

The fact that you know something can trick you into believing you’re living it.

“The general human failing is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce the action that we know to be right and the condition we want to enjoy. This is the feature of human character that explains why

the road to hell is paved with good intentions. We intend what is right, but we avoid the life that would make it a reality.” - Dallas Willard

The habit of scripture before phone helps:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All scripture is God breathed and is **useful** for **teaching**, **rebuking**, **correcting** and **training** in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The habit of scripture before phone helps:

1. Remind me of **my chosen Identity**. Who I am in Christ.

James 1:23 “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately **forgets** what he looks like.”

(MSG) “Don’t ... [let] the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don’t act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later **have no idea who they are**...”

John 15:16 (NIV84) “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last...”

- I am chosen and loved

Our I am Loved statement

“I will focus on and celebrate that I am God’s beloved child. That he loved me when I was unlovely, unworthy and undeserving, that I might begin to see myself through His eyes. That I am a child of God; deeply loved, completely forgiven, fully pleasing and totally accepted by God, chosen by Him to reflect His love and grace.”

- My **stories** change (A new narrative).
- My **motivation** changes

2. Remind me of **our chosen** identity. Who we are in Christ.

1 Peter 2:9-10 “But you are a **chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

- My **relationships** change (A new community).

3. Reinforce how we chose healthy practices (A new behavior).

Colossians 3:8-10&12-16 "...Rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator...Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

- As my community changes,
- My **habits** change.

Small Group Questions:

Opening/Mixer Q.

From your experience how have you seen cell phones interfere with relationships (our ability to be fully present with one another)? Please describe. (As a variation, if you'd like, have your group pair up to answer this question and then come back together for the remainder of the questions).

If time permits, go around your group three times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4, and lastly 5,6 or 7.

1. Pastor Jeff said in his message that, *"The smartphone is a tool that can be used for good but has been abducted by a culture (and industry) that values entertainment over integrity, pleasure over principle, comfort over character and instant gratification over disciplined transformation."* Looking at the above statement can you give an example of why it is valid or not?
2. How do you think our habits influence our identities (how we see ourselves)?
3. Do any of the passages of scripture used in the message impact or affect how you see yourself? Please share which one and why.
4. We all have defined ourselves (our sense of identity) by things in the world (what we do, who we know, or what we own). How would you be inclined to define yourself from a worldly point of view?
5. Looking carefully at the I am loved statement below, how might it impact your sense of identity and why?
"I will focus on and celebrate that I am God's beloved child. That he loved me when I was unlovely, unworthy and undeserving, that I might begin to see myself through His eyes. That I am a child of God; deeply loved, completely forgiven, fully pleasing and totally accepted by God, chosen by Him to reflect His love and grace."
6. What do you think about the idea of a corporate or group identity; how do you think a group identity could be good or bad? Can you share an example?
7. Looking at the Col. 3 passage, what stands out to you the most and why?

Remind your group about being on mission

Close your group in prayer

Soaping/ Journaling Suggestions

Monday- Journal how much time do you spend on your phone compared to how much time you spend in scripture?

Tuesday- Journal- Between your phone and scripture, which is most likely to start your day off with purpose? Explain your answer.

Wednesday- Soap Matthew 6:33

Thursday- Soap James 1:23-24

Friday- Journal which of the daily habits have you begun to make a new Rule of Life

Pastor Jake
03/12/22

Under the Influence #8
Habit #5 Weekly 1-Hour Conversation with a Friend

Jesus **changed** the world one **interaction/conversation** at a time

The Result: The Early Church changed the world one **conversion at a time**

- Hospitals & Health Care
- Education Systems
- Equality for Women
- Familial treatment of Slaves
- Adoption of Abandoned Children

A Rule of Life

“Is a tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, to be formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”

When we look at Luke 24:13-36, we see the power of conversation:

1. We see **Companionship**

Luke 24:13-16 *“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, **Jesus himself came up and walked along with them**; but they were kept from recognizing him.”*

- **Healthy companionship includes **caring** for others and being **cared** for by others**

2. We see **Confusion**

Luke 24:17-24 *“He asked them, **‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’** They stood still, **their faces downcast**. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’ **‘What things?’** he asked. ‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. **‘He was** a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;*

but **we had hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. **And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.** In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Proverbs 13:12 “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”

3. We see **Correction**

Luke 24:25-27 “He said to them, ‘**How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!** Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, **he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures** concerning himself.”

2 Timothy 3:16 “**All Scripture** is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

“The Bible in 50 Words.”

God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, Abraham split. Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled, Bush talked, Moses balked; Pharaoh plagued, people walked. Sea divided, tablets guided, Promise landed. Saul freaked, David peeked, prophets warned, Jesus born. God walked, love talked, anger crucified, hope died. Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread, God remained.

- Because they missed what was said in the **past (Old Testament Prophecy)**, they were stuck in the **present** with no hope for the **future**

4. We see **Communion**

Luke 24:28-32 “As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, **he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.**

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

Revelations 3:20 *"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."*

5. We see **Commission**

Luke 24:33-35 *"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."*

Mark 16:19-20 *"After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."*

Call to action:

You are made in the image of a relational God for the purposes of relationships that point others to God

Acts 2:46-47 *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

I am Loving

I will work to eliminate whatever distractions are in my life and schedule that interfere with me living and loving like Jesus

John 13:34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

○ **Embrace:**

i. Embrace the **truth** that you are made be **relational**

- ii. Embrace **creating** a weekly time to be in a **faith community** and have conversations with friends
- iii. Embrace **inviting** others into your **friendships**
- Resist:
 - i. Resist being in **Isolation**
(the story that being alone is good)
 - ii. Resist being **overprotective**
(the story that your friends belong to you)
 - iii. Resist (the excuse of) being too **busy**
(the story that you don't have time)

Under the Influence #9
Weekly Habit: Curate Media to 4 Hrs
Small Group Study Guide

Rule of Life:

“Is a tool (Illustrated by a trellis) that will enable and equip us to deconstruct what pulls us out from under the influence of Jesus and reconstruct the kind of habits/practices that will bring us under His influence, to be formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.”

To “Curate” is to select, decide on, and organize some kind of content- art, music, media, tools, even relationships.

In a way, our “Rule of Life ” is curating. It is deciding on, selecting and organizing some best practices that can enable and empower us to better live and love like Jesus. To live under His influence.

When Justin Early, in The Common Rule, is talking about curating “Media” he is referring to all media content (mass communication ie. broadcasting, TV, movies, radio, publishing, and the internet) that is not only available but is literally flooding our conscious and unconscious minds.

I am Loving Statement

I will seek to eliminate whatever distraction is in my life and schedule that interferes with me living and loving like Jesus.”

This overload of media is flooding our environment with some good, some futile, and some aberrant, toxic and nefarious content.

Why Curate Media
Ephesians 4:17-24

1. Because we are affected by Stories

What fills us forms us.

What we consume can control us.

What we take in can take over.

How much media is filling us?

The average person consumes between 8-9 hours of media per day.

Among those who are between the ages of 18-34 almost 4 hours a day is spent on digital platforms.

Ephesians 4:17-24 (84) “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their thinking**. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them **due to the hardening of their hearts**. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to **sensuality** so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”

- **Notice what happened to their thinking.**

The word “Futility” is *Matiaotes* in the Greek and means, **vain** or **empty**, lacking in usefulness or value.

How our brain works:

If we don't train our brain to focus on what is good it will seek to be entertained by some form of distraction.

Entertainment is defined as “Keep someone in a certain frame of mind; to be amused.”
Amuse-Amusement: comes from Muse = think + the A prefix = not. Therefore to amuse is to “Not think”.

- **Notice, that what filled their head affected their heart.**

Ephesians 4:17b -19 “You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their thinking**. They are **darkened in their understanding** and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them **due to the hardening of their hearts**.”

Our Stories shape our values and Beliefs

Our Values and Beliefs shape our Behavior

Our Behavior tells a Story

- **Notice how what filled the head and heart fueled their behavior.**

Ephesians 4:19 “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to **sensuality** so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, **with a continual lust for more**.”

- **It eroded their **boundaries** and made them **insatiable**.**
- **Q. What story does your media consumption tell?**

- Our spiritual practices/habits/discipline (Our Rule of Life) reminds us of who we really are-our true identity.

Ephesians 4: 20 “That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the **truth that is in Jesus.**”

- They remind us that not all stories are **True.**

2. Because we can be **infected** with **deceptive** Stories

Justin makes the point that if we don't curate our stories someone else's stories will now curate us (See Page 115-116).

Ephesians 4:22 “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires**”

James 1:14 “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away **by their own evil desires** and enticed....”

Remember the story of Adam and Eve in Gen. 3? (**Gen. 3:1-13 NIV**)

2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I am afraid that just as Eve was **deceived** by the serpent's cunning so **your minds may be led astray** from your sincere and pure devotion from Christ.”

Three examples of media stories that we are highly vulnerable to:

Materialistic stories

Romantic stories

Success stories

3. Because we can be distracted from the **redemption** story

Ephesians 4:17-18 “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and **separated from the life of God**”

Ephesians 4:22-24 “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**”

If Satan can't make you bad he'll be satisfied with just keeping you busy (and distracted).

Three suggestions:

Slow down and think about your media consumption

Sit down and talk about your media consumption

Write down a plan about your media consumption

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Opening Mixer Q.

Stories are impactful; they affect us: *Schindler's List*, *Shawshank Redemption*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Exodus*, (*Moses and the deliverance from Egypt*), *The Scarlet Letter*, we could go on all day listing iconic stories that have affected us to one degree or another. Share around your group a story, fantasy or reality, that has had a significant impact on you and why.

If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4, and lastly question # 5.

1. Justin Early (author of the Common Rule) suggests Curating Media to 4 hours as a weekly practice. He himself admits that 4 hours is arbitrary, it could be 3 hours or 23 hours, the impetus behind his recommendation is that we are all highly influenced by media (by stories and especially by what he calls the “Streaming story”). What is your opinion, do you see this in your life or others? Why might this be a good practice, to curate; to select what amount and type of content you will consume? Thoughts?
2. Pastor Jeff shared the following progression, can you give an example of how some kind of story has influenced your values or belief and then affected your behavior?

Our Stories shape our values and Beliefs

Our Values and Beliefs shape our Behavior

Our Behavior tells a Story

3. Looking at Ephesians 4:17-19 passage, and especially vs 19, could you give any examples of how our boundaries, because of media consumption, have been eroded and our desires become more insatiable?
4. Pastor Jeff pointed out how the passage below indicates that we have a built in propensity for deception resulting in an increased story that runs in our own minds, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, fueling our drive for materialism, romance, and success. Do you agree or disagree with this idea of being “infected” by a deceptive narrative, and why?

Ephesians 4:22 “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is **being corrupted by its deceitful desires**;

James 1:14 “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away **by their own evil desires** and enticed....”

2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I am afraid that just as Eve was **deceived** by the serpent's cunning so **your minds may be led astray** from your sincere and pure devotion from Christ.”

5. Finally, Pastor Jeff gave three suggestions on how to curate our media. How and when, if you are willing, might you take these steps, or a portion of them, to become more aware and discerning?

Three suggestions:

Slow down and think about your media consumption

Sit down and talk about your media consumption

Write down a plan about your media consumption

Please encourage everyone in your group to watch the daily videos (you may need to show them how to access the daily devotionals) and to continue to build their Rule of Life.

Have someone close your time in prayer.

Soap/Journal Suggestions

Monday- Does your social media habits interfere with your relationships? Is there an appropriate amount of time for social media? Journal your thoughts.

Tuesday- Soap Ephesians 4:22

Wednesday- What are the dangers of Social Media? How can Social Media affect how you see yourself?

Thursday-Soap Proverbs 3:5-6. How would Social media fit into this scripture?

Friday- Journal how your rule of life is shaping up? What have you added into your habits?

Under the Influence #10
Habit #7 Fasting
Rule of Life
Small Group Study Guide

I am a Disciple

“I will concentrate on the spiritual habits and disciplines that Jesus practiced so I can truly be more like him in my daily life. I will make **connecting** with God daily through prayer and Bible engagement, **growing** with others in community, and **servicing** with others through the use of my talent, time and tithe a top priority in my life.”

The term “Mathetes” in the Greek is where we get both our term for **disciple** and **discipline**. A disciple is a learner, student or apprentice, that becomes more **disciplined** as they follow the way of Jesus.

Richard Foster, author of *Celebrate the Disciplines* says, “The **disciplined** person is the person who can do what needs to be done when it needs done.”

A Rule of Life is a set of practices/habits that create a pattern of connecting with Jesus so I can become more like Jesus as I learn to follow and trust him in all things. A rule of life is a plan of action to invest in the spiritual training needed to thrive in our walk with God.

The discipline of Fasting is one of the most powerful ways we can learn to **resist** our flesh/sinful nature and turn instead to **embrace** Jesus (the Spirit of God).

Galatians 5:16-17 “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For **the flesh desires** what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are **in conflict with each other**, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

For many of us, our unintentional Rule of Life is the **Pleasure Principle**: From psychology the pleasure principle explains that we are largely motivated by a **wish for instant gratification** of our needs and desires as well as the **wish to avoid pain**.

This compulsion leaves us and holds us captive to **immaturity**.

Fasting empowers us to be more present with reality (aware of how & what to resist) and invites God to work in us and through us, (empowering us to embrace God’s will and presence) in the midst of pain and discomfort.

Some of you are probably not ready to fast, nothing, not me or anyone else is going to break your stride or slow you down. Most of us, (me included) are compulsive consumers gripped by the urge to satisfy our desire for comfort or pleasure.

If we do not learn to say **NO** to our desires our desires will prevent us from saying **Yes** to Jesus.

To Fast is to slow down and intentionally choose something that is a normal part of your daily life to say **no** to; to voluntarily deny yourself from an otherwise normal function for the sake of **focused spiritual activity and wellbeing**.

“The essence of fasting is the **separation** of ourselves from something in order to **offer ourselves in greater measure to God**.” He goes on to explain, “one of the main purposes of fasting is to **wean** ourselves from our **dependence on God's gifts** and enable us to become dependent on **God alone**.” - Robert Mullholand

“The central idea in fasting is the **voluntary denial** of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense **(focused) spiritual activity**.” - Richard Foster

I. Why to Fast.

1. To be more in touch with (and aware of) Jesus (To be more like Jesus).

Matthew 4:2 “*Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting...*”

Matthew 6:2,5,16&17 “*When you give....When you pray....When you fast...*”

Jesus fasted and we are called to follow and imitate Christ.

2. To be more in touch with (and aware of) ourselves (Our own brokenness and self-obsession). Distractions from the inside.

James 1:14 “*Each one is tempted, when by his **own evil desires** he is dragged away and enticed...*”

Psalms 139:23-24 “*Search me, God, and know **my heart**; test me and know **my anxious thoughts**. See if there is any **offensive way in me**, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

Jesus calls us to deny self, when self isn't in sync with God's will.

Mark 8:34 “*If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.*”

3. To be more in touch with (and aware of) others (The needs and brokenness of others). Love and compassion for others.

Galatians 5:14 “*The entire law is summed up in a single command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*”

Phillipians 2:3-4 “In humility **consider others better** than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also the **interests of others.**”

Romans 12:10 “Honor one another **above yourselves.**”

Jesus calls us to love others compassionately and sacrificially.

John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for his friend.”

4. To be more in touch with (and aware of) the world (The brokenness and temptations of the world around us). Distractions from the outside.

1 John 2:15-16 (NIV84) “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

II. What to Fast

“Fasting is when we **lay down an appetite** to develop a greater **hunger for God.**” - Adele Calhoun, *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

1. From Food

Matthew 4:4 (KJV) Jesus said, “Man does not live by **bread alone.**”

John 4:34 (ESV) Jesus said, “**My food** is to do the will of him who sent me . . .”

2. From Phone

Phillipians 2:3 (NIV84) “Consider others’ **interests more important** than your own.”

3. From People

Luke 5:16 “As often as possible Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer.”

Solitude is not about isolation or loneliness but **separation for the things** which clutter our **minds** and distract us from being alone with God to **hear and make our connection to God as strong as it can be for that day.**

“Solitude is separation for people and things to attend to God.” - Dallas Willard

4. From Noise/Media

Psalms 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

Isaiah 30:15 *"In quietness and trust is your strength."*

"Silence is quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God." - Dallas Willard

5. From Advertising & Spending

1 Timothy 6:17 *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to **put their hope in wealth**, which is so uncertain, but to **put their hope in God**, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Share a time or experience when you did something that was difficult (was hard to do) that made you a better person.

If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 - 5, and lastly question # 6.

1. Can someone describe the concept of a Rule of Life and how it relates to the idea that we need to resist some things and embrace others?
2. What are some examples of a “Disciplined person” being able to do what needs to be done when it needs doing? How does the Galatians 5:16-17 passage tie into this idea and relate to our spiritual lives?

Galatians 5:16-17 “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

3. Looking at the definitions of fasting (below) what would be something (a normal function) that you might be motivated to fast from and why?

Robert Mullholand “The essence of fasting is the separation of ourselves from something in order to offer ourselves in greater measure to God.” He goes on to explain, “one of the main purposes of fasting is to wean ourselves from our dependence on God’s gifts and enable us to become dependent on God alone.”

Richard Foster “The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense (focused) spiritual activity.”

4. Pastor Jeff gave four reasons why to fast: to be more aware of (and in touch with) Jesus, ourselves, others needs and the world. In your own words why would you say this could be helpful?
5. Pastor Jeff listed five things that might be good to fast from: food, our phones, people, noise/media and advertisements and spending. Which of these, if you were to fast from them, do you think might help you to be more equipped to resist your flesh (giving into the pleasure principle) and embrace God’s purposes for your life-what is healthy? Thoughts?
6. In closing, go around your group and see who is willing to give fasting a try, and why or why not.

Soap/Journal Suggestion

Monday- Soap Galatians 5:16-17

Tuesday-Has fasting been part of your spiritual discipline? Why or why not.

Wednesday- What would be the most difficult thing to fast from? Explain

Thursday- Soap Matthew 6:16-18

Friday- What discipline has made the biggest impact on your life?

Under the influence #11
Habit #8 Sabbath
A Sabbath Impression
Small Group Study Guide

Building a Rule of Life

A rule of Life is a set of practices/habits that create a pattern of connecting with Jesus so I can become more like Jesus as I learn to follow and trust him in all things.

A rule of life is a plan of action to invest in the spiritual training needed to thrive in our walk with God.

An Introduction: What and Why of Sabbath

The Word itself Shabbat (in Hebrew - Shabbat) means to cease from, or STOP, and to REST.

Genesis 2:2-3 “By the **seventh day** **God had finished** the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he **rested** from all his work. Then God **blessed** the seventh day and made it **holy**, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had **done**.”

1. It is a **day that is **Holy**.**

It is a Day that is **repeated every week for special observance and rhythm** with God.

“In the restlessness and busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. All life requires a rhythm of rest. There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body’s need for sleep. There is a rhythm in the way the day dissolves into night, and night into morning. There is a rhythm as the active growth of spring and summer is quieted by the necessary dormancy of fall and winter. There is a tidal rhythm, a deep eternal conversation between the land and the great sea. In our bodies, the heart perceptibly rests after each life-giving beat; the lungs rest between the exhale and inhale. We have lost this essential rhythm...Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something - anything - is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way....We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest, and for want of rest , our lives are in danger.” - Wayne Muller

The word **“holy”** Kedushah, means to “set apart as special” to differentiate. (The True value of TGIF)

Notice this thing that is “holy” is not a place but a **moment in time**.

2. It is a day to **Stop**

To cease from labor.

We are called to pursue being like God and to remember we are not God.

Psalms 46:10 “*Be still and know that I am God.*”

3. It's a day to **Rest**

Genesis 2:2 “....so on the seventh day he **rested** from all his work.”

4. It's a day to be **Blessed**

Genesis 2:3 “Then God **blessed** the seventh day...”

How to Sabbath

A few steps to **IMPRESS** on you how to start some degree of Sabbathing

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*”

Mark 2:27 (msg“Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren’t made to serve the Sabbath.” (MSG)

In a **spirit of prayer** (connection to Jesus) **IMPRESS** upon yourself a deeper awareness of Jesus as **LORD** of your life and all that is in it.

Matthew 12:8, **Mark 2:28**, and **Luke 6:5**: “For the Son of Man is LORD of the Sabbath.”

“**LORD**” in Greek is **Kurios** and is the most used title for Jesus in the New Testament. Used over **700 times** in comparison to **Savior** which is used **24 times, and means** supreme one, one who is sovereign and possesses absolute authority, absolute ownership and uncontested power; to whom a person or thing belonged.

“The Sabbath is an invitation to enter delight. The sabbath, when experienced as God intended, is the best day of our lives. Without question or thought, it is the best day of the week. It is the day we anticipate on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday - and the day we remember on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk, and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the sabbath and sanctify it, to

make it holy, because a full day of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.” - Dan Allender

Imagine being refreshed every week

Make up your mind to radically trust God

Pick a day

Resist work that drains you

Embrace activities that fill you

Stay in bed longer (take naps)

Savor things that bring delight to you and Jesus

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. From the concepts Pastor shared about Sabbath, what is the closest you think you might have come to observing the sabbath?

If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 - 5, and lastly question # 6.

- 1. Picture the Rule of Life matrix that has been described: a circle with cross hairs, the vertical line representing Love God (at the top) and Love others (at the bottom); then the horizontal lines representing Resist and Embrace. How does the idea of sabbath fit into the “Resist & Embrace” portion of the matrix?**
- 2. From the Gen. 2:2-3 account of sabbath in the creation story, how does the idea of sabbath as a weekly rhythm (every seven days - of deep connection with God) impact you; attractive/or not, easy/difficult, healthy and necessary/or not?**
- 3. Pastor Jeff gave four specific characteristics of sabbath: Holy (set apart as different from the other six days of the week), a day to stop, to rest and a day that is blessed. Do any of these nuances draw you more than another, toward the idea of practicing sabbath and why?**
- 4. If the sabbath, according to Jesus, is for us, to serve us, why do you think we struggle to practice the sabbath with any serious consistency? And, if Jesus is the Lord of the sabbath, does that cause you to see sabbath as an important spiritual practice, and why?**
- 5. Pastor said he wanted to IMPRESS on us to observe the sabbath and gave several suggestions on how we might start. Which of the points within his acrostic are most attractive to you and why?**

Soap/Journal Suggestions

Monday- How would you describe your work/rest balance?

Tuesday- Soap Genesis 2:3

Wednesday- Have you ever practiced taking a Sabbath? What did that look like for you?

Thursday- What has gotten in the way of you practicing a Sabbath day?

Friday- What have you learned to embrace? What have you learned to resist?

Easter
Under the Influence
The Resurrection can bring us
Under the Influence of Jesus

Everyone is being formed by something they are under the influence of...We are under the Influence of something.

What fills us forms us.

What we focus on forms us

What we follow forms us

What we are consumed by controls us

What we take in can take over

Easter (The resurrection) is the Ultimate evidence for why anyone would follow Jesus

I. Easter (the resurrection) can bring us under the influence of Jesus

Because it reminds us that:

1. Jesus is who he claimed to be.

John 11:25 *"Jesus said ...'I am the resurrection and the life.'"*

John 14:6 *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*

John 10:30-33 *"'I and the Father are one.' Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any good work,' they replied, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'"*

2. Jesus did what he said he would do.

Matthew 28:5 *"[EASTER MORNING AT THE EMPTY TOMB] The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.'"*

John 2:18-22 (MSG) *"But the Jews were upset. They asked, 'What credentials can you present to justify this?' Jesus answered, 'Tear down this Temple and in three days I'll put it back together.'"*

They were indignant: 'It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you're going to rebuild it in three days?' But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was **raised from the dead**, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and **what Jesus had said.**"

3. Jesus exercised the **power** he **claimed** to have.

John 10:17-18 (NRSV) "I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have **power** to lay it down, and I have **power** to take it up again."

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NKJV) "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty."

They put all their eggs in this resurrection basket.

II. How can I come under the Influence of Jesus

You have to have a **good connection** to Jesus if you want to be under his influence.

"As long as we are self-sufficient and complacent, we don't need to ask God for anything, we don't want Him; it is only when we know we are **powerless** that we are prepared to listen to Jesus Christ and **do what He says.**" - Oswald Chambers

Romans 6:4 (NLT) "And just as Christ was **raised from the dead** by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."

When we **come to Jesus** and follow Him we experience His power:

1. To **Forgive** our **sin**

"To be a sinner is our distress, to know it is our hope. To come to the end of self-deception excuses, alibis and hiding is a profound moment of hope."
- Reihold Niebuhr

Colossians 2:13-14 "He **forgave us all our sins**, ...which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, **nailing it to the cross.**"

1 John 1:8-9 (NIV84) "If we claim to be **without sin**, we **deceive** ourselves and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just and will **forgive us** our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

2. To **Fill** our Heart

Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV84) *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power** through **his Spirit** in your **inner being**, so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in **love**, may have **power**, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the **love of Christ**, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be **filled** to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

“It is unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God in a casual haphazard manner. There will be a need for some **intentional commitment** and some **reorientation** of our lives. But there is nothing that will enrich our lives more than a deeper and clearer perception of God’s presence in the routine of daily living.” - William Paulsell

3. To **Follow** His Example

JESUS

John 13:15 *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”*

PETER

1 Peter 2:21 (NLT) *“He (Jesus) is your **example**, and you must **follow in his steps**.”*

PAUL

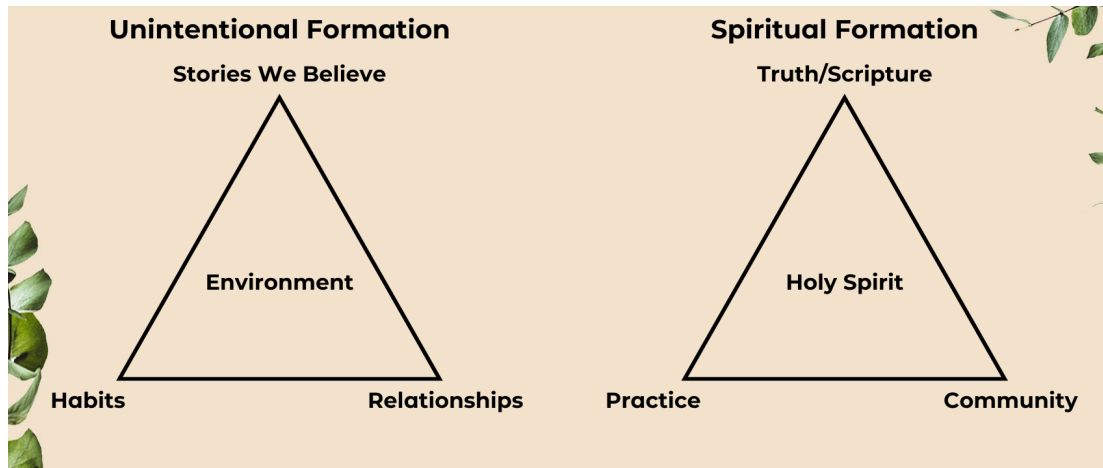
Ephesians 5:2 (TLB) *“Be full of love for others, **following the example of Christ** who loved you and **gave himself** to God as a **sacrifice** to take away your sins.”*

JOHN

1 John 3:16 *“This is how we’ve come to understand and **experience love**: Christ **sacrificed his life for us**. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves.”*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. If we are all under the influence of something, what are some things that you have been under the influence of? (A relationship-parents or romantic interest, loneliness, anger, seeking success in some area, education, desire for love, wealth, accomplishment, drugs or alcohol, etc...)



If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 - 3, then 4 - 5, and lastly question # 6.

1. Pastor shared a diagram that suggests that we are all being formed (influenced) by either something unintentional or something intentional. Does this concept make sense to you and if so why?
2. Do you think the resurrection is critical to the life of a believer (a Christian), if so why?
3. How does the three points about what Jesus claimed impact your faith:
He did what he said he would do.
He is who he claimed to be.
He exercised the power he claimed to have.
4. When you feel the need for forgiveness, how have you learned to access forgiveness?
5. Pastor said that we can live in a state of forgiveness, or regret, or disappointment, or bitterness or love; what state do you live in? How does the Ephesian passage give hope for our state of being?

Ephesians 3:16-19 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18** may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, **19** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (NIV84)

6. Take a look at the below quote and passages and then comment or answer the following question. When it comes to being intentional about following Jesus, what are you learning to do that is making a difference?

William Paulsell

“It is unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God in a casual haphazard manner. There will be a need for some intentional commitment and some reorientation of our lives. But there is nothing that will enrich our lives more than a deeper and clearer perception of God’s presence in the routine of daily living.”

PETER

1 Peter 2:21 “ He (Jesus) is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (NLT)

PAUL

Ephesians 5:2 “Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. (TLB)

JOHN

1 John 3:16 “This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves.”

Journal/Soaping Suggestions

Monday- Journal - What does Jesus’ resurrection mean to you?

Tuesday- Journal - Christ gave his all for us, what might you be holding back from him?

Wednesday- Soap John 14:6

Thursday- Soap Ephesians 3:16-19

Friday- Journal- How are you living sacrificially for others?

Under the Influence
Week 12: Life of Surrender
Study Guide

Everyone is being formed by something they are under the influence of...We are under the Influence of something.

What fills us forms us.

What we focus on forms us

What we follow forms us

What we are consumed by controls us

What we take in can take over

Luke 6:44 (NKJV) *"For every tree is known by its own fruit..."*

Matthew 7:18 *"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit"*

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."*

"We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man" - CS Lewis

How to live a Life of Surrender bearing good fruit

1. You must be teachable

Matthew 11:28-29 *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and **learn from me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."*

Psalms 119:33 & 73 *"**Teach me**, Lord, the ways of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end....give me understanding to **learn** your commands."*

James 4:6 *"..... God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

"Arrogance and a teachable spirit are mutually exclusive" - Nathan Foster

“A teachable spirit and a humbleness to admit your ignorance or your mistake will save you a lot of pain. However, if you're a person who knows it all, then you've got a lot of heavy-hearted experiences coming your way.” - Ron Carpenter Jr.

2. You need to be informed of Truth

Proverbs 18:15 (ESV) *“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”*

Leviticus 26:3 *“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, **I will:***

Verse 4 *“...send you rain in its season...”*

Verse 6 *“...grant peace in the land...”*

Verse 9 *“...look on you with favor and make you fruitful....keep my covenant with you...”*

Verse 11 *“...put my dwelling place among you...”*

Verse 12 *“...I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people...”*

Leviticus 26:14,19-20 *“But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands... I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit.”*

“The truth is like a lion, you don't have to defend it, let it loose and it will defend itself.” - St Augustine

3. You must be trainable

1 Timothy 4:7-8 *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, **train** yourself to be godly. For physical **training** is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching**, rebuking, correcting and **training** in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Luke 6:40 (NLT) *“Students are not greater than their teacher. But the student who is **fully trained** will become like the teacher.”*

4. You must allow yourself to be Transformed

Romans 12:2 *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, rather, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....”*

James 1:22 *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says...”*

Psalms 119:59 *“I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.”*

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 *“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

A life of surrender will bear good fruit

Galatians 5:22 *“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control... ”*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. If we are all under the influence of something, what are some things that you have been under the influence of?

How would you describe how that substance or pursuit affected your life? What were its fruits?

If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to answer the questions

1. Take a look at the quote below and talk about a time you recognized your need to stop and turn around from a behavior and turned quickly. Then talk about a road you followed far too long.

“We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man”- CS Lewis

2. What does a life of full surrender to Jesus actually mean to you?

3. Pastor said that being teachable is to be informed and to be trainable leads to being transformed. Where do you currently see yourself in that journey?

4. As we have been learning how to be under the influence of Jesus, how have your relationships been affected? Has God put someone on your heart to teach about Jesus and his forgiveness? Explain

5. If time permits, share your 3 minute testimony if you have not done so before.

6. Pray for each other and pray for your church.

SOAP SCHEDULE

Monday- James 4:6 says God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Why is God against pride?

Tuesday- Soap Proverbs 18:15

Wednesday-Soap Luke 6:40

Thursday- John 8:36 “ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” What has the Son set you free of?

Friday- Who are you sharing about Jesus with?

Under the Influence
Week 14: How to not get LOST
Small Group Study Guide

Under the wrong influence we easily get LOST.

I. We get lost when we don't know:

1. The difference between getting lost and being lost

2 Peter 2:15 (TEV) "They have left the straight path and have lost their way."

2. The difference between how we start and how we finish

Acts 20:24 (MSG) "What matters most to me is to finish what God started; the job the Master Jesus gave me."

2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

3. The difference between how God sees life and we see life.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way that seems to be right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

II. We need a spiritual GPS (God Positioning System)

Our Rule of Life (Our Spiritual Practices), that we are building this year, are all about our Spiritual GPS. If we don't want to get lost we must build a regular practice of staying well connected (tuned in) to God.

1 Timothy 4:7-8 "Spend your time and energy in **training** yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical **training** has some value, but spiritual **training** is much more important, **for it promises a reward** in both this life and the next." (NLT)

Principle: When we **train ourselves to see as God sees by **authentically being in His presence** we are more likely to do as God desires.**

Fundamentally we are training our brain to:

1. Look at stuff the way God does.

1 Chronicles 29:11-13 “Everything in the heavens and earth is yours O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as being in control of everything. Riches and honor come from you alone, and you are the Ruler of all mankind, your hand controls power and might, and it is at your discretion that men are made great and given strength.” (LB)

2. Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

1 Timothy 6:10 (TEV) “For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows.”

3. Strengthen our posture of contentment.

Philippians 4:11-13 (NASB) “For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

4. Transform what we do into an expression of worship.

Colossians 3:17 (NIV 84) “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Colossians 3:15-17 (NIV 84) “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Our theme for this month will look at ways we can get lost or distracted from focusing on our walk with Christ, especially as it relates to our material possessions and need to manage our finances. Can you recall a time that you felt lost or distracted from God because of financial or materialistic needs or issues? If so, please share.

If time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3, and lastly question # 4.

- 1. The scriptures speak often of people losing their way. No one plans to get lost, yet we often begin to wander from a healthy path to an unhealthy one. What kinds of things have you seen that have distracted you or others from what is healthy, or what matters most?**
- 2. In many areas of life (marriage, business, friendships, and our spiritual walk) people start well but don't finish well. Looking at the two scriptures below share as a group how spiritual practices (a healthy "Rule of Life") could help us to both start and finish well.**

Acts 20:24 (MSG) "What matters most to me is to finish what God started; the job the Master Jesus gave me."

2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

- 3. Training ourselves to be aware of and practice God's presence is a significant concept in our series. Looking at the 1 Timothy passages below and the corresponding principle, answer one of the following questions:**
 - a. How does the idea of a spiritual GPS make sense to you or not, especially in light of the following scripture.**

Isaiah 30:21 "Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left." (NLT)
 - b. How can the idea of physical training help you to be inspired and focused more on spiritual training; what are you learning about your need for spiritual training?**
 - c. Share what you have learned, or are seeking to learn about being "authentically in God's presence".**

1 Timothy 4:7-8 "Spend your time and energy in **training** yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical **training** has some value, but spiritual **training** is much more important, **for it promises a reward** in both this life and the next." (NLT)

Principle: When we train ourselves to see as God sees by authentically being in His presence we are more likely to do as God desires.

- 4. Out of the 4 areas (listed below) that we will be focusing on in the weeks ahead, which one stands out as the most relevant for you personally and why?**
- Look at stuff the way God does.
 - Overcome cultures' grip of greed.
 - Strengthen your posture of contentment.
 - Transform what you do into an expression of worship.

SOAP / Journaling suggestions

Monday- What is the difference between being and staying lost?

Tuesday- How have you been "training" in your spiritual disciplines

Wednesday- Soap Colossians 3:17

Thursday- How would you describe authentically being in God's presence and being a conduit of His desires?

Friday- Soap Acts 20:24

Under the Influence - Week 15
How to Not Get LOST - Part 2
Luke 16:1-13

Our Rule of Life (Our Spiritual Practices), that we are building this year, are all about our Spiritual GPS. If we don't want to get lost we must build a regular practice of staying well connected to, tuned in and under the influence of God/Jesus.

Spiritual practices are the **little things** we do to stay under the influence of Jesus (in step with the Spirit).

Deuteronomy 14:23 (TLB) "*The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to **put God first** in your lives.*"

1 Timothy 4:7-8 (NLT) "*Spend your time and energy in **training** yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical **training** has some value, but spiritual **training** is much more important, **for it promises a reward** in both this life and the next.*"

Principle: When we **train ourselves to see as God sees, by **authentically being in His presence**, we are more likely to do as God desires.**

Training ourselves to: (LOST)

Look at stuff the way God does.

Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

Strengthen our posture of contentment.

Transform what we do into an expression of what we believe about God.

Luke 16:1-13

I. Jesus tells a good story.

Luke 16:1 "*Jesus told his disciples: 'There was a rich man whose **manager** was accused of wasting his possessions.'*"

Luke 16:1 (ASV) "*There was a certain rich man, which had a **steward...***"

Greek *Oikonomos* = household manager or steward and is where we get our word economics.

- **The manager (steward) is in trouble.**

Luke 16:2 “So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because **you cannot be manager any longer.**”

Luke 16:2 (MSG) “Get your report in order, for you are to be **dismissed.**”

- **The manager is going to **lose his job.****

Luke 16:3 “The manager said to himself, ‘**What shall I do now?** My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg.”

- **The manager has a little bit of **time and opportunity.****

Luke 16:4 “I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.”

- **The manager has an **epiphany****
- **The manager makes a **plan** and **implements** it.**

Luke 16:5-7 “So he called each one of his masters debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’ Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’”

II. Jesus’ story has an unexpected twist.

Luke 16:8 “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”

- The master commends the manager for his **prudence**.

“Shrewd,” in Greek, is “phronimos” and means to be **wise or prudent**; mindful of one’s interests; to **think ahead**.

III. Jesus gives three ways to look at our stuff to not lose our way (not get LOST).

Look at:

1. Worldly wealth as a **tool**.

Luke 16:9 “I tell you, **use worldly wealth** to gain friends for yourself, so that when it is **gone**, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

- To bring people into a **relationship** with God.
- They use what is **temporary** to secure what is **eternal**.

2. Worldly wealth as a **test**.

Luke 16:10-12 “Whoever can be **trusted** with very **little** can be **trusted** with much, and whoever is dishonest with very **little** will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been **trustworthy** in handling worldly wealth, who will **trust** you with true riches? And if you have not been **trustworthy** with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”

- Of their **stewardship** to God.
- They pass the **trust** test.

3. Worldly wealth as a **testimony**.

Luke 16:13 “No servant can **serve** two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot **serve** both God and money.”

- Of our personal relationship with God.
- They know, what they do with what they have, says who or what they **serve**.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Our theme for this month will look at ways we can get lost or distracted from focusing on our walk with Christ, especially as it relates to our material possessions and need to manage our finances. How would you say people, in general (the world around us) LOOK at stuff, and how has that influenced you?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3, or 4 and lastly question # 5.

1. Jesus tells a story about a manager who had responsibility or influence over what he had been given by his master. What is stirred in you when you consider the idea that God sees you as a manager (Oikonomos) over the stuff in your life?
2. Prudence is the idea of planning ahead or being mindful and prepared for what is coming. How would a Rule of Life (engaging in spiritual practices) be a prudent way to live?
3. The story Jesus tells us in Luke 16 gives three ways to look at our stuff: as a tool, a test, and a testimony. Say a little about each of these and if any one of them seems to be more challenging than another and why?
4. If the way we manage or steward what we have says something about who or what we serve, what might someone observing your life conclude about what or who you serve?
5. How does today's topic "Look at stuff the way God does" affect or motivate you personally about how you look at and manage your stuff?

If your group is large enough, have everyone pair up and pray together about what you hope to apply with regard to your own spiritual training or any other need before you.

Remind everyone to invite anyone they know who would benefit from being with us, to join us next week.

Soaping/Journal schedule

Monday- Journal whether your finances “wealth” control you or do you control it? How can you better use finances as a tool?

Tuesday- How would you describe God’s idea of stewardship?

Wednesday- Soap Luke 16:13

Thursday- How are you building your rule of life when it comes to finances?

Friday- Soap Luke 12:27-28

Under the Influence
How to not get LOST Part 3
Overcome Cultures Grip of Greed
Luke 12:13-34

Principle: When we **train** ourselves to see as God sees, by **authentically being in (practicing) His presence**, we are more likely to do as God desires.

Training ourselves to: (LOST)

Look at stuff the way God does.

Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

Strengthen our posture of contentment.

Transform what we do into an expression of what we believe about God.

Luke 13:34 *"For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."*

Proverbs 4:23 *"Above all guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life."*

Luke 12:15 *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."*

TWO QUESTIONS:

1. From Culture: Why don't I have more?
2. From Christ: Why do I have so much?

I. Jesus defines the problem. When greed gets a grip:

1. It **fractures** families.

Luke 12:13-14 *"Then someone called from the crowd, 'Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me.' Jesus replied, 'Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?'"*

2. It **defines value** by the number of one's **valuables**.

Luke 12:15 *"Then he said, 'Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.'"*

3. It **looks at goods** instead of **God for security**.

Luke 12:16-19 *"Then he told them a story: 'A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come.''"*

4. It relegates the **purpose of life** to the pursuit of **comfort**.

Luke 12:19b *“Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”*

5. It **blinds** us to the bigger picture.

Luke 12:20 (NLT) *“But God said to him, ‘You fool! **You will die** this very night. **Then** who will get **everything** you worked for?’”*

(NIV) *“...who will get what you have prepared for **yourself?**”*

6. It **positions self** at the **center** instead of God

Luke 12:21 *“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”*

(MSG) *“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.”*

Mark 8:36 *“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?”*

II. Jesus gives two solutions to break the grip of greed.

Luke 12:22-23 *“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.’”*

SHARE

1. **Priority Living** - when **God** is at the **center** of your **decisions**.

Luke 12:29-31 *“And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink....”*

(NIV) *“...do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink.”*

*“Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else**, and he will give you **everything you need.**”*

2. **Priority Giving** - when you **care** enough to **share**.

Luke 12:32-34 *“So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it **gives** your Father great happiness to **give** you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and **give** to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. **Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.**”*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Our theme for this month will look at ways we can get lost or distracted from focusing on our walk with Christ, especially as it relates to our material possessions and need to manage our finances. As we look at this week's message "Overcome cultures grip of greed" Share a time (if you are aware of a time) in your own life where you felt gripped by greed and how it affected you and your relationship with others.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3, and lastly question # 4 or 5.

1. Looking at the Principle our LOST focus is centered around, (When we **train** ourselves to see as God sees, by **authentically being in (practicing) His presence**, we are more likely to do as God desires) how does the principle make sense or not?
2. How do the following two statements of Jesus from Luke 12 motivate or challenge you?

Luke 12:15 "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."

Luke 13:34 "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also."

3. Looking at the 5 observations about how Jesus says greed affects us (see below), speak to one or two of them and how you have personally been affected by greed?

Jesus defines the problem. When greed gets a grip:

It fractures families.

Luke 12:13-14 " Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me."

Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?"

It defines value by the number of one's valuables.

Luke 12:15 "Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

It looks at goods instead of God for security.

Luke 12:16-19 "Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My

friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. It relegates the purpose of life to the pursuit of comfort.

Luke 12:19b “ Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”

It blinds us to the bigger picture.

Luke 12:20 ““But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ “

(NIV) “ who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

It positions self at the center instead of God

Luke 12:21 ““Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”

(MSG) ““That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.”

Mark 8:36 “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?”

- 4. Two big takeaways from Jesus teaching about greed: Priority Living & Priority Giving. Share your impressions of either or both, and answer, how would greed become weakened or overcome if a person could do these things?**

II. Jesus gives two solutions to break the grip of greed.

Luke 12:22-23 “Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”

- 3. Priority Living - when God is at the center of your decisions.**

Luke 12:29-31 “And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink...”

(NIV) “...do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink.”

“Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.”

- 4. Priority Giving - when you care enough to share.**

Luke 12:32-34 “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

- 5. Are there any practical steps you would like to take in response to Jesus teaching and how it might impact a Rule of Life?**

SOAP/Journal Suggestions

Monday - SOAP 1 John 2:16.

Tuesday - Journal about a time you or someone you know desired something to the point of hurting their relationships.

Wednesday - SOAP Hebrews 13:5.

Thursday - Journal what financial security looks like for you and means to you.

Friday - SOAP Proverbs 10:22

Under the Influence
How to not get LOST Part 4
Strengthen Your Posture of Contentment
Philippians 4:11-13

Principle: When we **train** ourselves to see as God sees, by **authentically being in (practicing) His presence**, we are more likely to do as God desires.

Therefore the answer to greater contentment is not more dollars or things, but more of Jesus.

Training ourselves to: (LOST)

Look at stuff the way God does.

Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

Strengthen our posture of contentment.

Transform what we do into an expression of what we believe about God.

I. Contentment's secret

Philippians 4:11-13 (NASB) *"I have **learned** to be **content** in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have **learned the secret** of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I **can do** all things **through Him** who **strengthens** me."*

TO FIND THE SECRET WE MUST FIRST UNCOVER THE LIES/MYTHS OF CONTENTMENT

- **Is not inherent**

*"I have **learned** to be **content**..."*

- **Is not from the from the outside but the inside**

*"I have learned to be content in **whatever circumstances** I am."*

- **Is not circumstantial.**

"...in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret..."

- **Is not from accumulation**

"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity;...both of having abundance and suffering need."

- **Is not my strength, but His.**

*"I **can do** all things **through Him** who **strengthens** me."*

Hebrews 13:5-6 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be **content** with what you have, **because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’** So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’”

- Is God's **presence**.

II. Contentment's lessons

Contentment is not Circumstantial but the Lessons are.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV84) “*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

If the secret to contentment is God’s presence and strength, how do we access His presence and strength?

5 ways to strengthen your posture of Contentment

Philippians 4:4-9 “*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.*”

1. Practice/exercise **Gratitude**

Philippians 4:4 “**Rejoice** in the Lord **always**. I will say it again: **Rejoice!**”

- A habit of gratitude strengthens contentment.

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.” - Cicero

“Say thank you, until you mean it.

Thank God...for everyone and everything sent your way. Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. It turns problems into gifts, failures into successes, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. It can turn an existence into a real life, and disconnected situations into important and beneficial lessons. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Gratitude makes things right.

Gratitude turns negative energy into positive energy. There is no situation or circumstance so small or large that it is not susceptible to gratitude's power.

Say thank you, until you mean it. If you say it long enough, you will believe it." - Melody Beattie

2. Practice/exercise His (Jesus) **Presence-Gentleness**

Philippians 4:5 "Let your **gentleness** be evident to all. The Lord is near."

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for **I am gentle** and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- A habit of **being in Jesus' presence** strengthens contentment.

3. Practice/exercise Prayer

Philippians 4:6-7 "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."

- A habit of **turning your anxiety over to Him** strengthens contentment.

4. Practice/exercise mental focus

Philippians 4:8 “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.”

- A habit of **focusing on God’s blessings** strengthens contentment.

5. Practice/exercise with other content people.

Philippians 4:9 “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.**”

- A habit of connecting with healthy **spiritual mentors** strengthens contentment.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. When you consider the idea of strengthening contentment, which of the exercises mentioned in this week's message would help you the most and why?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3, and lastly question # 4 or 5.

- 1. From Philippians 4:11-13 Pastor pointed out several myths about contentment, (listed below). Share which of these you are more vulnerable to and why?**
 - Is not inherent
 - Is not from the outside but the inside
 - Is not circumstantial.
 - Is not from accumulation
 - Is not my strength, but His.
- 2. Pastor Jeff says, "To move onto a path of growth we must first go through the door of awareness." Describe whether this makes sense to you or not and how it might apply to the myths of contentment addressed this week.**
- 3. If the overarching principle of contentment, or means of obtaining it, is greater awareness of God's presence, how would you describe to someone just beginning their relationship with God, how to increase and enjoy God's presence more?**
- 4. How are you learning to practice gratitude? Is this easy for you or difficult and why?**
- 5. Looking over the 5 suggested exercises from Philippians 4:4-9, which one or combination, will you try and exercise more this week?**

Philippians 4:4-9 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 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. 9 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.

- Practice/exercise **Gratitude**
- Practice/exercise His (Jesus) **Presence-Gentleness**
- Practice/exercise Prayer

- **Practice/exercise mental focus**
- **Practice/exercise with other content people.**

Have someone close your time in prayer and to specifically ask, on behalf of your group, that you can discover more ways to be faithful in your spiritual exercises.

Soaping Suggestions

Monday- Philippians 4:4-5

Tuesday- Philippians 4:6-7

Wednesday- Philippians 4:8-9

Thursday- Philippians 4:11-12

Friday- Philippians 4:13

Under the Influence
How to not get LOST Part 5
Strengthen Your Posture of Contentment
1 Timothy 6:6-19

Principle: When we **train** ourselves to see as God sees, by **authentically being in (practicing) His presence**, we are more likely to do as God desires.

Therefore the answer to greater contentment is not more dollars or things, but more of Jesus.

Training ourselves to: **(LOST)**

Look at stuff the way God does.

Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

Strengthen our posture of contentment.

Transform what we do into an expression of what we believe about God.

Last week we Looked at two main points concerning contentment:

Contentment's Secret & Contentment's Lessons

We discovered last week that the secret of contentment is **experiencing** and **resting** in the **presence of God**.

Matthew 11:28-29 (Jesus) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you **rest**. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest** for your souls."

This week **Strengthen Our Posture of Contentment** **within community**

1 Timothy 6:6-19

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame

until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

Paul coaches Timothy on 4 Lessons to build contentment within spiritual community.

1. Put spiritual formation (godliness) above material accumulation.

1 Timothy 6:6 “*But **godliness** with **contentment** is great gain.*”

Godliness/*Eusebeia*: *Eu* = well & *Sebomi* = Reverence, awe, sacred. Well-worship.

Eusebeia/godliness is the ability to maintain an abiding awareness of the presence of God and reflect His presence.

It is a *Coram Deo* mindset - ever before the face of God.

Coram = in the presence of

Deo = God

Godliness is the supreme goal of being in God's presence - experiencing and resting in God.

Godliness is being deeply aware of God's presence, provision and purposes and living in sync with that awareness.

The Bible calls that **TRUST**.

Proverbs 3:5-6 “***Trust** in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways (acknowledge) submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”

Jeremiah 17:7-8 “*But blessed is the one who **trusts** in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*”

1 Timothy 6:6-8 “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For **we** brought nothing into the world, and **we** can take nothing out of it. But if **we** have food and clothing, we will be **content** with that.”

Contentment is knowing where ultimate value (great gain) is found and **investing** appropriately.

Contentment (& godliness) are the results of the right **investment**.

“**Investment**” is the act of devoting time, effort or energy to a particular undertaking with the expectation of a worthwhile result.”

1 Timothy 4:7-8 “Have nothing to do with **godless** myths and old wives’ tales; rather, **train** yourself to be **godly**. For physical **training** is of some value, but **godliness** has **value** for all things, **holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.**”

The “great gain” Paul is referring to is **Knowing your Purpose in Life**.

Until I trust that my Purpose comes from God I’ll pursue (invest/train) in whatever I think will give me purpose.

If you don’t train your brain, for true purpose and meaning, culture will drain your brain from both.

- **Leverage spiritual training.**
2. **Feed **need**, over **greed**. (Watch your wants)**

1 Timothy 6:9-11 “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.”

“Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.”

- **Leverage what you have.**

1 Timothy 6:17-18 “Command those who are rich in this present world... to **do good**, to be rich in **good deeds**, and to be **generous** and willing to **share**.”

- **By sharing what you have.**

3. Know what to resist and where to persist.

1 Timothy 6:11-12 “But you, man of God, **flee from all this**, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. **Take hold of the eternal life** to which you were called...”

- Leverage the eternal perspective (your higher purpose) over the temporal perspective

Mark 8:36-37 “What good is it for someone to **gain** the whole world, yet **forfeit their soul**? Or what can anyone give in **exchange** for their soul?”

Where do I need to **resist accumulation** because I have **enough**?

Where do I need to **persist** for the sake of my **soul**?

4. Learn to **lead others** to greater contentment.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their **hope in wealth**, which is so uncertain, but to put their **hope in God**, who richly provides us with **everything for our enjoyment**. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. **In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.**”

- By helping them to **connect their resources to a higher purpose.**

We model spiritual living by what we are giving.

Jesus

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Paul quoting Jesus

Acts 20:35 “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Calvin Coolidge

“No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.

Andrew Carnegie

"No man becomes rich unless he enriches others."

Bryant S. Hinckley

"Service is the virtue that distinguished the great of all times and which they will be remembered by. It places a mark of nobility upon its disciples. It is the dividing line which separates the two great groups of the world—those who help and those who hinder, those who lift and those who lean, those who contribute and those who only consume. **How much better it is to give than to receive.** Service in any form is comely and beautiful. To give encouragement, to impart sympathy, to show interest, to banish fear, to build self confidence and awaken hope in the hearts of others, in short—to love them and to show it—is to render the most precious service."

John Wesley

"Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can."

- **Leverage material wealth for spiritual gain.**

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Strengthening contentment within spiritual community.
Share a time when you felt most content and what you believed the most in that moment.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4, and lastly question 5.

1. In 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul tells Timothy that godliness requires training, and in Chapter 6:6 he tells him that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” If the “Great gain” is knowing my purpose in life, how would that strengthen one’s contentment?
2. If godliness is being deeply aware of God's presence, provision and purposes and living in sync with that awareness, how would you coach someone to move in that direction?
3. In point #3 Pastor said that contentment or the lack of contentment comes from what you feed the most. How are you learning to feed your spirit over your flesh?
4. Under point #3 Pastor suggested two questions, how would you answer each?
Where do I need to resist accumulation because I have enough?
Where do I need to persist (stay focused) for the sake of my soul?
5. Do you believe you have a higher purpose that is connected to God’s kingdom, if so, how would you connect what you possess to that purpose (especially according to 1 Timothy 6:17-19)?

1 Timothy 6:17-19 “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. “In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

Soaping Suggestions

Monday- Journal what has caused you to feel a sense of discontent. Where was that feeling nurtured (example.. Grew up poor, feel need to have things)?

Tuesday- Soap 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Wednesday- Soap Mark 8:36-37

Thursday- Soap

Friday- Soap

Under the Influence
Week 19: Loving Well
Small Group Study Guide

Today we are going to do double duty. I am going to wrap up our focus on “How to not get **LOST**,” and kick off our next focus on “**Loving Well**.”

Training ourselves to: (**LOST**)

Look at stuff the way God does.

Overcome cultures' grip of greed.

Strengthen our posture of contentment.

&

Transform what we do into an expression of what we believe about God.

Loving Well is the ultimate expression of (way to illustrate) what we believe about God.

2 Principle to Loving Well:

1) Loving well flows out of how well we experience God's love for ourselves.

John 13:34-35 (Jesus) “A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this** everyone will **know** that you are **my disciples**, if you **love** one another.”

“We have substituted theological ideas for an arresting encounter; we are full of religious notions, but our great weakness is that for our hearts there is no one there. Any authentic spiritual journey must grow from a direct experience of God. There is no substitute for a genuine encounter with perfect love.” - A.W.Tozer

“Self transformation is always preceded by self-acceptance. And the self you must accept is the self that you actually and truly are before you can start our self improvement projects. Any hope that you can know yourself without accepting the things about you that you wish were not true is an illusion. Reality must be embraced before it can be changed. Our knowing of ourselves will remain superficial until we are willing to accept ourselves as God accepts us, fully and completely just as we are.”
- David Benner

1 John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us.”

2) We experience God's love as we enter into deeper relationship with God and others.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV84) “And let us **consider** how we may **spur one another on** toward **love** and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the

habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

2 Objectives each week

In our summer series, **Loving Well**, we will seek to highlight, each week:

- 1) A Character trait that you can focus on and
- 2) A set of skills or disciplines to practice that will give you greater **traction** to love well.

This week's Character trait is **Compassion**, which is at the heart of what Jesus has called all of us to be a part of, **Making Disciples**.

Definitions:

*Compassion is knowing and feeling the struggles others face and responding with **comfort** and support.*

Making Disciples is simply helping others move onto God's agenda.

“Discipleship is simply helping someone take their next step spiritually.” - Greg Surratt, Founding Pastor of SeaCoast Church

*“For the church to be deficient in discipleship is to be deficient in its fundamental reason for existence.” - Eric Geiger, *Transformational Discipleship**

“The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.” - C.S.Lewis

“Discipleship (to mentor) is to help or assist another to discover, establish and refine their spiritual identity.”

How to Cultivate your Compassion

- 1) **Praise** God for the Compassion and comfort that you've **received** from the Father of Compassion.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of **compassion** and the God of all comfort, who **comforts us in all our troubles**, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort **we ourselves receive** from God.”*

- Compassion empowers us to both **receive** comfort and give comfort to others-to love well.

It empowers us to be compassionate, first to ourselves (in whatever trouble we are in), & to move **toward** people with troubles not away from them.

“Addiction is a response to life experience. Recovery from such pain (trouble) can only be alleviated by social support, and gentle consistent inquiry into the origins. Addiction otherwise becomes a reflection and manifestation of the **lack of compassion for oneself.**” - Gabor Mate

- Transforming what you do **starts** by letting Jesus (sometimes through others) meet you where you **are.**

“Once we begin to live on the receiving side of God’s love, we will begin to move naturally to the giving side of that love.” - Pastor David from PJ’s *Identity* book

- Exercise/express **gratitude** over what God has given you.

2) **Pray** for the Compassion that Jesus modeled for us.

Matthew 9:36-38 “When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. **Ask the Lord** (Pray) of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

- Compassion empowers us to be more Christ-like (Godly) and can motivate us toward people who are spiritually disconnected (harassed, helpless, and without a shepherd).
- Transforming what you do comes as you prayerfully invite God into where you are (your space/home/job/play - your harvest field).
- Exercise/express the **prayer of faith** over your environment.

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV84) “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

3) **Practice** Compassion as a part of your spiritual **identity.**

Colossians 3:12-14 “Therefore, as **God’s chosen people**, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves with compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

- Compassion empowers us to practice our true identity as **God’s people.**

- Transforming what you do grows as you are reminded of who you are.
- Exercise/express your true identity within an authentic community.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Pastor Jeff started this weeks message by saying in his introduction that, “Loving Well is the ultimate expression of (way to illustrate), what we believe about God.” Do you believe that to be true and if it is, what should be the ramifications?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4, and lastly question 5.

1. Reflect on the two principles that will undergird our focus on “loving Well” and describe how you have or have not experienced them.

#1 Loving well flows out of how well we experience God’s love for ourselves.

#2 We experience God’s love as we enter into deeper relationship with God and others.

2. What do you think gets in the way of experiencing these principles?
3. Out of the three passages that addressed compassion this week, which one speaks to you the most and why?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of **compassion** and the God of all comfort, 4 who **comforts us in all our troubles**, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort **we ourselves receive** from God.”

Matthew 9:36-38 “When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 **Ask the Lord** (Pray) of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Colossians 3:12-13 “ Therefore, as **God’s chosen people**, holy and dearly loved, **clothe** yourselves with **compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

4. If receiving God's compassion/comfort is critical in order to give compassion/comfort, what kind of spiritual practices would empower us to be a better conduit of compassion and comfort?

5. Pastor recommended three ways to cultivate compassion:

Praise God (express your gratitude) for the compassion he has given to you.

Pray (in faith) for God to increase your compassion for yourself and others. And,

Practice compassion as a marker of your true and deeper, spiritual identity.

Which of these seems most easy and difficult to practice and why?

6. Can you commit to practicing/exercising compassion this week and if so, how will you do so?

Soaping Schedule

Monday - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Tuesday - Matthew 9:36-38

Wednesday - Colossians 3:12-13

Thursday - Hebrews 10:24-25

Friday - John 13:34-35

Under the Influence
Week 20: Loving Well - Dependability

Loving Well is the ultimate expression of (way to illustrate) what we believe about God.

2 Principles to Loving Well:

Loving well flows out of how well we experience God's love for ourselves.

1 John 4:19 *"We love because he first loved us."*

You cannot truly give what you don't have.

We experience God's love as we enter into deeper relationship with God and others.

Romans 13:8-10 *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."*

2 Objectives each week

In our summer series, **Loving Well**, we will seek to highlight, each week:

- 1) A Character trait that you can focus on and
- 2) A set of skills or disciplines to practice that will give you greater **traction** to love well.

Spiritual formation is the process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.

This week's Character trait is **Dependability/ Trustworthiness**, which is at the heart of what Jesus has called all of us to be a part of, **Making Disciples**.

Dependability - quality of being trustworthy and reliable; consistent in performance or behavior.

"Ability is important in our quest for success, but dependability is critical"
- Zig Zigler

"Integrity means that we are trustworthy and dependable, and our character is above reproach" - Billy Graham

How to Cultivate your Dependability

Hebrews 12:1-3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us **throw off everything that hinders** and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us **run with perseverance** the race marked out for us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, **scorning its shame**, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider him** who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not **grow weary and lose heart**.”

Embrace God for the Dependability of His Word

Psalms 136:2 “Give thanks to the God of gods, His word endures forever.”

Isaiah 40:8 “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

It empowers us to trust God, seek guidance from His word

Embrace the Dependability/ Trustworthiness that Jesus modeled for us.

Hebrews 12:2 “...**fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith”

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is **the same** yesterday and today and tomorrow”

Embrace Dependability as a part of your spiritual **identity**.

2 Corinthians 5:20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through **us**. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Proverbs 25:13 “Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master”

Dependability empowers us to practice our true identity as **God’s people**.

Transforming what you do grows as you are **reminded** of your true purpose.

What to Resist

- 1) **Resist** the urge to make promises you can’t keep (people please)

Matthew 5:37 *“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one”*

Proverbs 25:14 *“Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given”*

2) Resist excessive change/spontaneity

Constant change makes your plans - and you appear unreliable.

3) Resist giving up

James 1:4 *“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

Galatians 6:9 *“Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”*

As we become more dependable we allow those around us to trust the Gospel as dependable.

Under the Influence
Week 21: Loving Well - Week #3
Charity

Loving Well is the ultimate expression of (way to illustrate) what we believe about God.

2 Principles to Loving Well:

1) Loving well flows from how well we experience God's love for ourselves.

John 13:34 (Jesus) "A new command I give you: **Love one another.** As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

"Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."

— C. S. Lewis

You cannot truly give what you don't have.

2) We experience God's love as we enter into a deeper relationship with God and others.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV84) "And let us **consider** how we may **spur one another on** toward **love** and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the **habit** of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

2 Objectives each week

In our summer series, **Loving Well**, we will seek to highlight, each week:

- 1) A Character trait that you can focus on and
- 2) A set of skills or disciplines to practice that will give you greater traction to love well.

This week's Character trait is Charity

Definitions:

Charity is exercising tolerance when evaluating people who are unlike themselves, accepting them as God uniquely made them.

“Charity is meeting people where they are with the same grace that Jesus met us with and embracing others with diverse personalities and perspectives.”

How to Embrace a Heart of Charity

1) Embrace **Unity**

Ephesians 4:3 “Make every effort to **keep the unity** of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

a) We are **One Body**

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form **one body**, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form **one body**—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

b) We all **belong**

Romans 12:4-5 “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member **belongs** to all the others.”

2) Embrace **Diversity**

a) There are diverse **parts of the Body.**

1 Corinthians 12:18-20 “But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, **there are many parts**, but one body.”

b) There are diverse **purposes of the Body.**

i) To **Equip** one another

Ephesians 4:11-12 “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelist, the pastors and teachers to **equip His people** for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

ii) To **Serve** one another

Philippians 2:3-8 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, **have the same mindset as Christ Jesus**: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the **very nature of a servant**, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

iii) To **Build** one another

Ephesians 4:16 “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and **builds itself up in love**, as each part does its work.”

Dangers to Charity that need to be resisted

1. Resist the stories of **Inferiority** (insecurity)

1 Corinthians 12:15-16 “Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, **I do not belong** to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, **I do not belong** to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.”

2. Resist the stories of **Superiority** (pride)

1 Corinthians 12:21-26 “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘**I don’t need you!**’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘**I don’t need you!**’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

NEXT STEPS

1 Peter 4: 8-11 *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”*

1. **A**ccept that God has gifted you and called you to a Kingdom purpose.
2. **B**elieve in the fact that you are a needed integral part of the body.
3. **C**hoose to express Charity by serving, and serving with, people who are different from you through the use of your spiritual gifts.
4. **D**iscover your spiritual gifts by attending the S.H.A.P.E.’s class.

Under the Influence
Loving Well #4
Attentiveness

OUR TWO PRINCIPLES:

- 1) **Loving well flows out of how well we experience God's love for ourselves.**
- 2) **We experience God's love as we enter into deeper relationship with God and others.**

Oswald Chambers

"God can give us a pure heart in an instant but He cannot quickly bring us christian character, that takes time and can come only through a series of right moral choices."

Lysa Terkeust

"If there is a singular theme that emerges from the entirety of scripture, it is this: Through relationship with God, man is finally capable of doing that which he was incapable of doing on his own. That's what walking in the Spirit is all about, And that is what character is all about...Character is the by-product of dependency...Character is the will to do what is right"

Wayne Cadero

"Character is the ability to follow through on a worthy decision long after the emotion of making the decision has passed."

Today's Character trait is Attentiveness

Loving well is experienced as we are able to demonstrate close attention to others' thoughts, interests and desires by listening well and engaging in Healthy Conversations.

Engaging in healthy conversation can open the door to knowing and being known; to caring and being cared for; to supporting and being supported; to loving and being loved.

Two fundamental skills:

1. Asking Well (Good Questions).

Jesus was excellent at both of these qualities. Jesus asked more than 300 questions in the Gospels.

2. Listening well (Good Hearing).

Jesus listened to the disciples, to Nicodemus, the woman at the well, to blind Bartimaeus, to the Pharisees, on and on he listened to others.

- **The Goal to all communication is being understood.**

Paul Tournier

“Listen to all the conversations of our world, those between nations as well as those between couples. They are, for the most part, dialogues of the deaf. Exceedingly few exchanges of viewpoints manifest a real desire to understand the other person...No one can find a full life without being understood by at least one person. Misunderstood, he loses his self-confidence, he loses his faith in life, or even in God. Here is even a greater mystery: no one comes to know himself through introspection, or in the solitude of his personal diary. He who would see himself clearly must open up to a confidant freely chosen and worthy of such trust.”

Proverbs 20:5 *“The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.”*

I. Three things to resist that will kill understanding (Loving well).

1. **Resist distractions** & the urge to **disengage**.

Five levels of Listening:

Not Listening
Pretending to listen
Selective listening

LISTENING WELL

Active listening
Empathetic listening

2. **Resist the urge to dominate** the conversation.

Proverbs 18:13 *“He who answers before listening- that is his folly and his shame.”*

3. **Resist** the urge to **Hijack or detour** them to you.

Proverbs 18:2 *“Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.”*

II. How to build understanding and engage in healthy conversation.

Remember the goal.

When someone feels understood they feel heard and known.

David Augsburger

“Being heard is so close to being loved that the average person cannot distinguish the difference.”

ASKING WELL:

Good questions are more powerful than answers.

Jesus asked more than 300 questions in the Gospels.

An answer says, ‘This is what I know’, a question says, ‘I want to know you.’

Harvard Business Review

*“Questioning is a uniquely powerful tool for unlocking **value** in organizations: It spurs learning and the exchange of ideas, it fuels innovation and performance improvement, it builds rapport and **trust** among team members. And it can mitigate business risk by uncovering unforeseen pitfalls and hazards.”*

General principles:

Open-ended questions are better than close-ended.

Be aware of the progression from privacy to transparency

A great deal of the quality in conversation is nonverbal.

Three levels of questions:

1. **Invitational** Questions:

John 1:38 “When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

This question led to them spending an entire day with Jesus.

- **Are about General Information** - Who, What, Where...

Example: Tell me about yourself, who are you?

Ask them about something they are an **expert on**: their **work**, their **family**, and their **hobbies** (or **interests**).

- **Welcomes** others into **relationship** and says, ‘**I’m interested in you.**’
- **Move us toward Trust**

No one has ever concluded that they were loved by someone who wasn’t interested in them.

Philippians 2:3 “Consider others’ interests more important than your own.”

2. **Insightful** (Investigational) Questions

- **Are about Thoughtful Evaluation**

Example: Tell me what you think about that?
Describe how you arrived at that conclusion?
What does that mean to you?

Dr Phil

“How is that working for you?”

Ask for evaluation, analysis, description, interpretation.

After telling the story about the Good Samaritan...

Luke 10:36 (Jesus) *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*

Luke 6:46 (Jesus) *“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”*

Mark 8:36 (Jesus) *“What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

- Moves us toward **Tension**

3. **Implicational** Questions

- Are about **Personal Application & Formation**

Examples: Tell me about what’s going on for you?

How would you apply this to your life?

What next step can you take?

Ask what they will do, what they have learned, what they can apply.

If this (Blank) is true, what’s next?

Mark 8:27-29 *“[Jesus] asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah.’”*

John 21:16 (NIV1984) *“...Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’... ‘Feed my sheep.’”*

- Moves us toward **Transformation & Action**

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. In Pastor Jeff's introduction he shared a few quotes about character (see below) which of them speak to you the most and why?

Oswald Chambers

*"God can give us a pure heart in an instant but **He cannot quickly** bring us christian **character**, that takes **time** and can come only through a series of right moral choices."*

Lysa Terkeust

"If there is a singular theme that emerges from the entirety of scripture, it is this: Through relationship with God, man is finally capable of doing that which he was incapable of doing on his own. That's what walking in the Spirit is all about, And that is what character is all about...Character is the by-product of dependency...Character is the will to do what is right"

Wayne Cadero

*"**Character** is the ability to **follow through** on a worthy decision long after the emotion of making the decision has passed."*

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4, and lastly the closing question.

Stretch Question: Share for memory, with one another, the Character trait of each Module and one skill you are personally working on from the first three modules.

- 1. Looking over the three things to resist to improve our ability to understand one another by listening well, which one do you need to resist the most and why?**
 - **Resist distractions & the urge to disengage.**
 - **Resist the urge to dominate the conversation.**
 - **Resist the urge to Hijack or detour them to you.**

2. If you were in a conversation and not feeling heard or understood how could you influence the conversation toward a healthier outcome using questions in one of the three levels?
3. How could using Invitational questions empower you to engage in healthier conversations?

Invitational Questions:

- Are about General **Information** - Who, What, Where...

Example: Tell me about yourself, who are you?

- Ask them about something they are an **expert on**: their **work**, their **family**, and their **hobbies** (or **interests**).
- **Welcomes** others into **relationship** and says, **'I'm interested in you.'**
- Move us toward **Trust**

4. Can you describe a situation where asking Insightful questions would be helpful?

Insightful (Investigational) Questions

- Are about Thoughtful **Evaluation**

Example: Tell me what you think about that?
Describe how you arrived at that conclusion?
What does that mean to you?

Dr Phil

"How is that working for you?"

- Ask for evaluation, analysis, description, interpretation.

Luke 6:6 (Jesus) *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*

Mark 8:36 (Jesus) “*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*”

- Moves us toward **Tension**

IN CLOSING, let's ask and answer an **Implicational question**. How can you **apply** what you've learned today and in what relationships will you practice Listening and Asking Well?

Go around your group and pray for a relationship where you will seek to have healthier conversations this week.

Soap suggestion

Monday Proverbs 20:5

Tuesday Proverbs 18:13

Wednesday Proverbs 18:2

Thursday Mark 8:36

Friday John 21:16

UNDER THE INFLUENCE: LOVING WELL WHAT IS LOVE?

1 John 4:9-8

□ Brief Context of 1st John

▣ **1 John 4:7-9** (NET)

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God. The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

By this the love of God is revealed among us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning [satisfactory] sacrifice for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, then we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God resides in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

▣ **Love is the confirmation of our Christian identity — of our communion with God.**

▣ **John 13:35** (CEB) *“This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.”*

▣ **John 4:20-21** (MSG) *“If anyone boasts, ‘I love God,’ and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.”*

What is Love?

□ The dictionary provides two definitions of love...

1. Love is a strong feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, such as for a parent, child, friend, or pet.
2. Love is a profoundly tender, passionate affection, often mingled with sexual desire, for another person.

- Today's common definition of love...
 - Love is encouraging and supporting people to do whatever they want (whatever feels good), regardless of the consequence, and regardless of what God's word says. This definition of love is becoming more acceptable in our society.

What is Biblical love?

- **1 John 4:8-9** (NET) *"The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love. By this the love of God is revealed among us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him."*

- **1 John 4:8a** — *"The person who does not love does not **KNOW** God, because God is love."*

- **1 John 4:8b** — *"The person who does not love does not **KNOW** God, **because God is love.**"*

- **1 John 4:9** (NET)— *"By this the love of God is revealed among us: that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we may live through him."*

- **1 John 2:5** *"But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him."*

- **1 John 3:17-18** *"Suppose a believer who is rich enough to have all the necessities of life sees a fellow believer who is poor and does not have even basic needs. What if the rich believer does not help the poor one? Then it is clear that God's love is not in that person's heart. My children, our love should not be only words and talk. No, our love must be real. We must show our love by the things we do."*

- **1 John 4:10** *"This is love: it is **not that we loved God** but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins."*

- “Love is an act of the will, accompanied by emotions, leading actions on behalf of another person.” - Pastor Voddie Baucham

THE BIG IDEA...

- God is the foundation, definition, and description of love, and it is only by knowing Him that we will be empowered to understand, and express His love accurately and consistently.

ENCOURAGEMENTS

- **3 Ways to grow in knowing God.**

1. Daily Bible Reading...
2. Set aside to pray to God daily, multiple times per day.
3. Be in community

Discussion Questions

1. What is your definition of love?
2. How is your definition of love different or similar to the dictionary's definition of love?
3. How did you come about your definition of love?
4. Who/What has influenced or influences your definition of love the most?
 - Like everything else about us, our understanding of love is and has been largely influenced by our culture, community, and circumstances. All these affect our view and understanding of love (and of life, in general).
 - Culture** — by culture I am referring to your upbringing, how you were raised, your family background and dynamic. This is where we learn and develop habits, traditions, principles of life, and our understanding of love. This is also where our personality is largely formed. So our family experience is very important, as it tends to have the most influence and impact on the way we understand love.
 - Community** — by community I am referring to the society, from your neighbors to the world. This includes Friends, Pastors, Teachers, Coaches, Politicians, Schools, Social Media Influencers, Books/Novels, Movies, different Philosophies/Teachings about life, our co-workers, etc.
 - Circumstances** — by circumstances I am referring to our socio-economic and physical realities. So things such as mental/emotional health, financial health, physical health, spiritual health, substance abuse, and needs such as food, shelter, clothing etc. All this has an impact on our understanding of love.
5. Based on the following Scripture what can we learn about biblical love/ God's love?
 - 1 John 2:15-17** (New Living Translation) *"Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever."*
 - 1 John 3:13-18** *"So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead. Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them. We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows*

no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.”

- **1 John 4:7-12** *”Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.”*
- **Love = Agape**
 - The word translated as love in all the Scriptures above is the Greek word agape. Agape refers to a love that is unmerited and unconditional. It is a love that is rooted in facts and not feelings— facts about who God is and who God says we are. It is a love that is rooted in God.

6. How does this differ from your understanding and expression of love?

Under the Influence
Loving Well #6
Gentleness

OUR TWO PRINCIPLES:

- 1) Loving well flows out of how well we experience God's love for ourselves.
- 2) We experience God's love as we enter into deeper relationship with God and others.

Today's **Character trait** is **Gentleness and the skill for application is giving and receiving feedback.**

Loving well is experienced as we are able to demonstrate gentleness through a humble demeanor & delivery of whatever one has to offer.

I. A **Picture (definition) of Gentleness**

In Greek, Gentle (meek, KJV) (4239) is "praus" which originates from paos = easy, mild or soft. "Prautes" is the noun and is most often translated "gentleness" and describes those who are of a quiet, gentle spirit, in contrast to the proud and supercilious Scribes and Pharisees and their disciples.

The adjective praus was often used of **a wild horse that was broken and made useful to its owner.** For believers, to be gentle is to be willingly under the control of God. The one who walks in a surrendered/submitted/yielded state before God.

J C Ryle says that...

"The meek are those who are of a patient and contented spirit. They are willing to put up with little honor here below; they can bear injuries without resentment; they are not ready to take offense."

Martyn Lloyd Jones:

"A person who is of the type... must of necessity be mild. Think again... of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mild, gentle, lowly— those are the terms... But it also means that there will be a complete absence of the spirit of retaliation, having our own back, or seeing that the other person pays for it. But it also means, therefore, that we shall be patient and long-suffering, especially when we suffer unjustly. But it also means that we are ready to listen and to learn; that we have such a poor idea of ourselves and our own capabilities that we are ready to listen to others. Above all we must be ready to be taught by the Spirit, and led by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Meekness always implies a teachable spirit."

Pastor and author Hughes goes on to note some practical benchmarks by which you can assess whether you are manifesting the meekness Christ's calls for...

- Harshness: If you are mean in your treatment of others, if there is an absence of gentleness in your treatment of others, take heed.
- Grasping: If you make sure you always get yours first, if numero uno is the subtle driving force in your life, if you care little about how your actions affect others, beware.
- Vengeful: If you are known as someone never to cross, if you always get your "pound of flesh," be on your guard.
- Uncontrolled: If rage fills your soul so that life is a series of explosions occasioned by the "fools" in your life, watch out.

- **The ultimate picture of Gentleness is Jesus.**

Matthew 11:29 (Jesus) "*I am gentle...*"

II. A **Partner** to Gentleness (A Biblical pairing of traits)

- Gentleness with Humility

Humility in Greek is Tapeinos and is defined as low, not high, not rising far from the ground. It speaks of one's condition as lowly or of low degree.

1 Peter 5:5 "*All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the **humble**.'*"

"BUT, I'm just not good at receiving feedback!"

"For the things we need to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." - Aristotle

Spurgeon said that...

"Humility is to make a right assessment of oneself." "Do not be proud of race, face, or grace." (Point: everything and anything we have is from God Alone so how can we boast?) The higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own esteem.

Warren Wiersbe wrote that...

"To be poor in spirit means knowing yourself, accepting yourself, and being yourself to the glory of God."

Dwight L. Moody declared that...

"Unless you humble yourself before (God) in the dust (Note: tapeinos = not rising far from the ground), and confess before Him your iniquities and sins, the gate of heaven, which is open only for sinners saved by grace, must be shut against you forever."

Puritan William Secker wrote that...

"Pride is a sinner's torment, but humility is a saint's ornament."

John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote that...

"The first test of a truly great man is humility."

"Humility is the ability to live dependent on God, interdependently on others, with a passion to serve."

Matthew 11:28-29 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle** and **humble** in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

- We learn to cultivate our **humility and gentleness** (Tapeinos and Praus) by staying **yoked** up with Jesus.
- Humility (Tapeinos) is Proper **self-regard**
- Gentleness (Praotes) is Proper **self-restraint**

Ephesians 4:1-2 "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely **humble** and **gentle**; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

III. A **Practice** of Gentleness

As believers we are called to practice giving and receiving **feedback**, with Gentleness and Humility.

"BUT, I'm just not good at receiving feedback!"

Aristotle:

"For the things we need to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."

1. **Ask** for and **receive** feedback (A Humble posture)

FROM GOD

Psalms 139:23-24 "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my **anxious** thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

James 3:13 "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the **humility** (Praus) that comes from wisdom."

FROM OTHERS

Proverbs 19:20 (ESV) *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”*

Proverbs 15:31-32 (NLT) *“If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise. If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.”*

- **CHALLENGE:** Ask, “What is it like to be on the other side of me?”

2. Give and receive loving feedback.

Ephesians 4:15 & 25 *“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ.... Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”*

- **CHALLENGE:** Is to build greater trust and accountability by sharing with one another what we see in each other that is good and helpful and what isn't..

The Gallup organization calls this Fast and Focused feedback.

Gallup data show that when employees strongly agree they received "meaningful feedback" in the past week, they are almost four times more likely than other employees to be engaged.

They delineate that feedback should be:

- Fast - best case, day or week of the event.
- Frequent - in contrast to an annual review weekly feedback.
- Focused - it's specific to a person's natural talent and performance needs, relevant to their contribution.
- Future oriented - Good feedback doesn't get stuck in the past, it moves a person toward the future.

(Examples: What can we do to get even better? How can we prepare for the future? What did you learn from this phase?)

- Freely receives as well as given - Model two way feedback.

Galatians 6:1-2 *“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit (Under His Influence) should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

3. Receive difficult feedback

1 Peter 3:15-16 *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

- **CHALLENGE:** Seek to hear feedback, criticism, and slander from a humble and gentle posture that refuses to retaliate or give in to defensiveness.

Proverbs 15:1 *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

1 Peter 2:23 *“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. If you can, share a time when you received feedback well and a time you didn't. Can you distinguish what empowered you to receive it well versus not so well?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4,

1. Do you think humility is learned, if so how do you think we cultivate greater humility?
2. Pastor Jeff often shares his definition of humility as “the ability to live dependent on God, interdependently on others, with a passion to serve.” What makes sense about this definition or does not make sense, and why?
3. The picture of gentleness, in Greek culture, was strength under control and was associated with an animal (often a horse) that was trained to be submissive to its master and under the master's control. How do you think the spiritual practices that we have been looking at this year could enable us to be more gentle?
4. Look over the last major point in your sermon notes, A Practice of Gentleness (see below), and comment on which of the three you would like to work to improve and why?

A **Practice** of Gentleness

As believers we are called to practice giving and receiving **feedback**, with Gentleness and Humility.

1. **Ask** for and **receive** feedback (A Humble posture)

FROM GOD

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- **CHALLENGE:** Seek to hear feedback, criticism, and slander from a humble and gentle posture that refuses to retaliate or give in to defensiveness.

Proverbs 15:1 “A **gentle** answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

1 Peter 2:23 “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he **entrusted** himself to him who judges justly.”

In Closing: Ask someone from your group to close your time in prayer and to encourage one another with healthy feedback.

Soaping Suggestions

Monday- James 3:13

Tuesday- Proverbs 15:31-32

Wednesday- Ephesians 4:15

Thursday- Ephesians 4:25

Friday- 1 Peter 3:15-16

Under the Influence
Loving Well - Week #8
Esteem
Philippians 1:27, 2:1-4

OUR TWO PRINCIPLES:

- 1) Loving well flows from how well we experience God's love for ourselves.
- 2) We experience God's love as we enter into deeper relationships with God and others.

Philippians 1:27, 2:1-4 *“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. **(Gospel Mentioned 7 times in chapter 1)** Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel... Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

1. **Reflect** on our relationship with Christ (Am I motivated by His Love to be in unity with others?)

Four ways we experience God's love in this Passage:

Philippians 2:1 *“Therefore if you have any **encouragement** from being united with Christ, if any **comfort** (Consolation in NKJV) from his love, if any **common** sharing in the Spirit, if any **tenderness and compassion...**”*

The word “IF” in this text is not used in the context of doubt or uncertainty. It can be translated to “since” or “because”

1. If any **Encouragement** in Christ

The Greek word for Encouragement: “paráklēsis” (par-ak'-lay-sis) means to “coming alongside someone to encourage them, to counsel them, to help them, to exhort them.”

John 14:15-17 *“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **advocate to help you** and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

This encouragement leads to **hope**

1 Peter 3:15 *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”*

2. If any **Comfort** (Consolation) from His Love

The Greek word for Comfort/Console is “paramuthian”. One Greek lexicon defines it as “lessening the intensity of something that pains or distresses”

Psalm 34:17-18 *“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. **The Lord is close** to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

This comfort leads to **peace**

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

3. If any **Communion** (Fellowship) in the Spirit

The Greek word used here is “koinōnía” which means “fellowship, the close association between persons, emphasizing what is common between them”

1 Corinthians 12:13 *“For we were all baptized by **one Spirit** so as to form **one body**—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”*

1 Corinthians 6:19 *“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”*

This communion leads to **intimacy** with Christ and others

Acts 2:42-44 *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.”*

4. If any **Compassion** (Affection) of the Spirit

The Greek word used here is “**Splanchna**,” meaning “deep, internal caring comparable to the modern expressions of deep feeling such as ‘broken-hearted’ or ‘gut-wrenching’”

Romans 8:26-27 *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”*

Matthew 9:36 *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*

This compassion leads to **goodness**

Galatians 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

V2 comes from a place of Pastoral care and desire

2. **Embrace** a Christ-centered mind towards ourselves and others

Philippians 2:3-4 *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

Philippians 2:5 (NKJV) *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”*

I. A Christ-centered mind produces the **Humility** to **esteem** others

Philippians 2:3: *“...in humility (lowliness of mind NKJV) value (esteem NKJV) others above yourselves.”*

Character Focus: Esteem “to regard highly or favorably; regard with respect or admiration”

Humility is made possible when we move from the inquiring thoughts of “what’s in it for me” to ones of “what’s in it for others”. Of course, that would require the discipline to be selfless. One in which you think of yourself less, not less in terms of your self-worth or value, but in terms of the amount of time you spend thinking about yourself. The goal of humility is to have a person rid themselves of self-centeredness. When humility accomplishes its goal, a person’s motives move from self-preservation to self-sacrifice for the sake of others, which, in turn, reflects Christ-centeredness.

II. A Christ-centered mind seeks to embrace the **interests** of others

Philippians 2:4 “..but each of you to the **interest of others...**”

3. **Resist** a self-centered mind toward ourselves and others

III. A self-centered mind produces a **“self-first”** attitude

Philippians 2:3 “...Do **nothing** out of selfish ambition...”

IV. A self-centered mind produces a **“Look at me”** attitude

Philippians 2:3-4 “...or vain conceit...”

Romans 12:3 “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought**, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”

V. A self-centered mind produces an **“All about me”** attitude

Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV) “Let each of you look out **not only** for his own interests...”

Study Guide Questions

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q. Can you see how Christ has esteemed us through the gospel? Read Philippians 2:1-8 to help answer this question. Pick 1-2 of the ways His life, death, and resurrection have esteemed you and share with the group

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times, giving everyone the opportunity first to answer questions 1 or 2, then 3 or 4,

1. PJR defined “Esteem” as “to regard highly or favorably; regard with respect or admiration” If you can, share a time when someone has esteemed you. When that happened, did that make you closer or more distant from that person?
2. In PJR’s message, he says, “Having a Christ-centered mind produces the humility to esteem others,” if so, how do you think we cultivate the mind of Christ?
3. Look at Romans 12:3 “But with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you”. What does the sober judgment of yourself look like? What tends to impair your judgment?
4. PJR says, “Humility requires the discipline to be selfless.” What disciplines would you need to keep practicing or add to your practice to become more selfless?
5. Looking at the Greek and definitions below used to describe God’s heart for you, how does it feel to have a greater understanding of his love? How does this motivate you to a deeper relationship with Christ?
 - a. The Greek word for Encouragement: “paráklēsis” (par-ak'-lay-sis) means to “coming alongside someone to encourage them, to counsel them, to help them, to exhort them.”
 - b. The Greek word for Comfort/Console is “paramuthian”. One Greek lexicon defines it as “lessening the intensity of something that pains or distresses”
 - c. The Greek word used here is “koinōnía” which means “fellowship, the close association between persons, emphasizing what is common between them”
 - d. The Greek word used here is “Splanchna,” meaning “deep, internal caring comparable to the modern expressions of deep feeling such as ‘broken-hearted’ or ‘gut-wrenching’”
6. How will you esteem others this week? Take a moment to close your eyes and ask the Father to put in your heart the person He wants you to esteem.

Then with eyes closed and heads bowed, go around your group and intercede for that person.

Soaping/Journaling Suggestions

Monday- Soap Philippians 1:27

Tuesday- Soap Philippians 2:3-4

Wednesday- Journal a time when you experienced true humility. Who displayed it and how was it responded to?

Thursday- Soap Romans 12:3

Friday- Which sermon of the last 8 weeks (loving others) has impacted your life and the way you treat others? Journal examples

Under the Influence
John 15
Jesus' Instruction on how to **stay Under His Influence**

John 15:1-17 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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.*

'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. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

'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. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.'"

The goal or objective of our theme/series

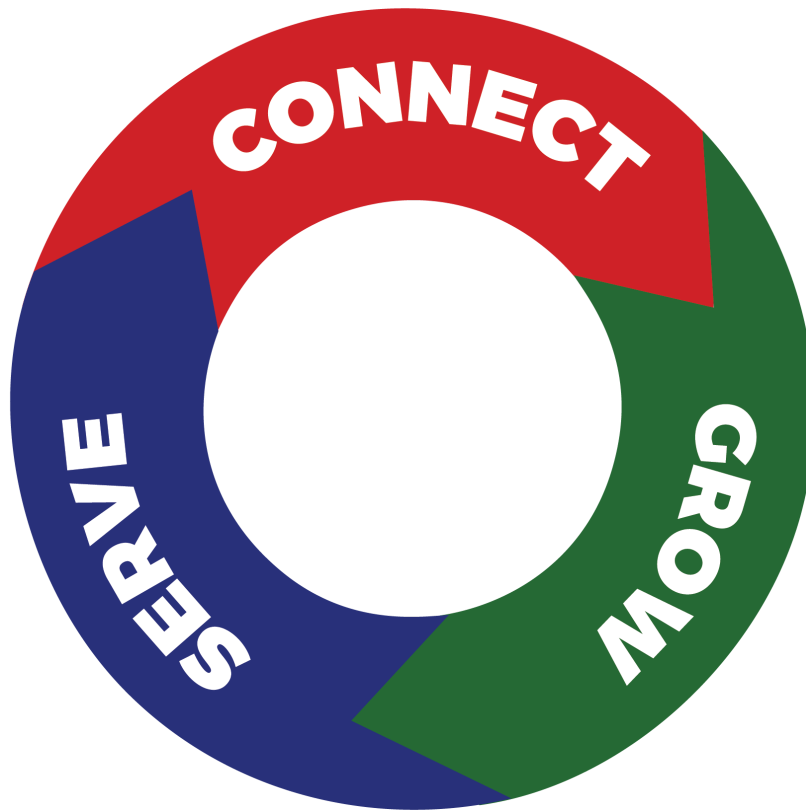
Together, we are seeking to build a personalized "Rule of life" that will empower and equip each of us to **remain under His influence.**

We are all vulnerable to come under the influence of many things that are contrary to, or distractions from, God's influence. So, how we order our lives will determine if the Influence of Jesus remains.

Our "Rule of Life" is simply a **tool (or collection of tools)** to help us **train** for, and **maintain**, our growth to become more like Jesus for the sake of others.

John 15 is the most classic text where Jesus teaches about what this looks like.

Being Under His Influence is realized as we learn to **maintain an intimate **connection** to Jesus/God and His **purpose** for our life.**



I. The **Purpose** of being under His Influence

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit..."*

The key word in John 15 is the Greek word "**meno**" which means **to abide, stay, remain or continue**. It is used 11 times in this chapter alone and is the key concept to live under His influence of Jesus

- Is a divine **Partnership** with God

Who is the vine? **Jesus**.

Who are the branches? **We are**.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing."*

II. The **Proof** of being Under His Influence

John 15:5, 8 *"...If a man remains in me and I in him he will **bear much fruit... showing yourselves to be my disciples.**"*

Matthew 7:16 *"By their **fruit** you will recognize them."*

Galatians 5:22 “But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

- Is a life that bears **fruit**.
- If these traits are not present in your life, your “Rule of life” isn’t working.

III. The **Progression** of being Under His Influence

1st) **John 15:2a** “He cuts off every branch that bears **no fruit**.”

2nd) **John 15:2b** “...while every branch that does **bear fruit** he prunes.”

3rd) **John 15:5** “If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear **much fruit**...”

4th) **John 15:16** “...I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-**fruit that will last**.”

- Is an increase of mature love-proof of His presence.

IV. The **Plan** for staying under His Influence.

John 15:7 “If you remain in me and **my words** remain in you, **ask** whatever you wish and it will be given to you.”

The Two most fundamental **tools** that Jesus highlights are **Prayer** and His **Word** (**Bible engagement**). These tools increase our awareness and acceptance of God’s presence, purposes and plan (His will). From the following verses what is the desired response to this **increased awareness**?

John 15:9,10 &12 “As the Father has **loved** me, so have I **loved** you. Now remain in my **love**. If you **obey** my commands, you will remain in my **love**...My command is this: **Love** each other as I have **loved** you.”

Here’s the beauty of what Jesus gives us. When we work **His plan** (when we are obedient) we will experience:

- His purpose - greater **partnership** with God.
- His proof - greater **fruitfulness** for God
- His progression - greater **maturity** in God

We become more like Jesus for the sake of others.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q How does the idea of being “in sync”, or “out of sync” relate to the metaphor in John 15 about remaining in the vine? Can you describe the benefits that are experienced from an “in sync” relationship?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4,

1. Have you made any adjustments to your personal “Rules of Life”?
2. How is a Rule of Life like a tool for our spiritual Growth?
3. Looking at John 15’s metaphor of the Vine and the branch, how does this picture emphasize the partnership that God wants with us?
4. Looking at the passages below, concerning “fruit”, as the proof of God’s presence, how have you experienced (seen this to be true) in your life or others?

John 15:8 “... If a man remains in me and I in him he will **bear much fruit...showing yourselves to be my disciples.**”

Matthew 7:16 “By their **fruit** you will recognize them.”

Galatians 5:22 “But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

5. If Jesus is highlighting a plan, or means by which, we can “remain” in him through prayer and his word, how are you seeking to be obedient to that plan and what are your greatest distractions from that plan?

In closing, encourage everyone to write down their current “Rule of life” (plan for staying under the influence of Jesus) and if they want to make any alterations to their plan. Then have someone close your time in prayer.

Soaping Suggestion

Monday - Matthew 7:16

Tuesday - John 15:10

Wednesday - John 15:12

Thursday - Galatians 5:22 What is meant by “fruit of the Spirit”

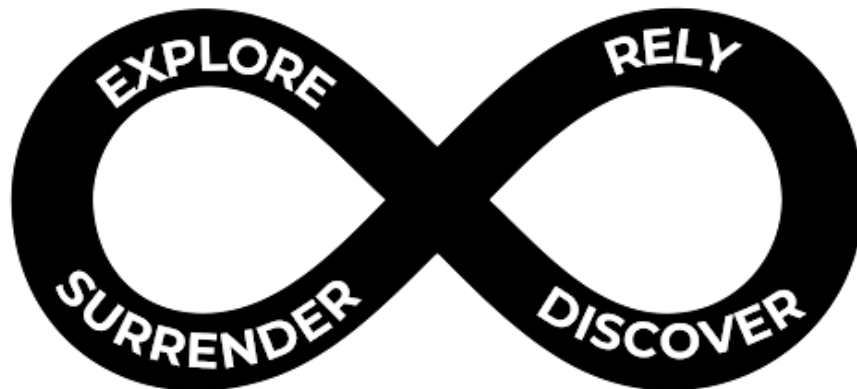
Friday - John 15:7

Under the Influence
John 15:1-4 (all passages are in NIV 84)
Jesus' Instruction on how to **stay Under His Influence**

John 15:1-17 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will 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.*

'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed 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. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you obey what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last— Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.'"



Being Under His Influence is realized as we learn to **maintain** an intimate **connection** to Jesus/God and His **purpose** for our life.

Last week we looked at the:

Purpose of being under His influence - **Divine Partnership**

Proof of being under His influence - **Fruitfulness**

Progression of being under his influence - **Spiritual Maturity**

Plan to stay (meno) under His influence - **Prayer & God's Word** (Bible engagement)

We noted that our intimate connection to Jesus is what brings us under His influence and the maintenance of that connection requires **Prayer** and **God Word** (Bible engagement) I called them our fundamental tools for building our **Rule of Life**.

Coming under the Influence of Jesus:

I. **STARTS** with an intimate **encounter**.

John 15:1-3 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he **prunes** so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already **clean** because of the word I have spoken to you."*

Key word: "**Kathairo**" in the Greek means to **prune**, **cleanse** or **purify**.

Warning - An intimate encounter is **not** an intimate connection/relationship.

Examples:

- Judas - John 13:8-11

John 13:8-11 *"No," said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I **wash** you, you have **no part with me.**' 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is **clean**. And you are **clean**, though **not every one of you.**' For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said **not everyone was clean.**"*

What is the subject of washed and clean a metaphor of?

- Nine healed lepers - Luke 17:11-17
- Rich young ruler - Luke 18:18-27

II. Must lead to an honest **confession**.

John 15:3 “You are already **clean** because of the word I have spoken to you.”

Matthew 16:15-16 (Jesus & the Disciples) “‘Who do they say I am?...’ ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter said, ‘You are the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God.’”

Romans 10:9-10 (NIV84) Paul: “If you **confess** with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

John 4:15 (MSG) “Everyone who **confesses** that Jesus is God’s son participates in an intimate relationship with God.”

III. Produces a Fruitful **connection**/relationship (With God, self and others)

Three tools for staying under the influence

We exercise the following through **Prayer** and **Bible Engagement**

1. You embrace the purpose of **pruning**.

John 15:2 “...while every branch that **does** bear **fruit** he **prunes** so that it will bear even **more fruit**.”

Hebrews 12:6-8 “My dear child, don’t shrug off God’s discipline...It’s the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects. God is educating you; that’s why you must never drop out. He’s treating you as dear children. This trouble you’re in isn’t punishment; it’s **training**...”

John 15:11 *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

James 1:2 *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”*

- **The purpose of pruning is to increase your **fruitfulness**.**

“In times of trouble, say, ‘First, he brought me here. It is by His will I am in this straight place: in that will I rest.’ Next, ‘He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child.’ Then say, ‘He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.’ And last say, ‘In His good time He can bring me out again...how and when, He knows.’ Therefore say, ‘I am here by God’s appointment, in His keeping, under His **training**, for His time.’” — Andrew Murray

2. You embrace the fruit of **forgiveness.**

John 15:3 *“You are already **clean** because of the **word** I have spoken to you.”*

John 13:8 *“Jesus answered, ‘Unless I **wash** you, you have **no part with me**.’”*

Matthew 6:12 (The Lord's Prayer) *“...Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors....”*

1 Peter 1:22 *“Now that you have **purified** yourselves by **obeying** the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”*

3. You embrace the discipline of **dependence.**

John 15:4 *“Remain in me, and I will 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.”*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q Pastor shared a visual picture of the infinity symbol and gave a picture of our spiritual journey; explore, discover, rely & surrender. Can you describe where you think you might be on your spiritual journey and why?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & then #5.

- 1. How does the idea of being pruned set with you; is it something you welcome or resist and why?**
- 2. Based on the first two points in the sermon and John 15:1-3 how would you differentiate between an intimate encounter and an honest confession?**
- 3. Based on John 15:1-4 pastor Jeff suggested three tools for staying under the influence of Jesus. Which of these tools make the most sense to you and why?**
- 4. Can you describe the “The purpose of pruning” and give an example of a time you were pruned and because of the pruning you experienced greater fruitfulness?**
- 5. What is one thing you could do differently this week because of the message you heard this week?**

Spend a few minutes praying for one another before closing your time together.

**Under the Influence
For Divine Partnership
John 15:1-17 (all passages are in NIV 84)
Staying Under His Influence is how we live purposeful lives.**

Two weeks ago we looked at the:

Purpose of being under His influence - **Divine Partnership**

Proof of being under His influence - **Fruitfulness**

Progression of being under his influence - **Spiritual Maturity**

Plan to stay (meno) under His influence - **Prayer & God's Word** (Bible engagement)

We noted that our intimate connection to Jesus is what brings us under His influence and the maintenance of that connection requires **Prayer** and **God Word** (Bible engagement) I called them our fundamental tools for building our **Rule of Life**.

Remember, like an electric drill needs its battery charged, so do you. We keep our spiritual batteries charged through daily Prayer, & Bible Engagement (God's Word).

A consistent Rule of Life (Daily Prayer & Bible Engagement)

1. Will fuel/charge your Passion to be used by God.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing."*

- Teaching us how to **love** others (His Purpose).

John 15:9-14 *"As the Father has **loved** me so have I **loved** you. Now remain in my **love**. If you **obey** my commands you will remain in my **love**, just as I have **obeyed** my Father's commands and remain in His **love**. My command is this, **love** each other **as I have loved** you. Greater **love** has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you **obey** my commands."*

2. Will fuel your Intolerance for wasting your life.

John 15:6 *"If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is **thrown away** and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."*

- You begin to see & value yourself as a part of God's **business** (His Purpose)

John 15:15 *"I no longer call you servant because a servant **does not know** his master's **business**. Instead I have called you friends. For everything I have learned from my Father **I have made known** to you."*

3. Will fuel your Dependence of God's Word

John 15:7 *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you..."*

- You begin to see & value God's Word as a fundamental instrument (tool) for knowing God's **will** (His Purpose).

Joshua 1:8 *"Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth; **meditate** on it **day and night**, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*

4. Will fuel your Boldness in Prayer

John 15:7 *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, **ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.** This is to my Father's glory that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*

John 15:16-17 *"You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit—fruit that will last. Then **the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.** This is my command. **Love** each other."*

- You begin to see yourself as an instrument of fruit production (His Purpose).
- This begs the question, what is this fruit?

1) Loving others (In John 13-17 "Love" is used 36 times)

John 15:12 *"...**love** each other **as I have loved** you."*

John 13:34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. **As I have loved you, so you must love one another.** By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

John 4:34b-35 *"The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and **the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life.** What **joy** awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!"*

2) People brought into eternal life (Into relationship with God)

John 12:24-25 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, **it bears much fruit.** Anyone who loves their life (hold onto it) will lose it, while anyone who hates their life (Let it go) in this world will keep it for **eternal life.**"*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Following the metaphor of a spiritually charged life, through prayer and time in God's word, can you describe a time when you experienced being spiritually charged up or drained?

(If greater explanation is needed, remind your group of pastors Jeff's electric drill metaphor for how we need to have our spiritual lives charged up (or fueled up) in order to love like Jesus. What did he say we can do to have a spiritually charged life and have you experienced having your spiritual batteries filled or drained? Please share your story.)

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & then #5.

1. Looking at the following verses, have you experienced any connection between obedience and loving well?

"As the Father has **loved** me so have I **loved** you. Now remain in my **love**. If you **obey** my commands you will remain in my **love**, just as I have **obeyed** my Father's commands and remain in His **love**. My command is this, **love** each other **as I have loved** you. Greater **love** has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you **obey** my commands."

2. What do you think Jesus means when he tells us that "greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."? Is there a way to practically love like that today?
3. If Jesus has revealed the master's business, how would you explain what that business is?

John 15:15 "I no longer call you servant because a servant **does not know** his master's **business**. Instead I have called you friends. For everything I have learned from my Father **I have made known** to you."

4. What do you think it would look like to live in dependence on God's word or to have his "words remain in you"?

John 15:7 "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

5. If the fruit that John speaks of, in his gospel, is "Loving others" and "people being brought into relationship with God" how could we partner

more effectively with God and one another to love well and introduce others into a relationship with God?

Close your time by praying for one another.

Soap Schedule

Monday- John 15:1-2

Tuesday- John 15:3

Wednesday- John 15:4-5

Thursday- John 15: 8-9

Friday- John 4:34-35

Under the Influence

Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #1

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

Last few weeks (From John 15):

Purpose of being under His influence - **Divine Partnership**

Proof of being under His influence - **Fruitfulness = Loving Community & People coming to faith in Jesus; & incorporated into community.**

Progression of being under his influence - **Spiritual Maturity**

Plan to stay (meno) under His influence - **Prayer & God's Word** (Bible/Scripture engagement/Lectio Divina)

I. Why is the Bible (The Scriptures/Word of God) the foundation of our Rule of Life?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) *"There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us."*

1. There's nothing like it.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) *"**There's nothing like the written Word of God** for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of **Scripture** is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us."*

"I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to men. All the good of the savior of the world is written to us through this book." - Abraham Lincoln

2. It's the Word of God

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) “There’s nothing like **the written Word of God** for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”

Hebrews 4:12 “The **word of God is living** and active...”

“The Bible is no mere book, but a **living creature**, with a power to conquer all that oppose it.” - Napoleon Bonaparte

“The Bible is **alive**, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me.” - Martin Luther

3. It shows us the way to Jesus

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) “There’s nothing like the written Word of God for **showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”

The Bible Project’s Mission Statement

“Helping people to experience the Bible as a **unified story that leads to Jesus**.”

4. It is God breathed (Remember our divine partnership - the purpose for being under the Influence of Jesus.)

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) “There’s nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **Every part of Scripture is God-breathed** and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”

God-breathed = Greek “theopneustos”

It is a compound word comprised of “THEOS” and “PNEO.

Theos = Deity/God & Pneo = To Breath hard

- The **scriptures** - The Divine breath into Human authors = The **partnership** of God working through humans to reveal His Word/God’s Purposes

Genesis 2:7 “Then the LORD **God** formed a man from the dust of the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and

female he created them... and said to them, **'Be fruitful** and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

- **Humanity** - The Divine Breath into humanity = The **partnership** of God and humans to accomplish His purposes.

John 1:1&14 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginningAnd the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us..."

- **Jesus** - The Divine Word (breath) becoming the perfect human = The **partnership** of God becoming human to fulfill his ultimate purpose of reconciliation.

5. It is useful:

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) "There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.** Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us."

NIV/MSG - side by side

"Teaching/**Showing us truth**"

"Rebuking/**exposing our rebellion**"

"Correcting/**correcting our mistakes**"

"Training/**training us to live God's way**"

"The Bible is not intended only for scholars. From the beginning it was intended to be everybody's book." - F.F. Bruce

6. It helps to put us together and shape us for the tasks God has for us.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) "There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. **Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.**"

"Put together & shaped" in Greek is Artios = developed, complete, or equipped. The prefix Ex, exartios, being added means "fully" so the result is being fully developed or fully equipped, for every good work.

NIV "...so that the servant of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work."

ESV “...that the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for every good work.”

“Within the covers of the Bible are all the answers to all the problems men face. The Bible can touch hearts, order minds, and refresh souls.” - Ronald Regan

When the Bible becomes a part of you, you'll be less likely to fall apart.

II. How do we engage the Bible (scriptures/Word of God) in our Rule of Life

1. Lectio Divina is prayerfully **Reading** of Scripture to **Explore** the Truth that leads to Jesus
2. Meditatio (Meditation) is **Reflecting** on the Scriptures to **Discover** the Truth found in Jesus.
3. Oratio is **Responding** (Through Prayer & obedience) to **Rely** on the Truth in Jesus.
4. Contemplatio is **Resting** in God's Truth in order to **Surrender** to the Lordship of Jesus

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Have you ever purchased a tool that was needed and critical to accomplish an important task? If so, please share your story and how pleased were you of your investment and why?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5 or 6.

1. We looked at 2 Tim. 3:15-17 this week in two translations. What stood out to you the most from the message and this passage?
2. Is it easy or hard for you to trust that the Bible is “God’s Word” why or why not?
3. Have you ever watched a “Bible Project” video, and if so, what did you think?
4. The Bible Project’s mission is, “Helping people to experience the Bible as a **unified story that leads to Jesus.**” Do you think that claim could be true, why or why not?
5. How does the idea of “Partnership with God” as our divine purpose, fit into this conversation about the Inspiration of Scripture?

6. We are trying to encourage one another to practice a Rule of Life. Ask if anyone has made any changes to their Rule of Life and, if understanding how to use the Bible could equip you for “every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17), what kind of engagement and priority would you be willing to give it (in your Rule of Life)?

Close your time praying for one another, maybe in pairs or triads, as your group finishes.

Matthew 6:9-13

God's **Meaning** and **Model** for Prayer

- **Romans 8:26-27** “In the same way the Spirit also *helps our weakness*; for *we do not know how to pray* as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because *He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*”

- **Matthew 6:9-13** (NASB) “*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.’*”

- ▣ **Luke 11:1-4** (JB Philips) “*One day it happened that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said, ‘Lord, teach us how to pray....’ Jesus answered and said ‘When you pray...you should say, “Father, may your name be honored—may your kingdom come! Give us each day the bread we need, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive anyone who owes anything to us; and keep us clear of temptation.”’*”

- ▣ **2 observations** about prayer from Matthew 6:9-13
 - ▣ **God’s Meaning of Prayer** (God’s Definition of Prayer)
 - ▣ **God’s Model for Prayer** (God’s Description of Prayer)

- ▣ **1 John 5:14** (CEB) “*This is the confidence that we have in our relationship with God: If we ask for anything in **agreement with His will**, He listens to us. If we know that he listens to whatever we ask, we know that we have received what we asked from him.*”

- **Matthew 6:9** “*Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.’*”

Matthew 6:9c-13 *“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.”*

God’s Plan

God’s Provision

God’s Plan:

Matthew 6:9c-10 *“Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Question?

God’s Provision:

Matthew 6:11-13 *“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.”*

Jesus’ prayer reveals a dependence on God for

Food

Forgiveness

Faithfulness

Matthew 6:11 *“Give us this day our daily bread.”*

Food

□ **Matthew 6:12** “*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*”

□ **Forgiveness**

□ **Matthew 6:13** “*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

□ **Faithfulness**

□ **Question?**

**Group Study Questions:
Small Group Questions**

- I. Is prayer part of your daily routine/walk with God?
- II. What is your current prayer routine / regimen?
- III. Before the sermon, how would you define prayer?
- IV. How is your understanding and practice of prayer similar to what you heard in the sermon?
- V. How is your understanding and practice of prayer different from what you heard in the sermon?
- VI. What do the following verses teach about prayers?
 - a. 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 - b. 1 John 5:14
 - c. 1 John 3:22
 - d. Romans 8:26-27
- VII. How will these affect how you pray and what you pray for?

Please close out your group in prayer, focusing on the resources God has given us to know and connect with Him.

Under the Influence Wk. 31
Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #2

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

Two weeks ago I introduced the idea that we all have a **Frame of reference**, by which we see the world.

Definition: **A Frame of Reference is** a person's or group's assumptions, perceptions, values, priorities and beliefs that affect how something is thought about or understood. Synonyms, Your: Lens, Paradigm or WorldView.

Today we will look at how Jesus, and some of his contemporaries, saw the scriptures (their F.of R.), and, we will begin to examine how to read and interact with the scriptures in order to **be formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others**. We call this **Spiritual Formation**.

When we shift from our primary bent of reading for **Information** (Our cultural norm) to reading for **Formation** we encounter God differently.

I. Jesus Frame of Reference

For genuine Christ followers **we embrace the scriptures** because **Jesus**, our Lord and Savior, **embraced the scriptures**.

Christianity, at a fundamental level, is giving up our control and trusting God; it is a surrendering of ourselves over to God's control.

If you never **explore** the idea, you'll never **discover** the reality.

When life is being lived on our terms (Our F.of R.) we generally **seek control**; we grasp for whatever we perceive will make us stable or happy. We are inclined to manipulate circumstances and people to advance our own agenda, and **we seek information** that will **either advance our sense of control** or **entertain & distract us from the weight of wanting control**.

This is the opposite of life on God's terms.

Mark 8:34-36 (Jesus) "*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: '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 and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

1. Jesus F.o.R. to the scriptures. (Matthew 5:17-21)

Matthew 5:17 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

- "Abolish" Greek Kataluo = to destroy or tear down, we might say to deconstruct.
- "Fulfill" Greek Pleroo = to bring to full completion.

Matthew 5:18-19 *"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus then goes on to teach from the Law (Torah)

Matthew 5:21 *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder...commit adultery...divorce....your oath/word...an eye for an eye ... love your neighbor and hate your enemy...'"*

- The scriptures point to Jesus and he is their fulfillment.
- The scriptures, down to the smallest detail, matters.
- The scriptures contain critical content that needs to be practiced & taught..

II. Jesus confronts the wrong frame of reference to the scriptures.

1. The "left" of his day, The Sadducees

Held a low view of the scriptures; did not believe in the resurrection, miracles, nor anything other than the Law (Torah) and worked closely with the Romans for power and control.

Mark 12:18-27 *"Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?'"*

Jesus replied, 'Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage;

they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in **the Book of Moses**, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. **You are badly mistaken!**”

- The scriptures are to be genuinely vs superficially known
- The scriptures tell of God’s power
- The scriptures testify to life after death

2. The “right” of his day, The **Pharisees**

Held **such a high view** of the scriptures; they believed they were the means to eternal life, by keeping the law (Rules over relationship), **missing the heart of God**, and the **Messiah (Jesus)**. They sought to **control** others through strict observance of the Law.

John 5:39-47 “You **study the Scriptures** diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very **Scriptures that testify about me**, yet you refuse to come to **me** to have life.

*I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that **you do not have the love of God in your hearts**. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

*But **do not think I will accuse** you before the Father. Your accuser is **Moses**, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed **Moses**, you would believe me, for **he wrote about me**. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”*

- The scriptures “Moses” (the Law) point to Jesus.
- The scriptures can be studied and still miss the love of God (The main Point).
- The scriptures are trustworthy when understood correctly.

III. To read the scriptures as Jesus read them, His frame of reference, we need to **approach** them not just for **Information** (Rules) but for **Formation** (Relationship with God).

Reading the Bible isn’t about how I control the scriptures but about how I learn to let God’s spirit bring me under his control through the scriptures.

I don’t come to the Bible to get what I want, I come to discover what God wants, and then, submit to that.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

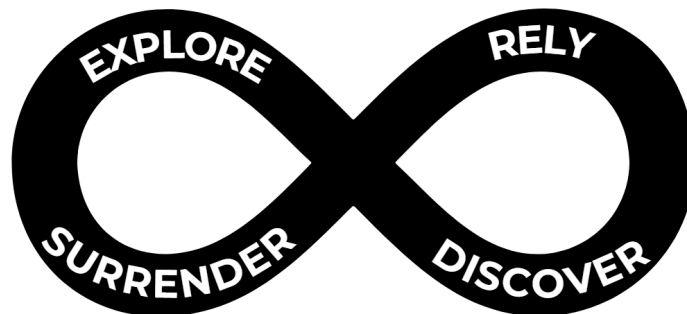
Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Talk with one another about the idea that we all have a Frame of Reference. Do you think most people are aware of their F.of R. or not? Try to list out, as a group, 5-6 common Frames of Reference that are prominent in our culture and comment if you think they are aligned with Jesus' (the Bible's) F.of R.or not?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

1. Looking at our definition of Spiritual Formation below, how does the concept of Spiritual Formation sit with you, and does it match or help refine your own frame of Reference?

Def. Spiritual Formation: to be formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.

2. Looking at the Macro journey of our Spiritual lives (Explore, Discover, Rely, Surrender) how does the above definition of Spiritual Formation play out in the diagram?



3. Based on the following two passages, what would you say Jesus was conveying about the scriptures? Does that influence you, one way or another, concerning the Bible's reliability, why or why not?

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfill them.**”

Luke 24:44 “He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be **fulfilled that is written about me** in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

- 4. If the Sadducees and Pharisees had an inaccurate F. of R. about the Bible and did not see it (needed Jesus to point it out). Do you think we could be vulnerable to an inaccurate view (F.of R.), if so, describe?**

The Sadducees held a low view of the scriptures; did not believe in the resurrection, miracles, nor anything other than the Law (Torah) and worked closely with Roman for maintaining control of others.

The Pharisees held such a high view of the scriptures; they believed they were the means to eternal life, by keeping the law (Rules over relationship), missing the heart of God, and the Messiah (Jesus). They sought to control others through strict observance of the Law.

- 5. Pastor closed the message contrasting reading for Information versus Formation (or Transformation). How would you describe the difference between the two?**

Encourage one another this week to read a short passage of scripture (a Psalm, a few Proverbs or a section of the Gospels) each day using the Lectio Divina model. Read slowly, patiently, and prayerfully. If you have a journal, write out what you sensed from the passage and if you hear anything specifically for you.

Have someone close in prayer.

Under the Influence Wk. 32
Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #3

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

We all come to the scriptures (The Bible) with a Frame of Reference. Today we will talk through some **unhelpful (yet common) ways** we look at the Bible and make several recommendations for **better ways** to look at (approach and read) the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) "There's **nothing like** the written Word of God for **showing you the way** to salvation through faith in **Christ Jesus**. **Every part** of Scripture is God-breathed and **useful** one way or another—**showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way**. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for **the tasks God has for us**."

The Bible Project's Mission: "**Helping people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus**."

Luke 24:44 "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be **fulfilled** that is written about **me** in the **Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms**.'"

I. The Bible is not (& was not written to be):

1. A Reference book

Definition: "a book intended to be consulted for **information** on specific matters rather than read from beginning to end."

Dictionary; Thesaurus; Encyclopedia & Bible

- **The Danger of Magical Direction**
- **The Danger of Proof Texting**

Webster defines proof-texting as taking **isolated quotes** (ie: a text) and **establishing a position** that may not be the author's original **intent**.

- **The Danger of Heresy (false teaching)**

Heretical teaching often uses the Bible as its source book for promoting a perspective, taken out of context, to promote hate, prejudice, and violence on the very people Jesus came to love, reach and redeem. They use the bible to back up just about everything they do. The problem is they miss the whole person of Jesus Christ, and the message of redemption; God's love, acceptance and forgiveness for a sinful world.

The Bible does not take precedence over Christ, the Bible's message gives witness to Christ, and **reveals Christ as its grand subject**. The **entirety of the scriptures find their fulfillment and**

purpose in the person of Jesus Christ. If the Bible, Old and New Testaments, did not connect us to Jesus and the restoration of God's purposes, it would not be the Word of God.

"The Church exists for nothing else but to **draw men into Christ**, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, **even the Bible itself**, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose." - C.S. Lewis

2. A Children's book

"The Bible is not a book for the faint hearted – it is a book full of all the greed and glory and violence and tenderness and sex and betrayal that benefits mankind. It is not the collection of pretty little anecdotes mouthed by pious little church mice – it does not so much nibble at our shoe leather as it cuts to the heart and splits the marrow from the bone. It does not give us answers fitted to our small-minded questions, but truth that goes beyond what we even know to ask." - Rich Mullins, *The World as Best I Remember It*

3. A Collection of Anecdotal, Moral Stories

"The reason for our confusion [about the Bible] is that we usually read the Bible as a series of **disconnected stories**, each with a '**moral**' for how we should live our lives. It is not. Rather, it comprises a **single story**, telling us how the human race **got into its present condition**, and how God through **Jesus Christ** has come and will come to **put things right**." - Timothy Keller

4. A Modern day Self-Help book

The Bible definitely tells us how to help ourselves but it is drastically different from what "self-help" books promote. The Bible says to **deny** self, **die** to self, **consider others better** than self. "Self-help" philosophy tends to put **Self at the center** of all things and the Bible is extremely clear that God/**Jesus must be at the center** of all things to ultimately help yourself.

5. A Scientific Manuel

"The Bible is not a book of science. The Bible is a book of Redemption." - Billy Graham

"If it is assumed, without due Scriptural support, that the purpose of revelation is to give mankind a source-book of information on all phases of physical, mental, spiritual, sociological, artistic, and scientific life—a source-book which must have meaning for the people to whom it was addressed and to all the generations coming after them in spite of the changes which are continuously occurring—then we have the greatest difficulty in maintaining the doctrine of an inerrant Scripture. If, on this stand, we adopt the position of 'arbitrary inerrancy,' we essentially jeopardize the whole truth of Christianity by attempting to balance the great wealth and weight of God's revelation in Christ upon our ability to show that the words of Scripture can be judged inerrant even when we examine them on the basis of criteria they were not written to satisfy. How much of liberalism and rejection of Biblical revelation has been precipitated as a blind reaction against such a stand!" - Richard H. Bube, 1963, writing to Christian scientists

II. The Bible is (Was written as):

1. A Divine/Human Partnership

Exodus 17:14 “Then the Lord said to Moses, **Write** this in a book as a memorial and **recite** it to Joshua...”

Jeremiah 36:1-6 “This word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, ‘Take a **scroll** and **write** on it all the **words** which I have spoken to you... in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin.’

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which He had spoken to him. Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, ‘...go and... read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities.’”

2 Samuel 23:1-2 “Now these are the last words of David... **The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.**”

2 Peter 1:21 (MSG) “Keep in mind here is that **no prophecy of Scripture** is a matter of private opinion... Prophecy resulted when **the Holy Spirit prompted** men and women to speak **God’s Word.**”

2. A Library

The Bible is composed of 66 books that came from 24 scrolls, broken into two major divisions (39 Old and 27 New Testament books) written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 human authors.

3. A Variety of Literary Genres (Hebrew)

Narrative - 43% Poetry - 33% Discourse - 24%

4. A Cross Cultural Experience.

Ancient Literature

Meditative literature

Messianic literature

Wisdom literature

5. A unified story that leads to Jesus.

Luke 24:44 “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be **fulfilled** that is written about **me** in the **Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.**”

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: What Frame of reference were you given of the Bible from those who have been influential in your life: The Bible is God's word; The Bible is the end-all-answer to everything; The Bible is a book of myths and fairytales; The Bible is a book for good morals?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

- 1. How does the story of William Tyndale and others who were martyred for the sake of the scriptures impact your thinking about the scriptures?**
- 2. According to 2 Tim. 3:15-17 Why would the Bible be so important for Spiritual Formation?**

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) *"There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us."*

- 3. Pastor gave five unhelpful ways (Frames of Reference) that we look at the scriptures. Have you ever experienced any of these and if so, describe why such a frame of reference could be problematic? He also compared any one of these perspectives (FoR) to a tool being used in a way it was never intended.**

A Reference book; A Children's book; A Collection of Moral Stories; A Modern day Self-Help Book, or A Scientific Manuel.

- 4. The Bible says about itself, that it is a human and divine partnership. The Bible tells us story after story of people who partnered with God for his purposes, it invites us to find our purpose in partnering with God and Jesus was the supreme example of the human and divine partnership. Does this consistent theme of partnership help you to understand how the scriptures came into existence (why or why not)?**
- 5. If the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus, how might that affect your personal Rule of Life and your frame of reference; the way you read and seek to understand the scriptures?**

Take a few minutes as you close to pair up and pray for one another.

Under the Influence Wk. 33
Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #4

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

Current Goal is to increase our commitment and ability to experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, by engaging the scriptures daily to hear God's voice/word, that invites us into His story.

I. God's Word - For Us

2 Timothy 3:15-17 (MSG) "There's *nothing like* the written Word of God for *showing you the way* to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. *Every part* of Scripture is God-breathed and *useful* one way or another—*showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.* Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for *the tasks God has for us.*"

2 Timothy 2:15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one, ... who *correctly handles the word of truth.*"

Last week: We all come to the scriptures (The Bible) with a Frame of Reference. We looked at some *unhelpful (yet common) ways* we look at the Bible and I made several recommendations for *better ways* to look at (approach and read) the Bible.

Is not:

A reference book
A Children's book
A Collection of Moral Stories
A self-help book
A Scientific Manual

Is:

A Divine Human partnership
A Library
A Variety of Literary Genres
A Cross Cultural Experience
A Unified Story that leads to Jesus

How to approach the Bible (Frame of Reference) to avoid Misinterpretation and increase Transformation/Formation.

Pray

Read (Explore)

Reflect - Meditate & Study on a passage (to Discover)

Respond - this is where we learn to trust (Rely)

Rest - (Surrender)

II. God's Word - In Us.

Jeremiah 15:16 (NLT) *"When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name...."*

Matthew 4:4 *"Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

1. Meditative Literature

Joshua 1:8 *"Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don't get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you're going. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed."*

Psalms 1:2 *"Blessed is the one who delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers."*

MEDITATE: *hagah* (verb), to meditate, groan, moan, growl, whisper.

2. Messianic Literature

The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

- Through the Seed (genealogy)
- Through the Blood (Sacrifice)
- Through the Oil (Anointing)

ANOINT *mashach* (verb) means to rub on, pour on, smear, or saturate.

ANOINTED ONE *mashiach* (Noun & title) - Profet, Priest or King- Translated Messiah, or Christ

3. Wisdom Literature

Proverbs 1:1-3 “*These are the proverbs of Solomon, David’s son, king of Israel. Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise. Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.*”

Wisdom books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Songs of Solomon

2 Timothy 3:15 (AMP) “*From childhood you have known the sacred writings (Hebrew Scriptures) which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus [surrendering your entire self to Him and having absolute confidence in His wisdom, power and goodness].*”

Matthew 7:24 “*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*”

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share with one another what you believe your greatest barriers are to spending time in God's Word.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

1. Reading the Bible in its **context** means: paying attention to or finding out, what were the cultural **customs when** it was written, **to whom** was it written, what **literary genre** was it written, and what is the main point of the **subject** that is being addressed. Share why you think this would be an important piece of a healthy Frame of Reference?
2. Looking at Lectio Divina through the infinity diagram, can you see yourself, or imagine, being able to do all or most of the five recommendations: Pray, Read (Explore), Reflect (Discover), Respond (Rely) & Rest (Surrender)?
3. Can you share a time when you have engaged the scriptures and experienced one of the 4 benefits described in 2 Timothy 3:16 "...showed you the truth, exposed your rebellion, corrected your mistakes, and trained you to go God's way."?
4. Under point # 2 "God's word in us" pastor spoke about meditating on the scripture: reading slowly, thoughtfully, chewing on individual words, phrases and themes. Two questions to ponder: what would it look like for you to do this daily, and what do the two passages below say are the benefits?

Joshua 1:8 "Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don't get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you **get to where you're going**. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and **meditate** on it **day and night**, making sure you **practice** everything written in it. Then you'll **get where you're going**; then you'll succeed."

Psalms 1:2 "Blessed is the one who delight is in the law of the Lord, and who **meditates** on his law **day and night**. That person is like a **tree** planted by streams of water, which yields its **fruit** in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do **prosper**."

5. What stands out to you as helpful by looking at scripture (Frame of Reference) as Messianic Literature and Wisdom literature?

Ask everyone in closing what they would be willing to do differently this week in their rule of life (Bible engagement), and then ask everyone to pair up and pray for one another and the week ahead.

Under the Influence Wk. 34
Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #5

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

Current Goal is to increase our commitment and ability to **experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, by **engaging** the scriptures daily to hear God's voice/word, that invites us into His story.**

Meditation & Memorization

God's Word - In Us.

Matthew 4:1-11 *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.""*

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.""

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'

Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

Meditation & Memorization was the custom of Jewish culture (that Jesus and his disciples grew up in) and the Jesus movement perpetuated.

When we meditate on and memorize God's Word we **internalize truth and are empowered to **recognize** truth from error (or deception) and to **realize** our true identity in Christ.**

I. We **Internalize God's Word**

Joshua 1:8 *"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **meditate** on it **day and night**..."*

Psalms 1:2 “Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who **meditates** on his law **day and night.**”

Psalms 119:11 “I have hidden **your word in my heart** that I might not sin against you.”

Jeremiah 15:16 (NLT) “When I **discovered your words, I devoured them.**”

Ezekiel 3:1 “Son of man, **eat** what is before you, **eat this scroll**; then go and speak to the people of Israel.”

Revelation 10:9 (MSG) “Go, take the book held open in the hand of the Angel astride sea and earth.’ I went up to the Angel and said, ‘**Give me the little book.**’ He said, ‘**Take it, then eat it.**”

They all participated in a **practice that internalized** God’s word.

Jesus / Matthew 4

Jesus is tempted 3 times and every time he responds by saying “**It is written**” and then **quotes** scripture for **memory**. (Verses 4, 6 & 10)

Matthew 4:4 “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not **live** on bread alone, but on **every word** that comes from the mouth of **God.**”’

- **We cannot expect to be like Jesus if we fail to live like Jesus.**

“I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than **memorizing scripture**No other **single practice** pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life is strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.” - Charles Swindoll

“As a pastor, teacher, and counselor I have repeatedly seen the transformation of inner and outer life that comes simply from **memorization and meditation** upon scripture. I would never undertake to pastor a church or guide a program of Christian education that did not involve a continuous program of memorization of the choicest passages of Scripture for people of all ages.

Bible **memorization** is absolutely fundamental to **spiritual formation**. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose **Bible memorization**, because it is a fundamental way of **filling our minds** with what it needs.” - Dallas Willard

II. **We Recognize Truth from error/deception**

Matthew 4:6-7 “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. **For it is written:** “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.””
Jesus answered him, **‘It is also written:** “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.””

- If we cannot **recognize deception** we will not **realize** God’s **protection**.

III. We **Realize** the Truth of our Spiritual Identity

When our frame of reference is built on truth (God’s word/Jesus’ words) we discover both who God is and who we are.

Matthew 4:3 “The tempter came to him and said, **‘If you are the Son of God...’**”

How do you think Satan has or is attacking your spiritual identity?

- If we do not **internalize** who **God says we are** we’ll never **realize** all that we can **be**.

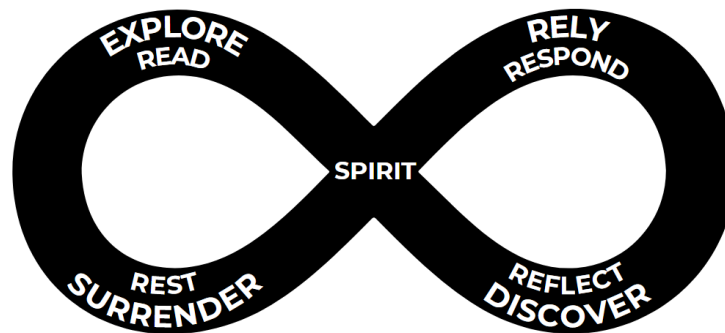
SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share with one another something that you have committed to memory (a poem, some portion of scripture, a phone number, something about sports, a story or quote); was it easy or difficult to do, and what motivated you to do it?

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5 or 6.

1. What are you learning or seeing about spiritual growth and the reading of scripture from the infinity symbol?



2. Share what stands out to you the most about needing or having a Biblical Frame of Reference?
3. Can you describe a time where you could clearly tell that you were responding to a person or a circumstance from a biblical frame of reference; where some portion of scriptures shaped your response?
4. Pastor Jeff encouraged us to add to our Rule of Life a daily practice of meditation and memorization. He even made a few suggestions (1 Cor. 13; Romans 12; James 1 and Collossians 3). Are you likely to try this practice on for size, why or why not?
5. Can you discern (recognize) quickly, within yourself, when you are justifying or rationalizing choices and behavior that do not match a biblical frame of reference, please share?
6. We all have an identity, what would you say is your most dominant identity, and do you think it matches what God would say your identity should be?

In closing, spend a little time praying for one another (maybe in pairs) for our internal spiritual awareness to increase or any other needs someone might have.

Under the Influence Wk. 35
Scripture/Lectio Divina = Divine Reading #6

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

Marjorie Thompson defines a Rule of Life as a **pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness.**

Current Goal is to increase our commitment and ability to experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, by engaging the scriptures daily to hear God's voice/word, that invites us into His story.

I. Barriers to Lectio Divina (Bible engagement)

1. Our **time is off**

Leftover time instead of our best time of the day.

Psalms 119:147 "*I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.*"

- **When is the best time for me to read and pray?**

2. Our **thoughts are off**

Cluttered & distracted thoughts instead of Christ centered thoughts.

Psalms 119:67 (MSG) "*I focus my attention on what you are saying*"

- **Practice bringing your thoughts back to God & the Biblical text.**

3. Our **consistency is off**

Hit & Miss practices instead of Daily (regular) practices.

Psalms 119:164 "*Seven times each day I stop and shout praises...*"

- **Set a goal to create the habit. **It takes 21 days to create a new habit.****

4. Our **environment is off**

A conducive space instead of a disruptive space.

Luke 5:16 "*As often as possible Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer.*"

- **Where is the best place to read and pray?**

II. Steps into Lectio Divina - Psalms 119

1. **Pray** before you read, inviting God's Spirit to meet you and speak to you in your experience with the scriptures.

Psalms 119:19 *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."*

- There are **wonderful** things in the Bible

"Open my eyes that I may see **wonderful things in your law.**"

His (God's) purposes, plans, provision, promises, patience, power and presence.

- **We need God's help to see them.**

"**Open my eyes that I may see** wonderful things in your law."

Luke 24:45 *"Then he (Jesus) **opened their minds** so they could understand the Scriptures."*

- **We need to ask to receive them.**

- Verse 12 "**Train me** in your ways of wise living."
- Verse 27a "**Help me** understand the meaning of your commandments...."
- Verse 34 "**Give me** understanding, so that I may keep your law..."
- Verse 35 "**Direct me** in the path of your commands..."

Matthew 7:7 (Jesus) "**Ask** and it will be given to you; **seek** and you will find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

2. **Read (Explore)** with an awareness of the historical/cultural context and the literary genre, observing plot (if narrative), characters (identify the author or characters within the story), themes, repetitions, contrasts, commands, & lists.

Scripture (or one of 9 synonyms) is mentioned in at least 171 of the 176 verses.

Verse 9 "How can a young person live a clean life? **By carefully reading the map of your Word.**"

3. **Reflect** on a passage through meditation & study (**to Discover**) its meaning to the original audience & to us. Here, we slow down and focus on a word, a phrase, a verse, a sentence, or a paragraph to properly digest it.

Meditation (Hebrew “Hagah”) is used 19 times in the Psalms and 6 times in Psalms 119.

- Verse 15 “I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.”
- Verse 27 “I will meditate on your wonderful deeds.”
- Verse 48 “I will meditate on Your statutes.”
- Verse 78 “I will meditate on Your precepts.”
- Verse 97 “I meditate on it all day long.”
- Verse 148 “That I may meditate on Your word.”

4. **Respond** to what you read; this is where we learn to trust (**Rely**) on what we are hearing from God’s word and how it applies to us. It could be a prayer of gratitude, a confession, or a step of obedience.

James 1:22-25 “**Do** not merely **listen to the word**, and so deceive yourselves. **Do** what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not **do** what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and **immediately forgets** what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—**not forgetting** what they have heard, but **doing** it—they will be **blessed** in what they **do**.”

Psalms 119:32-35 (MSG) “**I choose the true road.... I grasp and cling to whatever you tell me... God, teach me lessons for living so I can stay the course. Give me insight so I can do what you tell me — my whole life one long, obedient response.**”

ASK: Is there some **gratitude to express**, a **command to obey**; a **promise to claim**, a **sin (bad attitude) to confess**, or a **prayer to pray**.

5. **Rest (Surrender)** is where we train ourselves to ultimately end up after spending time in God’s presence; spending time in God’s word aims to reinforce our awareness of God’s presence and purposes, so that our reading goes beyond information to our spiritual formation.

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Ask a few people to share with your group a time when they were able to have some extended time to be with God in prayer or reading the Bible and sensed a message from God (this could be a conviction to do something or a personal encouragement).

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

1. Pastor Jeff gave 4 barriers to lectio divina (Reading the scriptures for spiritual formation). Share which of these have you experienced and how have you learned to overcome them?

Time is off, thoughts are off, consistency is off & environment is off.

2. Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and is all about the Bible. Pastor gave several passages in Psalms 119 that illustrate the need to approach Bible engagement through prayer. Looking at those passages, which ones speak to you personally and what do they say you might **gain** if you asked?

Verse 19 **"Open my eyes"** that I may see wonderful things in your law."

Verse 12 **"Train me"** in your ways of wise living."

Verse 27a **"Help me"** understand the meaning of your commandments...."

Verse 34 **"Give me"** understanding, so that I may keep your law..."

Verse 35 **"Direct me"** in the path of your commands..."

3. We have been hearing quite a bit about reading the Bible for formation instead of just information. Talk about what you are learning about this idea (what you think it means) and whether you've been able to apply this practice or what might keep you from trying it?
4. If meditative reading is supposed to be a fundamental way of reading the scriptures, what does that say about its importance and learning how to do this well? Describe where you think you are with this practice?

Meditation (Hebrew "Hagah") is used 19 times in the Psalms and 6 times in Psalms 119.

Verse 15 *"I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways."*

Verse 27 *"I will meditate on your wonderful deeds."*

Verse 48 *"I will meditate on Your statutes."*

Verse 78 *"I will meditate on Your precepts."*

Verse 97 *"I meditate on it all day long."*

Verse 148 “*That I may meditate on Your word.*”

5. Learning to respond to what we are reading is huge, looking at the James passage from your notes, and the examples of responses below, spend a few minutes sharing how this idea of responding impacts you; are you inspired, equipped or discouraged and why?

James 1:22-25 “*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*”

ASK: Is there some gratitude to express, a command to obey; a promise to claim, a sin (bad attitude) to confess, or a prayer to pray.

Ask everyone in closing what they would be willing to do differently this week in their rule of life (Bible engagement), and then ask everyone to pair up and pray for one another and the week ahead.

Under the Influence Wk. 36
PRAYER - HOW TO ENCOUNTER GOD

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

We have been saying that the foundation of our Rule of Life is **Prayer** and **Bible Engagement**, (Lectio Divina).

"Our prayers should arise out of immersion in the Scripture. [We] speak only to the degree we are spoken to. . . . The wedding of the Bible and prayer anchors your life down in the real God." - Timothy Keller

"Dear child of God, let us never say, "I have no time for God." Let the Holy Spirit teach us that the most important, the most blessed, the most profitable time of the whole day is the time we spend alone with God. Pray to the Lord Jesus, who in His earth life experienced the need for prayer; pray to the Holy Spirit, who will impress us with this divine truth. As indispensable to me as the bread I eat or the air I breathe, is communion with God through **His word and prayer**. Whatever else is left undone, God has the first and chief right to my time. Then only will my surrender to God's will be full and unreserved." - Andrew Murray

Jesus Frame of Reference to Prayer

Luke 3:21-22 "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was **praying**, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

Luke 5:16 "As often as possible **Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer.**"

Luke 6:12 "One of those days Jesus went out to a **mountainside to pray**, and spent **the night praying to God.**"

Luke 9:18 "Once when Jesus was **praying in private** and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'"

Luke 9:28 "Jesus ... took Peter, John and James with him and **went up onto a mountain to pray.**"

Jesus prayed habitually; it was his way of life because it was his connection to life with the Father.

If prayer is not habituated it will fail to show up in our lives until we are either in crisis or wanting to align ourselves to the expectations of someone we respect.

Luke 11:1-4 (& Matthew 6) “One day Jesus was **praying** in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, **teach us to pray**, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you **pray**, say: (Our) ‘Father, (in heaven,) hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. (your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.) Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. (but deliver us from the evil one.)”

The Lord’s Prayer is less a liturgy we say, more a template we use (less a prescribed prayer more a pattern to prayer).

I. The disciples request

Luke 11:1 “Lord teach us to pray...”

II. Jesus address

Jesus addresses our Orientation to Prayer 1st & our Petition 2nd.

1. Father

Verse 2a “Our Father...”

Over 165 times Jesus calls God “father”.

In Mark 14:36, Jesus calls God “Abba Father”

Prayer is not primarily about getting more things from God but getting more of God himself.

- Prayer is an **intimate** encounter - God’s **Affection** for us.

2. Heaven

Verse 2b “Our Father, **in heaven**...”

Heaven “Ouranos” in Greek, means the vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it; the universe, the world; the...sky, the region where the clouds and the tempests gather, and where thunder and lightning are produced.

Luke 3:22 “...a voice came from **heaven**: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased...”

Ephesians 2:6 “*He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom. That’s because we belong to Christ Jesus.*”

- Prayer is a close encounter with God - God’s Availability to us.

3. Hallowed

Verse 2c “...hallowed be your name.”

Hallowed in Greek is Hagiazo/hagios - to set apart a holy, special, unique, sacred.

- Prayer is a **sacred** encounter - God’s **Altogether sufficient** for us.
- Prayer (our relationship with God) is the source of our emotional well-being.

“To hallow God’s name is to have a heart of grateful joy toward God and even more a wondrous sense of His beauty. Consider how different this is from the normal way we use prayer to get things. We may believe in God but our deepest hopes and happiness reside in things; as in how successful we are or in our social relationships. We therefore pray mainly when our career or finances are in trouble, or when some relationship or social status is in jeopardy. When life is going smoothly and our truest hearts treasures seem safe it does not occur to us to pray. Seldom or never do we spend sustained time adoring and praising God. We know God is there but we tend to see Him as a means through which we get things to make us happy. For most of us he has not become our happiness.” - Timothy Keller

4. Your kingdom come

Verse 2 “*Your kingdom come (your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.)*”

Kingdom The Greek is basileia and is about the **ruling & reigning** of a king, - the **will** of the king.

The task of the believer is to give God/Jesus full reign over our hearts and minds. It is in prayer that we learn how to align ourselves with **His will, reign, and kingdom.**

- Prayer is a **strategic** encounter - God **Alters reality** for us.

III. Jesus addresses our petition 2nd

Luke 11:3-4 (Matthew 6) “*Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. (but deliver us from the evil one.)*”

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share, if you can remember, when and why you first said a prayer, and if prayer has played a significant or insignificant role in your life.

1. Do any of the below options reflect your personal frame of reference to prayer (You may select more than one), Prayer is:
 - Not a regular practice.
 - Something I struggle to understand.
 - What I do out of spiritual respect.
 - How I seek to get things from God.
 - How I maintain sanity and stability.
 - How I maintain a sense of intimacy with God.
 - What I do in a crisis.
 - What I do when others ask for it.
 - How I release guilt from my shortcomings or sin.
 - Other?
2. Talk about what you think it would mean to “habituate prayer” and why one might want to do so.
3. Can you make a case for why Prayer and Bible engagement should be the foundation to a Rule of Life?
4. In the Lord’s Prayer a pattern or template is set by Jesus for the ingredients in prayer that transform the person praying. From the four key points made in the message, share if you have experienced any of these “encounters” and how they have impacted your relationship with God.

Father, an intimate encounter - God’s affection for us.

Heaven, a close encounter - God’s availability for us.

Hollowed, a sacred encounter - God is all sufficient for us.

Kingdom, a strategic encounter - God alters reality for us.

Take a few minutes and pray together. Try to select one of the four encounters listed above as a template to influence the spirit of your prayer.

For example:

“Father God, thank you for the affection that you have for me, let me see you more clearly as my loving Father....”

“Lord, I recognize that you are as close as the air I breathe, thank you for being available, and ready to listen, to hear my voice and to be with me...”

“Lord God, you are all sufficient, you are holy, righteous and good, teach me to trust you with all that I have....”

“Father, bring your kingdom, I submit to you, reign in my life, transform me so I desire your will over my own...”

Under the Influence Wk. 37 — PRAYER
Discovering who we really are.
HOW TO RECONSTRUCT (Reframe) OUR ENCOUNTER WITH GOD
Matthew 6:1-13

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines (or practices) for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

We have been saying that the foundation of our Rule of Life is **Prayer** and **Bible Engagement**.

Prayer is the avenue by which we put ourselves in the proper place as His children; it is where we **discover who we really are**. It's how we align or construct our **identity** around our relationship with Christ, and who God says we are.

Ephesians 1:11 (MSG) "*It's in Christ that we find out **who we are** and what we are living for.*"

Last week: in Luke 11:1, "**Lord teach us to pray,**" the Disciples were wanting Jesus to **construct a framework for Prayer** for them to pray. Jesus gives them a **template or a pattern** for Prayer; an Orientation for prayer.

Prayer is **Relational**

Matthew 6:8 "*Our Father...*"

Prayer, at its core, is your relationship with God.

Definition: Prayer is our relationship with God; it's how we communicate, enter into and maintain our relationship with him.

This Relationship is:

1. **Affectionate...**"Abba/Father"
2. **Available...**"Heaven"
3. **Altogether sufficient for our **emotional well being**...**"Hollowed"
4. **Alters our reality...**"Your Kingdom come"
5. **Authenticates our true Identity**

IN PRAYER WE:

- I. Explore and Discover a Relationship with God that is without pretense or the need for performance. In prayer we **deconstruct our false self** and discover that we are really, truly loved by God.

Today in Matthew as we look at Jesus' frame of reference we will see that, before Jesus **constructs** a view or framework of prayer, he is going to do some **deconstruction** of what a relationship with God is all about.

FIRST LET'S TALK A BIT ABOUT CONTEXT

The backdrop to Jesus' teaching was in juxtaposition to the dominant frame of reference of the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' day. The Key word we'll see is "**Righteousness**."

Matthew 6:1 "Be careful **not to** practice your **righteousness** in front of others..."

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Righteousness in Greek is dikaiosune, and is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense dikaiosune conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm. To be right before God and others.

We insatiably try to GET our value - our rightness- from the wrong things.

There is all kinds of interference to a healthy & genuine relationship with God and others (righteousness). As we enter into a genuine relationship with God (prayer) it will purify who we are and our ability to live and love like Jesus. We will discover His righteousness-how to be right with God/Jesus & others.

As we construct a proper frame of reference to prayer (our relationship with God) we will also need to deconstruct what we believe gives us acceptance, security and significance (meaning and purpose/Righteousness).

For the Scribes and Pharisees, they believed what gave them acceptance, security and significance (Righteousness) was **impeccable external adherence to the law** and the **power to judge** and stand apart from others **as superior**; this produced, in contemporary language, what we would call acute **image management**.

For us, we might think of it as simply a craving to be seen as better than we really are; or better than others; or free of flaws and shortcomings; acute **image management.**

The premise of this frame of reference is, I must do or achieve something; meet some external standard, to be accepted and loved by God or others. To create my own righteousness. Two **KEY words in our text: "Reward" and "hypocrite."**

1. Deconstruct our need to be seen...

Matthew 6:1 “Be careful **not to practice** your righteousness in front of others **to be seen** by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

- By anyone but God
- Who you are at your deepest level is who you are when no one is looking (out of sight).

Matthew 6:4 **Your Father, who sees** what is done in secret, will **reward** you.”

2. Deconstruct our need to be esteemed

Matthew 6:2 “So when you give to the needy, **do not announce** it with trumpets, as the **hypocrites** do in the synagogues and on the streets, **to be honored** by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their **reward** in full.”

- By anyone but God.
- When we build our life (our sense of value/identity) on how others esteem us it's a house of cards. In Jesus' words a house built on sandy ground.

Matthew 7:26-27 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

3. Deconstruct our need for position and power for selfish gain.

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, **do not be like** the **hypocrites**, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners **to be seen** by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their **reward** in full.”

Hypocrite (hupokrites from hupó = under, indicating secrecy + krino = to judge) describes one who acts pretentiously, a counterfeit, a man who assumes and speaks or acts under a feigned character. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something he or she is not.

Hupokrites was the term used in Greek culture for actors in the theater.

Matthew 6:4 (MSG) “You’ve seen them in action, I’m sure—‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate **as long as someone is watching...**”

- Who am I when no one is watching?

4. Deconstruct our need to get what you want.

Matthew 6:7 “And when you pray, **do not keep on babbling** like pagans, for they think they **will be heard** because of their many words.”

(MSG) “They’re full of formulas and ...techniques **for getting what you want from God.**”

Jesus isn’t saying that these are not valid needs, they are, it’s just that we try to meet them apart from God.

Jesus is inviting us to drop our mask, to recognize that as long as our frame of reference has this bent toward image management we’ll never discover who he is or who we are as his children.

II. Learn to Rely on and Surrender to an authentic relationship with God.

Matthew 6:8-9 (MSG) “This is your Father you are dealing with, and **he knows better than you what you need.** With a God like this **loving you**, you can pray very simply. Like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, Reveal **who you are**....’”

When we strip away all the things that define our value, that are not from God, we are left with the powerful reality that God’s love, acceptance and forgiveness redefines (Alters) reality and who we are as His children.

When our relationship with God has **authenticity** we discover:

- who he is as our loving Father
- who we are as his beloved children.

“Because God loves us unconditionally-along with our dark side-we don’t need to dodge ourselves. In the light of His love the pain of self-knowledge can at the same time be the beginning of our healing.” - Richard Rohr

“God not only loves me as I am but also knows me as I am. Because of this, I don’t need to apply spiritual cosmetics to make myself presentable to Him. I can accept ownership of my poverty and powerlessness and neediness.” - Brennan Manning

Matthew 6:33-34 (MSG) “What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.”

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: We have all felt the pressure in life to wear a mask, to project ourselves in a way that we perceive will earn us acceptance, respect or love. Share if you have felt this (or the need for image management) and how it played out in your life.

1. Pastor defined prayer as our relationship with God; it's how we communicate, enter into and maintain our relationship with him. How does this concept of prayer strike you, is it new? Does it change anything about your motivation to connect with God?
2. The Biblical concept of Righteousness is to be Right with God. This rightness with God then equips us to do what is right from a purified center (heart). Can you describe a time when you felt this at an internal level? What brought you to this awareness?
3. In Matt. 6 Jesus uses a word (Hypocrite -hupokrites) that was used in the culture to describe someone who was an actor, or some who wears a mask. How would the concept of confession apply to taking off one's mask? Have you ever experienced a time when you took off your mask and thereby experienced greater congruence in your identity?
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to be completely authentic (without a mask) before God in prayer, why or why not?
5. Have someone read Matt. 6:33-34 from the Message (below) and then comment on how the passage strikes you as a way to enter into greater rightness (Righteousness/dikaiousune) with God?

Matthew 6:33-34 (MSG) *"What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."*

"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

Encourage one another, as you close, to seek to enter into prayer this week (Your Rule of Life) by first orienting yourself to this beautiful relationship that Jesus model for us. A relationship that is:
Affectionate..."Abba/Father"

Available...”Heaven”

Altogether sufficient for our emotional well being...”Hollowed”

Alters our reality...”Your Kingdom come” &

Authenticates our true Identity

As you pray together, select one of these relational markers (Above) to thank God for in your growing relationship with him.

Pastor Jeff

Under the Influence Wk. 38 - PRAYER
Relying on God
Strengthening our ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Yosemite Church's Mission Statement:

"Meeting people where they are and loving them to where Christ wants them to be."

Rule of Life = Your spiritual habits/disciplines (or practices) for staying under the Influence of Jesus.

We have been saying that the foundation of our Rule of Life is **Prayer** and **Bible Engagement**.

Today we will add to our Rule of Life the practice of **Silence and Solitude**.

Prayer is the avenue by which we put ourselves in the proper place as His children; it is where we **discover who we really are**. It's how we align or construct our **identity** around our relationship with Christ, and who God says we are.

To have a Christ (Jesus) centered identity (Authenticity with God) we have to spend time with Jesus. If we are to be like him we must understand what he is like. We do this through scripture meditation, prayer and Silence and Solitude.

The Practice of Silence & Solitude

"Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life."

— Henri Nouwen

Matthew 6:6 (MSG) *"Here's what I want you to do: Find a **quiet, secluded** place so you won't be tempted to **role-play** before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The **focus will shift from you to God**, and you will begin to sense his grace."*

Solitude was the current of the Jesus movement right from the start.

In Mark 1 the greek word "Eremos" is used 6 times... and can be translated as solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited, desert, and wilderness.

Mark 1:35-37

Mark 1:35-37 *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else...'"*

1. In solitude we **train** ourselves for **self-examination** and to break free from **distraction**.

1 Timothy 4:8 (NLT) “Physical **training** is good, but **training for godliness is much better**, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”

For most of us, being alone, without distraction, is difficult if not frightening.

“Most of man’s miseries are derived from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.” — Blaise Pascal

“Solitude is a terrible trial, it serves to crack open and burst apart our superficial securities.” — Dallas Willard

Mark 1:35 “**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.”

Luke 5:16 (MSG) “As often as possible Jesus **withdrew to out-of-the-way places** for prayer.”

Psalms 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

Solitude is not about isolation or loneliness but separation from the things which **clutter our minds and distract us** from being alone with God to hear and make our connection with him as strong as it can be for that day.

- This requires discipline

“An inner restlessness grows within us when we refuse to get alone and examine our own hearts, including our motives ... Unless we discipline ourselves to pull back, to get alone for the hard work of self-examination in times of solitude, serenity will remain only a distant dream.” — Charles Swindoll

2 Timothy 1:7 “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity but a Spirit of power, of love and of **self-discipline**.”

Luke 6:40 Jesus: “The student is not above his teacher but the student who is fully **trained** will be like his teacher.”

- You will strengthen your **awareness** of the **payoff** (God’s reward).

Hebrew 12:11 (MSG) “At the time **discipline** isn’t much fun. It always feels like it’s going against the grain. Later, of course, **it pays off handsomely**, for it’s the well **trained** who find themselves **mature in their relationship with God.**”

1 Timothy 4:8 (NLT) “Physical **training** is good, but **training** for godliness is much better, promising **benefits in this life and in the life to come.**”

Suggestion:

Depending on your personality, tie your training to a space where you can center your thoughts; a comfortable room, a walk, a drive, or a spot in nature that empowers your awareness of God.

Try being alone with no distractions; put your phone aside, turn off the TV or radio and pay attention to what bubbles up. Write down any tasks that need to be done, release any thoughts that are a distraction and then come back to a place of stillness.

“It costs much to obtain the power of the spirit. It cost self-surrender...and a yielding up of our most precious things to God. But when we are really in that power we shall find this difference, that whereas before, it was hard to do the easiest things, now it is easy to do the hard things.”

— A.J. Gordon

2. In solitude we train ourselves to know (to discern & be more conscious of) God’s **voice**.

Dallas Willard:

“Silence is the practice of quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God.”

“Solitude is the practice of being absent from people and things to attend to God.”

Mark 1:35-36 “Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a **solitary place, where he prayed.**”

Mark 1:9-13 “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And **a voice** came from heaven: ‘**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**’ At once the **Spirit sent him out into the wilderness**, and he was in the wilderness **forty days, being tempted by Satan....**”

“God’s Voice will convict you of sin and draw you to himself
Satan’s voice will condemn you of sin and push you from God

God’s voice will tend to reassure you
Satan’s voice will frighten you

God's voice enlightens you
Satan's voice confuses you

God's voice encourages you
Satan's voice discourages you

God's voice comforts you
Satan's voice worries you

God's voice calms you
Satan's voice obsesses you"

— Pastor Ken Shigematsu

- You will strengthen your awareness of God's **voice, presence & purposes**; a rhythm of receiving from God.

Suggestion:

In your quiet place, start by breathing through your nose out your mouth while inviting God to speak to you. While breathing in, think or whisper something of God's character and while breathing out whisper away some stress or anxiety.

While you are practicing being still in solitude meditate on (begin to memorize) one of the passages in your notes that speak to you about this practice.

3. In solitude we learn to leave good things behind for what is **better/best**.

Mark 1:35-36 "Jesus got up, **left the house** and went off to a **solitary place**, where he **prayed**."

Psalms 84:10 "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere..."

Philippians 1:9 "And this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to **discern what is best**..."

If Satan can't make you bad he'll just keep you busy.

Luke 10:41-42 (CEV) "The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has **chosen what is best**..."

- You will strengthen your **discernment**; how to make better choices.

“Discernment is learning to be attentive to these subtle movements and counter movements toward and away from God. Attending to the feelings that predictably correspond to each heart direction can help us discern God’s will. By learning to recognize the markers of having turned away from God, we can learn to more quickly and fully turn toward God. The self-focus that is a part of discernment is the means to the end, but not the end. The point of developing a discerning heart is to focus on God. It is a tool to help us learn to choose God.”

— David Benner

4. In solitude we learn to be **free** from the **expectations of other**.

Mark 1:35-37 *“Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else...’”*

*“As we relinquish control and admit weaknesses, we remember who we are and why we are here. The sun does not rise and set on our achievements, but on the love of God, **not achieving or gaining others approval**.... Letting go is both too simple and too difficult. It looks like weakness instead of strength, like losing instead of gaining, and it is.... Responding to God’s call to **surrender** forces me to value my brokenness, as well as my strength.”*

— Jan Johnson, *The Virtue of Surrender*

- You strengthen your **awareness** (Differentiation) of people's pressure and God's pleasure.

Suggestion:

Pray Psalm 139:23-24, *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

And then listen; pay attention to what comes up. If a sin, simply confess it; if a distraction/anxiety, release it; if a blessing, rejoice for it; if a desire, ask him to purify it; if a direction, seek to obey it.

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then # 3 or 4 & finally, #5.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q:

1. What would you say is your biggest distraction to spending quality time alone with God/Jesus?
2. From the passages below what is the stated or implied payoff to a strong Rule of life/disciplined walk with God?

Hebrew 12:11 (MSG) “At the time **discipline** isn’t much fun. It always feels like it’s going against the grain. Later, of course, **it pays off handsomely**, for it’s the well **trained** who find themselves **mature in their relationship with God.**”

1 Timothy 4:8 (NLT) “Physical **training** is good, but **training** for godliness is much better, promising **benefits in this life and in the life to come.**”

3. Are you willing to spend focused time this week in silence and solitude/prayer? If so, name when and where you can try on this practice and which of the suggestions you’d like to try?

Suggestions:

Depending on your personality, tie your training to a space where you can center your thoughts; a comfortable room, a walk, a drive, or a spot in nature that empowers your awareness of God.

Try being alone with no distractions; put your phone aside, turn off the TV or radio and pay attention to what bubbles up. Write down any tasks that need to be done, release any thoughts that are a distraction and then come back to a place of stillness.

In your quiet place, start by breathing through your nose out your mouth while inviting God to speak to you. While breathing in, think or whisper something of God’s character and while breathing out whisper away some stress or anxiety.

While you are practicing being still in solitude meditate on (begin to memorize) one of the passages in your notes that speak to you about this practice.

Pray Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

And then listen; pay attention to what comes up. If a sin, simply confess it; if a distraction/anxiety, release it; if a blessing, rejoice for it; if a desire, ask him to purify it; if a direction, seek to obey it.

To assist you in your Rule of Life (Prayer and Bible engagement) this week take a few minutes each day to meditate on the below passages. Use the suggestions from your notes in combination with the passages and suggestions below.

- Matthew 11:25-28 – Let God help you exchange hurry for true rest.
- Mark 1:35-39 – Use solitude to notice your load of care and seek to release it.
- Psalm 46 – Schedule short breaks to breathe and be aware of God.
- Psalm 131 – Use moments of silence to fuel humility and hope.
- Mark 9:2-8 – Schedule a personal retreat for quiet listening to Jesus.

Have someone close your time together with a prayer of blessings on one another.

Under the Influence Prayer #39
Matthew 6:9-13
P.R.Ask.Y. — ASK/PETITION

Pause
Rejoice
Ask
Yield

Matthew 6:11 “Give us this day our daily bread.”

I. Before we ASK

We Pause & Rejoice

1st Half is about God.

An orientation of Prayer:

Matthew 6:9-10

- *Our Father* — His **Affection** for us
- *in heaven* — His **Availability** for us
- *hallowed be your name* — He’s **Altogether sufficient** for our emotional well being.
- *your kingdom come, your will be done* — He **Alters** our reality

2nd Half is about Us.

Matthew 6:1-7 We come **Authentically – Through Silence and Solitude**

Matthew 6:11-13 We **Ask:**

- *Give us today our daily bread.*
- *forgive us our debts...*
- *lead us not into temptation...*

II. Why we ASK

Matthew 6:8 “Your Father **knows what you need** before you ask him.”

1. It’s Relational

Jesus speaks of, or prays to the Father over a 150 times in the Gospels

Luke 15:20 *“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”*

2. It's Vulnerable

1 Peter 5:7 (TPT) *“Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you.”*

3. It's Intentional

James 4:2b *“You do not have because you do not ask God.”*

III. How we ASK

1. We ask in dependence - asking for our needs to be met.

Matthew 6:11 *“Give us this day our daily bread...”*

2. We ask with perseverance - Keep asking.

Matthew 7:7 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

3. We ask with assurance - asking in faith.

Matthew 7:9-11 *“(NIV) Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?... (PTP) If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what's best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask him?”*

Hebrews 11:1 *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

James 1:5 *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

4. We ask in compliance - asking in His Name.

John 14:14 (NLT) “Yes, ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it! (MSG) “From now on, whatever you request **along the lines of who I am and what I am doing**, I’ll do it.”

John 16:24 (MSG) “This is what I want you to do: Ask the Father for **whatever is in keeping with the things I’ve revealed to you**. Ask **in my name**, **according to my will**, and he’ll most certainly give it to you. Your joy will be a river overflowing its banks!”

John 15:7 “If you remain in me and **my words remain in you**, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you.”

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share if you have a relationship with someone who loves you where you are confident to ask for what you need and what this relationship means to you.

1. Share if you are putting into practice the **P. & R.** of the acrostic **P.R.A.Y.:** Before you ask, **Pause & Rejoice** in God's **Affection**, **Availability**, **Altogether** sufficient for your emotional well being and **Alters** your reality?
2. Authenticity, the fifth aspect Pastor spoke on the last two weeks was our need to foster **Authenticity with God** and to use **Silence and Solitude** to strengthen your **authenticity**. If you have begun to practice **Silence and Solitude** describe what you are experiencing.
3. Under the second point, **Why we Ask**, the following points were made. Pick one or two that resonate with you and share why?

- It's **Relational**

Jesus speaks of, or prays to the Father over 150 times.

Luke 15:20 "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

- It's **Vulnerable**

1 Peter 5:7 (TPT) "Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you."

- It's **Intentional**

James 4:2b "You do not have because you do not ask God."

4. Under the second point, **How we Ask**, the following points were made. Pick one or two that you would like to apply & why?

- We ask in **dependance** - asking for our needs to be met.

Matthew 6:11 *“Give us this day our daily bread...”*

- We ask with **perseverance** - Keep asking.

Matthew 7:7 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

- We ask with **assurance** - asking in faith.

Matthew 7:8-11 *“(NIV) Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?... (PTP) If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what’s best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask him?”*

Hebrews 11:1 *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and **assurance** about what we do not see.”*

James 1:5 *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

- We ask in **compliance** - asking in His Name.

John 14:14 (NLT) *“Yes, ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it!”*

(MSG) *“From now on, whatever you request **along the lines of who I am and what I am doing, I’ll do it.**”*

John 16:24 (MSG) *“This is what I want you to do: Ask the Father for **whatever is in keeping with the things I’ve revealed to you**. Ask **in my name**, **according to my will**, and he’ll most certainly give it to you. Your joy will be a river overflowing its banks!”*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and **my words remain in** you, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you.”*

Under the Influence Prayer #40
Matthew 6:9-13
P.R.A.Yield.
Spiritual Warfare—Own it!

Matthew 6:13 (NIV) *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the **evil one**.”*
(MSG) *“Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe **from ourselves and the Devil**.”*

“None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have **learned it by experience**.” — Martin Luther

“For the things we need to learn before we can do them **we learn by doing them**.” — Aristotle

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (NIV/MSG) *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish **strongholds**. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and **we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ**.... Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.”*

“The ultimate freedom we have as individuals is the power to select what we will allow or require our minds to dwell upon and think about. By think we mean all the ways we are aware of things, including memories, perceptions, and beliefs. The **focus of your thoughts** significantly affects **everything** else that happens in your life and evokes the feelings that frame your world and motivate your actions.” — Dallas Willard

I. Know your Adversary — Satan

1 Peter 5:8 (BSB) *“Be sober-minded and alert. Your **adversary the devil** prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

John 10:10 *“The **thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

John 8:44 (TPT) *“[The devil] is a master of **deception** and the father of lies!”*

- **Own it! It's not People**

Ephesians 6:12 *“Our struggle is **not against flesh and blood**, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

Matthew 5:44 “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

“We must... remember that he who prays is fighting against the **devil and the flesh**... Satan is opposed to the church... the best thing we can do is put our fists together and pray.”

— Martin Luther

II. Know your **Vulnerability** — You

2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I am afraid that just as Eve was **deceived** by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

Ephesians 4:22 “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its **deceitful desires**...”

James 1:14 “...but each person is **tempted** when they are **dragged away** by their **own evil desire** and enticed.”

- **OWN IT! The battle is in your brain.**

Ephesians 4:22-23 “...to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be **made new in the attitude of your minds**...”

“The ultimate freedom we have as individuals is the **power to select** what we will **allow** or **require** our minds to dwell upon and think about. By think we mean all the ways we are aware of things, including memories, perceptions, and beliefs. The focus of your thoughts significantly affects everything else that happens in your life and evokes the feelings that frame your world and motivate your actions.” — Dallas Willard

III. Know your **Authority**

Matthew 28:18-19 “Then Jesus came to them and said, **All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to **me**. Therefore go and make disciples...”

Luke 10:19 (TPT) “Now you understand that **I have imparted to you my authority** to trample over his kingdom.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 “We are therefore **Christ’s ambassadors**...”

- **OWN IT! He is in you.**

1 John 4:4 (KJV) “Greater is he that is **in you**, than he that is in the world.”

IV. Know your **Bible**

Matthew 4:4 “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every **word** that comes **from** the mouth of **God**.”””

John 8:31-32 “Jesus said, ‘If you **hold to my teaching**, you are really my disciples. Then you will **know** the **truth**, and the **truth** will **set you free**.””

- OWN IT! Get **into** it.

Colossians 3:15 “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: What comes to mind when you hear the term “spiritual Warfare” or “spiritual battle” ?

- 1. Knowing our adversary is extremely challenging because we think our adversary/enemy is human/people/persons. Boundaries are not to hurt others but to protect ourselves and others? How do you think boundaries can help us to be more loving and forgiving instead attaching or revengeful?**
- 2. Knowing our vulnerability is a critical piece to spiritual warfare. How have you seen or experienced deception as a tool of the enemy and human vulnerability; do you think we are inclined toward self deception (rationalizing or justifying behavior)?**
- 3. Knowing our authority. The point isn't really about our authority, apart from Christ, but the authority from being “In Christ”. If he is in us and wants to work through us, (as His ambassadors) how might that affect our prayers?**
- 4. Knowing our Bible. Have you experienced any additional awareness of God's provision, availability, and power as a result of scripture, if so describe your experience?**

As you close your group ask everyone to share what they can take with them this week as a practical application to their Rule of Life (Habit of Prayer)?

Send a few minutes in prayer together as you close.

Under the Influence Prayer #41
P.R.A.Y. - Intercession is Multidimensional

Matthew 6:9-10 *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **your kingdom come, your will be done**, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Ephesians 6:19 *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with **all kinds of prayers and requests**. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”*

What is Intercession?

Aligning ourselves with God and stepping into the space (the **Gap**) where His purposes are needed.

“None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience.” — Martin Luther

“For the things we need to learn before we can do them we learn by doing them.”
— Aristotle

“The **gap between knowing and doing** is much greater than the **gap between ignorance and knowledge**.” — John Maxwell

Ezekiel 22:40 (MSG) *“I looked for someone to stand up for me against all this, to repair the defenses of the city, to take a stand for me and **stand in the gap** to protect this land so I wouldn’t have to destroy it. I couldn’t find anyone.”*

I. Get **Informed - Engage the **Facts**.**

1. Is there a gap between us, Lord?

2 Chronicles 7:14 *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

- **Confession** empowers Intercession

James 5:14-16 *“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned,*

they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

2. Is there a gap in which I can stand (kneel)?

“Intercessory prayer might be defined as loving our neighbor on our knees.”
— Charles Bent

1 Timothy 2:1 (MSG) “The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know....”

(NLT) “Ask God to help them; **intercede** on their behalf...”

- Intercession empowers engagement & **Intervention**.

“We never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can expect that He will **get us involved** in His plan for the answer. If we are true intercessors, **we must be ready to take part in God’s work** on behalf of the people for whom we pray.”

— Corrie Ten Boom

II. Get **Inspired** - Engage the **Word**.

“The primary principle of intercession is simply to tell God what He tells us to tell Him as the means of releasing His power. He tells us what to pray in His Word. We can pray the Bible. It is profoundly simple. Intercession is God’s brilliant strategy for including the saints in ruling with Him in power. Its mystery is in its weakness, simplicity, humility, and accessibility to all.”

— Rebecca Barlow Jordan

- Pray God’s **Word**

Ephesians 3:16-19 “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith**. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge** — that you **may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**.”

AMEN

- Pray God’s **Promises**

2 Corinthians 1:20 “For no matter how many **promises** God has made, they are **‘Yes’ in Christ.** And so through him **the “Amen”** is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Do you feel weak?

Isaiah 40:29 “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

AMEN

Do you struggle with doubts?

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV84) “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.”

AMEN

Think God has given up on you?

Hebrews 13:5 “He said, ‘I will never leave you, never will I forsake you!’”

AMEN

Afraid of death?

John 11:25 “Jesus declared, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, will live even though he dies.’”

AMEN

III. Get **Intense** - Engage the **Heart**.

Romans 8:26 “The **Spirit** helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.**”

(MSG) “...out of **our wordless sighs, our aching groans.**”

Romans 8:34 “**Christ Jesus** ...is at the right hand of God and **is also interceding for us.**”

“Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the way of what God has promised.” — Walter Wink

Romans 12:9-11 “Love must be sincere. **Hate** what is evil; **cling** to what is good. Be **devoted** to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking

in **zeal**, but keep your spiritual **fervor**, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Martin Luther went so far as to describe prayer as “a constant violent action of the spirit as it is lifted up to God, as a ship is driven upward against the power of the storm. Thus we must all practice violence and remember that he who prays is fighting against the devil and the flesh. Satan is opposed to the church... the best thing we can do, therefore, is to put our fists together and pray.”

“Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day.” — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

VI. Get **In-Sync** - Engage **Others**.

Matthew 18:19-20 (TPT) *“I give you an eternal truth: If two of you agree to ask God for something in a symphony of prayer, my heavenly Father will do it for you. For wherever two or three come together in honor of my name, I am right there with them!”*

Ephesians 6:19 & 20 *“Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”*

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions. As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4, & 5.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: If Intersession is filling the gap, share a time when you or someone you know filled a gap to help build a bridge to God's purposes.

1. Reflect on the idea (& the quotes below), that if we want to get better at something we must enter into doing it more. How does this stir your thoughts or conviction to engage prayer more or differently?

None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. - Martin Luther

"For the things we need to learn before we can do them **we learn by doing them.**" - Aristotle

"The **gap between knowing and doing** is much greater than the **gap between ignorance and knowledge.**" - John Maxwell

2. "Get Informed, Engage the facts", do you think it is important to pray from a place of clarity vs ambiguity about something, if so why?
3. "Get Inspired" What benefits might we experience if we prayed God's word and claimed his promises more? (See point #II)
4. "Get Intense" Can you share a time where you were engaging in prayer with intensity? Why might greater intensity in our prayers be valuable?
5. "Get in-sync" Why is it important for believers to pray together or for one another and what would it look like for you to be more in-sync prayerfully with others?

As you close your group, pair up with another person and share what you could be in prayer about, for each other, this week, and then pray for each other.

Under the Influence: Prayer — Week 42
P. R. Ask. Y. — Unanswered Prayer

I. When our request is wrong...

Mark 10:35-37 (MSG) *“James and John... came up to him. ‘Teacher, we have something **we want** you to do for us.’ ‘What is it? I’ll see what I can do.’ ‘Arrange it,’ they said, ‘so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left.’”*

- God will say, **no**.
- While you **want**...
- Instead of asking for more wants, ask for more **wisdom**.

James 1:5 *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

II. When our timing is wrong...

Romans 1:10-13 *“In my prayers at all times; I pray that... the way may be opened for me to come to you.... I planned many times to come to you but have been prevented from doing so...”*

John 11:1 *“Now a man named Lazarus was sick.... Mary and her sister Martha... sent word to Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick.’”*

- God will say, **not yet**.
- While you **wait**...
- Instead of asking for immediate gratification, express honest **frustration**.

Romans 1:13 (MSG) *“The longer this waiting goes on, the deeper the ache.”*

John 11:21 (MSG) *“Martha said, ‘Master, if you’d been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.’”*

III. When our motivation is wrong...

James 4:3 *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with **wrong motives**, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*

- God will say, **grow**.
- While you **wrestle**...
- Instead of asking God for more pleasure/comfort, ask for more growth in your **pain/discomfort**.

James 1:2-4 *“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.”*

IV. When our **world** is wrong...

1 John 5:19 (Ph) *“We know that we ourselves are children of God, and we also know that the world around us is under the power of the evil one.”*

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT) *“Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe.”*

John 18:36 *“My kingdom is not of this world.”*

- God will say, I **know**...

John 16:33 *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

- While you're **weak**...
- Instead of asking to be strong in **your** strength, ask to be strong in **His**.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (MSG) *“Satan’s angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees... At first I didn’t think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, ‘My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.’”*

Ephesians 6:10 *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”*

- Instead of trusting in the world, trust in God’s **word**.

John 17:15-17 *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the **truth**; your **word is truth**.”*

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share, if you can, a time or experience where you felt like God was not answering your prayers, and what happened as you went through that time or experience.

1. In the Biblical story about James and John (see below) it's easy to see that their request was wrong. Have you ever come to the realization that you were wanting something (& asking in prayer for it) that was wrong? If so, please describe your situation and what you learned.

Mark 10:35-37 (MSG) *"James and John... came up to him. 'Teacher, we have something **we want** you to do for us.' 'What is it? I'll see what I can do.' 'Arrange it,' they said, 'so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory—one of us at your right, the other at your left.'"*

2. Have you seen prayer as a way of seeking God's wisdom (James 1:5) and if so, can you give any examples of how you may have gained wisdom for a situation that was difficult?
3. When our timing is off, God will say wait. How is your waiter (your ability to wait) what have you learned (what has God taught you) from times when you had to wait?
4. Motivation, sometimes discerning our own motivation can be hard to do. What have you, or are you, learning when it comes to looking under the surface at the motivation of your wants, desires and prayers?

Before finishing your time (and closing in prayer) together, ask everyone to share one thing you would be willing to apply this week that came from this week's message and discussion.

Under the Influence: Prayer & Fasting — Week 43

“Our relationship with God in prayer should look like a consuming addiction in our lives, not a convenient addition to our lives.” — David Platt

In Prayer there are three distinct movements:

Upward for greater connection and intimacy with God

Inward for greater extraction for what gets in the way of God

Outward for greater connection to people with the love of God

Why should we fast?

Luke 7:34 (ESV) “*The Son of Man has come **eating and drinking**, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'”*

But Jesus also fasted.

I. Because Jesus fasted

We come under the influence of Jesus by adopting his overall lifestyle—arranging our life around the habits and practices that Jesus himself did—in order to open our lives to be transformed by God, from the inside out, so we can live and love like Jesus.

- He began his ministry with **forty days of fasting** in the wilderness.
- When the devil tempted him to eat, he said,

Matthew 4:4 “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”

What if we are missing out on one of the most important of all the practices of Jesus?

II. Because Jesus assumes we, as his followers, will fast.

Matthew 6:16-18 “*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*”

• Notice two things:

1. Jesus assumes that his disciples will practice fasting.

(V16): “*When you fast,*” not “*if you fast.*”

2. When you fast, the Father (V18) “*will reward you.*”

Meaning, there’s a gift waiting for you on the other side of fasting.

So, why should I fast?

III. To offer yourself (more completely) to God (Jesus)

The move **upward** toward greater **connection & intimacy** with God.

“The central idea of fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of **intense (focused) spiritual activity.”**

- **Richard Foster**

“The essence of fasting is the separation of ourselves from something in order to **offer ourselves in greater measure to God.”**

- **Robert Mullholland**

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV84) “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies** as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is**—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*”

Body in the Greek here is “Soma”; it is where we get the word somatic. It means, your whole person, including your body.

- It helps connects our physicality with our spirituality

This is the ultimate reason for fasting: hunger for Jesus, and for his transformation.

The Baptist preacher John Piper calls fasting “whole body hungering for God.”

What is hunger? Hunger is the feeling of wanting or needing something you do not have.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

IV. To train yourself to die (more fully) to your flesh

The move inward toward greater extraction of what gets in the way of God.

Romans 7:15-24 “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.... For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my (fresh) sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.... For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

- It helps us to deny our flesh
- The cross

Matthew 16:24 “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Philippians 3:18-19 “[M]any live as enemies of the **cross** of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their **god is their stomach**...”

(MSG) “They hate Christ’s **Cross**.... Those who live there make their **bellies** their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their **appetites**.”

The Greek word here for “sinful nature” or “flesh,” is *sarx* and denotes the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God.

Galatians 5:24 “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires.”

Colossians 3:5 “**Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your **earthly nature**: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed.”

Fasting is one way that we train ourselves to let go of a natural appetite for food in exchange for a spiritual meal. We learn to say no to the appetites of the flesh so we can feed on God himself.

Matthew 5:6 (Jesus) “Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness, for they will be **filled**.”

Group Study Guide Questions

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

As time permits, go around your group a couple of times giving everyone the opportunity to first answer question 1 or 2, then 3 or 4.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share, is the notion of fasting a new idea to your discipleship with Jesus or one that you have participated in before? What stirs in you as you think about this discipline/practice?

1. Pastor made the point that Fasting for centuries was at the center of following God and yet today is arguably the most neglected of all spiritual habits or disciplines. Why do you think fasting has fallen so far out of mainstream christian practice?
2. What do you think of the fact that Jesus expected his followers to fast? Does that change your view of its importance, why or why not?
3. How “in danger” are we, of becoming too content with the absence of Christ, because we have fed too long on the things of this world and lost our hunger for the things of God?
4. What are the top three things you do to cultivate a deeper hunger for God?
5. How do you think fasting could affect or augment your ability to offer yourself more completely to God (Rom. 12:1)?
6. Have you consciously sought to train yourself to deny your flesh, if so, how, and if not, do you think fasting could strengthen your ability to do so? Why or why not?

Ask your group if anyone would be willing to try and start fasting at some level this week?

Under the Influence Wk. 44
Confession in Community:
Proximity, Purpose, and Provision

Proximity - Location, location, location

Ezekiel 37:27 *“My dwelling place will be **with them**; I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

James 4:8 *“Come **near** to God and he will come **near** to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”*

Mark 7:6 (BSB) *“Jesus answered them, ‘Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: “These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are **far** from Me.”’”*

God's Purpose is Forgiveness and to bridge the gap.

Hebrews 8:12 *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

2 Samuel 14:14 *“Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain **banished from him**.”*

Provision

1. Community

Acts 2:44-45 *“All the believers were **together** and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need.”*

“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the final apologetic.” - Francis Shaeffer

“I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel alone” - Robin Williams

2. Confession

James 5:13-16 *“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other **so that you may be healed**. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

“He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

“Therefore when I admonish you to confession I am admonishing you to be a Christian”
- Martin Luther

1 John 1:8-9 *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

3. Christ

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son...”*

2 Corinthians 5:21 *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

4. Communion

Luke 22:14-20 (NASB) *“When the hour came, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.’ And when He had taken some bread and given*

thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup, which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in My blood.'"

Jeremiah 31:33-34 (BSB) *"But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put My law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will each man teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquities and will remember their sins no more."*

1 John 1:5-7 *"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him, there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*

Group Study Guide Questions

Open the group in prayer, then take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing.

Acts 2:44-45 *“All the believers were **together** and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone in need.”*

1. **Would you say that your small group community shares the same properties as the community described in Acts? Share why or why not.**
2. **What makes your small group special to you?**
3. **Pastor shared how we create a type of solitary confinement by concealment of our true sinful selves. Have you experienced feeling alone in your sin? Share where appropriate.**

“Therefore when I admonish you to confession I am admonishing you to be a Christian”
- Martin Luther

4. **Do you consider confession an integral part of your spiritual life? Is your current “community” a safe place to confess?**

Pray for one another and leave time for true confession. God Bless all of you.

Under the Influence of Hope
Advent
Romans 5:1-5 (NIV 84)

We have, all year, been seeking to build the kind of habits (spiritual practices) that can empower us to stay under the influence of Jesus more.

Over the next month, the **Advent season**, we will look at the four classic themes of Advent (**Hope**, Peace, Joy and Love) and tie them into our focus to live under the influence of Jesus.

Romans 12:12 *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

Advent comes from the Latin and means arrival. For believers we celebrate the arrival of Jesus coming and becoming. He came to earth and became like one of us and will come again to take us to be with him forever. He came to earth and became the sacrifice for the sins of the world, giving us access to an eternal relationship with God.

H.O.P.E.

We could think of **Hope** as a spiritual (meaning from God) **optimism**.
This is radically different from earthly (human) optimism.

Romans 15:13 *“May the **God of hope fill you** with all joy and peace as you **trust in him**, so that **you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**”*

I. **How does hope work?**

- **Hope Defined:**

Hope is the anticipation and expectation of receiving what I do not currently possess.

Romans 8:24 *“If we already have something, we don’t need to hope for it.”*

- **Hope deferred, threatens our emotional wellbeing.**

Proverbs 13:12 *“**Hope deferred** makes the heart **sick...**”*

(TEV) *“When hope is crushed, the heart is crushed.”*

- **Hope defines who we are from day to day.**

What we hope for shapes what we live for.

1 Timothy 6:17 “Command those who are rich in this present world **not** to put their **HOPE IN WEALTH**, which is so **UNCERTAIN**, but to **put their hope in God...**”

II. **Only faith in Jesus/God delivers lasting hope.**

Hebrews 11:1 “Now **faith** is being sure of what we **hope for** and **certain** of what we do not see.”

Hope, in the scriptures, is almost always connected to the person of God, **NOT** circumstances.

- **Walking with Jesus (Our Rule of Life) creates spiritual certainty and stability.**

Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom we have **gained access by faith** into this grace in which we now **stand.**”

- **Through Jesus we know:**

God exists

Hebrews 1:3 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”

God cares

1 John 4:9 “This is how God **showed his love** among us: **He sent his one and only Son** into the world that we might live through him.”

1 Peter 5:7 (KJV) “Casting all your **care** upon Him, for **He cares** for you.”

God is here

Matthew 1:22-23 “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**’ (which means **‘God with us’**).”

Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money. Because God has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’”

III. **Put your hope in Jesus/God.**

1 Peter 1:3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

IV. Exercise hope daily by trusting God’s presence and work in the difficulties and tensions of life.

Bottom line, is by staying vibrantly connected to God

Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

Romans 5:3-5 “And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

- **Four ways to exercise hope:**

Boast in Greek is *kauchaomai* = Actively expressing joyful confidence (In this case), in one’s relationship with God; ie our “standing.”

Rejoice in Greek is *kauchaomai* = Actively expressing joyful confidence (In this case), what God can do in us ie. our process of growth.)

Know in Greek is *eídō* = to see; to perceive with the eyes; to perceive by any of the senses; to notice, discern, discover. Biblical hope is a view of the future based on what we’ve seen (perceived and discovered) from the past. We look back to look forward in hope.

We “know” because we have seen, either in the scriptures or our own life, how God has refined the character of those who trust him with their suffering. Hope looks back in order to look forward in optimism.

Perseverance in Greek is *hypomoné* = stay or remain under a difficulty or pressure while looking for and participating in what God is doing. (In this case), in whatever you are going through, exercise/practice worshiping, praising rejoicing in:

Your standing with God - being aware of God’s complete acceptance and forgiveness

God is standing with you - being aware that he is with you, doing something wonderful inside you.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then do the following mixer and questions.

Ice Breaker/Mixer Q: Share a time when you felt like you lost hope.

1. What do you think the difference is between earthly optimism versus spiritual optimism from the hope described in the scriptures?
2. How does the Romans 15:13 passage cause you to think about hope; its origin and its purpose?

Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

3. Paul gives Timothy instruction to send a message to the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17, “Command those who are rich in this present world not to put their HOPE IN WEALTH, which is so UNCERTAIN, but to put their hope in God...” Why is it important for believers today to be aware of misdirected hope?
4. Looking at Romans 5:1-5 and the last point (see below) in this week's message, what do you think you can do differently to better exercise spiritual hope?

Romans 5:3-5 “And we **boast** in the **hope** of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also **rejoice** in our **sufferings**, because we **know** that suffering produces **perseverance**; perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. And **hope** does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

- Four things to practice:

Boast in Greek is *kauchaómai* = **Actively expressing** your joyful confidence (In this case, in one's relationship with God; ie **our “standing”**)

Rejoice in Greek is *kauchaómai* = **Actively expressing** your joyful confidence (In this case, in what God can do in us ie. **our process of growth through suffering**).

Know in Greek is *eídō* = to see; to perceive with the eyes; to perceive by any of the senses; to perceive, notice, discern, discover. Biblical hope is a view of the future based on what we've seen (perceived and discovered) from the past. We look back to look forward in hope.

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Under the Influence of Peace Advent

We have, all year, been seeking to build the kind of habits (spiritual practices) that can empower us to stay under the influence of Jesus more.

Through December, the **Advent season**, we will look at the four classic themes of Advent (Hope, **Peace**, Joy and Love) and tie them into our focus to live under the influence of Jesus.

Remember that **Advent means arrival**. So, in the holiday season, we are celebrating Jesus' first arrival, to bring us spiritual peace, and the anticipation of his second arrival when he will bring ultimate peace/reconciliation.

Romans 15:13 “May the **God of hope fill you with all joy and peace** as you **trust in him**, so that you may overflow with **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Colossians 3:15 “Let the **peace of Christ RULE** in your **HEARTS**, since as members of one body you were called to **peace**.”

I. The Purpose of Peace

Peace defined: Hebrew - Shalom & Greek - Eirene: **to be safe, sound, well, healthy, whole, and complete**. It signifies a sense of **well-being** and **harmony** both within and without. It's not just the absence of war but **reconciled relationships that work in harmony**.

Shalom in the OT:

- David checks on his brother to see if they are **well (Shalom)**.
- Solomon finished the temple and brings it to **completion (Shalom)**
- Job's tents are in a state of **Shalom** because he counted his sheep and **none are missing**.
- Nehemiah rebuilds the wall to bring **shalom** back to Jerusalem.
- The prophets foretell of the Messiah who will bring **Shalom**.

II. The Problem of no Peace

Many of us are not at peace with God, others or even ourselves. We get out of sync with God and others. Deep down we usually know something is missing; something is not right.

Antonyms of Peace:

War

Anxiety

Irritation

Agitation

Conflict

Noise

Compulsion to control

BUT, Biblically, the most significant antonym to peace is SIN.

Isaiah 59:2 *“Your iniquities have separated you from your God, your sins have hidden his face from you...”*

Roman 3:17 (NLT) *“They (people stuck in sin) don’t know where to find peace.”*

Much of our compulsion to medicate, manipulate, control and avoid is our attempt to feel a semblance of peace but such behavior produces the opposite effect. In the absence of true peace we choose to numb our senses, medicate our angst, justify our irritation with others and seek to control the people and circumstances around us. This does not produce internal, or relational peace (harmony, wholeness, well-being).

III. The Promise of Peace (the Arrival)

Isaiah 9:6 *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, ... and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 53:5 *“He (Jesus) was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him...”*

What do you mean by punishment?

VI. The Price of Peace.

Colossians 1:19-20 *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

That promise was fulfilled in Jesus

Romans 5:1-2 *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”*

Ephesians 2:14-15 *“For he (Jesus) himself is our peace...”*

**NO GOD - NO PEACE
KNOW GOD - KNOW PEACE**

We must understand that this is not natural, it's supernatural. This peace we are talking about, that the scriptures talk about, as being fulfilled by, and coming from Jesus, isn't of this world. It is otherworldly.

So now, we want to look at the **natural requirement** to access this supernatural **peace** of God.

John 14:27 "**Peace** I leave with you; **my peace** I give you. **I do not give to you as the world gives.** Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

John 16:33 "**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.** **In this world you will have trouble.** But take heart! I have **overcome the world.**"

Principle: God asks us to do the possible and **TRUST HIM**, to do the impossible.

Romans 12:18 "**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**"

Ephesians 4:2-3 "**Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**"

V. The Practice of Peace (How to exercise for God's Peace)

Focus your thoughts/mind on God and His will.

Isaiah 26:3 "**You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.**"

"A man's mind may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, bring forth. If no useful seeds are put into it, then an abundance of useless weed seeds will fall therein, and will continue to produce their kind." — James Allen

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds.... This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in this practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to him. In the early times of our practicing we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are just habits - not the law of gravity - and can be broken. A new grace filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps to keep God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the North." — Dallas Willard

- Let go of your **anxiety and obsessive thoughts**.

Philippians 4:6-7 “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.**”

- Take hold of an **authentic prayerful connection to Jesus**, and the focus of your thoughts.

Philippians 4:8-9 “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**.... And the God of **peace** will be with you.”
(See also Colossians 3:1-16)

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then answer the questions. Go around your group and give everyone the opportunity to answer either question 1 or 2 and then go around again to answer either question 3 or 4 and then 5.

1. Looking at the definition (or purpose) of peace can you describe a season in your life where you had peace and why?

Peace defined: Hebrew - Shalom & Greek - Eirene: to be safe, sound, well, healthy, whole, and complete. It signifies a sense of well-being and harmony both within and without. It's not just the absence of war but reconciled relationships that work in harmony.

2. What stands out to you about the verse or statements below?

Roman 3:17 *"They (people living without a relationship with God) don't know where to find peace."*

Much of our compulsion to medicate, manipulate, control and avoid is our attempt to feel a semblance of peace but such behavior produces the opposite effect. In the absence of true peace we choose to numb our senses, medicate our angst, justify our irritation with others and seek to control the people and circumstances around us. This does not produce internal, or relational peace (harmony, wholeness, well-being).

"Until we solve the human equation called man and get him straightened out we'll never have a peaceful world. You've got to build a better man before you can build a better society." — Billy Graham

3. Do you think the passages below say that peace is about our circumstances or about a person? What is the implication?

Colossians 1:19-20 *"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."*

Romans 5:1-2 *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."*

Ephesians 2:14-15 *"For he (Jesus) himself is our peace..."*

John 14:27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

4. If the principle below is true what are some things we can do to open our lives to experience more of God's peace?

Principle: God asks us to do the possible and **TRUST HIM**, to do the impossible.

Romans 12:18 “If it is **possible**, as far as it **depends on you**, live at **peace with everyone**.”

Ephesians 4:1-3 “Be **completely humble** and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make **every effort** to keep the unity of the Spirit through the **bond of peace**.”

Isaiah 26:3 “You will keep in **perfect peace** those whose **minds** are steadfast, because they **trust in you**.”

5. Looking at the quotes and scriptures below, what are some ways you could increase your ability to keep God before your mind or bring peace to your mind?

Philippians 4:6-9 “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**.... 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**.... And the God of **peace** will be with you. (See also Colossians 3:1-16)

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Take a moment of quiet/silence and ask everyone to prayerfully think about what they could put into practice this week. Then after a couple of minutes of quiet reflection, close, or have someone close, your time in prayer.

Under the Influence of Joy Advent

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Through December, the **Advent season**, we will look at the four classic themes of Advent (Hope, Peace, **Joy** and Love) and tie them into our focus to live under the influence of Jesus.

Remember that **Advent means arrival**. So, in the holiday season, we are celebrating Jesus' first arrival, to bring us spiritual peace, and the anticipation of his second arrival when he will bring ultimate peace/reconciliation.

Luke 2:8-11 “*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause GREAT JOY for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’”*

Advent-the Savior and Messiah had arrived.
(Birth Announcements are usually a time for Joy...)

I. What is Joy

Two strong characteristics of Hebrew Joy: it is **assertive & relational**.

1. It is Personal

Psalms 16:11 (NASB) “*In your (God’s) presence there is fullness of joy...*”

Galatians 5:22 “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, etc...*”

2. It is Positive

Luke 2:10 “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy...*”

3. It is Practical

Nehemiah 8:10 “*The joy of the Lord is our strength.*”

4. It must be Practiced to be increased.

Defined: In Hebrew:

Simcha = gladness, happy, joy - a celebration.

Sim = put & **cha** = to laugh, ha ha ha

Psalms 30:11-12 “You turned my wailing into **dancing**... and clothed me with **joy**, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.”

Psalms 126:2 “Our mouths were filled with **laughter**, our tongues with songs of **joy**.”

The point is, Joy can be found in many things, but **ultimate joy comes from God. Joy is a relational reality.**

II. God wants you to be full of Joy (Personal, Practical)

Psalms 16:11 “In your (God’s) **presence** there is **fullness of joy**.”

- “Near your face” is the literal translation of the Hebrew.

Neuroscience tells us that joy is most powerfully triggered in us when we see the face of someone who is happy to see us, who is thrilled to be with us, who is delighted by us. Their face shows it.

The word “joy” occurs 218 times in the Bible and 11 Times the New Testament authors use the phrase “**that your joy may be full**” or “**complete**”. God clearly wants us to experience deep joy, pleasure, and gladness.

Romans 15:13 “May the God of **hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him**, so that you may **overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

John 15:11 (Jesus) “I have told you this so that **my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (full)**.”

III. How to exercise **greater** Joy (It must be Practiced).

Luke 2:10 “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause **GREAT JOY...**”

1. Replace Bad News with the **Good News** of Jesus

Luke 2:10-11 “I bring you **good news** that will cause **GREAT JOY** for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord...”

“Good news” in greek is “*euangelion*” and is often translated as “Gospel” is the English translation of the Greek word “*euangelion*” which means “**news that brings great joy**.”

We need good news... lots of bad news...
A **Savior** is born...he is the **Messiah**, the Lord.

James 1:2-4 “**Consider** it **pure joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you **face trials** of many kinds, because you **know** that the **testing of your faith (the Gospel)** produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

The greek word for “Consider” is **hegeomai** from **ágo** = to lead, is the idea of **leading your mind/thoughts** to a different conclusion about something.

(The Message) “Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.

2. Replace Fake News with the Good News of Jesus

Luke 2:1 “In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.”

Luke 2:10 “I bring you **good news** that will cause **GREAT JOY...**”

An inscription found in Priene, in modern-day Turkey, referring to Caesar Augustus says: “the birthday of [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of the *gospel (euangelion)* concerning him.”

This inscription is found on a government building dating from 6 B.C. Here is more of what it says, which gives us insight into how they understood the “gospel” concerning Caesar Augustus:

The most divine Caesar... we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things... for when everything was falling (into disorder) and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura; Caesar... the common good Fortune of all... The beginning of life and vitality... All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year... Whereas the Providence which has regulated our whole existence... has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us (the emperor) Augustus... who being sent to us and our descendents as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and (whereas,) having become (god) manifest /PHANEIS/, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times.

The “gospel” of Caesar Augustus was what we call today the *Pax Romana*, the age of peace in the Roman Empire which came about during this time, into which Jesus was born.

Caesar Augustus in this inscription is declared to be: divine, savior, and the beginning of the good news for all people on Earth.

1 Timothy 4:7 “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives tales, rather train yourself to be godly...”

Romans 5:1-2 (NIV84) “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we **rejoice** in the **hope** of the glory of God.”

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV84) “Not only so, but we also **rejoice** in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And **hope** does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

3. Reproduce Joy by Sharing it. (Practice giving it away)

Luke 2:10 “I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy **for all people**...”

Joy is meant to multiply.

Luke 2:17 (Referring to the Shepherds) “When they had seen him, **they spread the word** concerning what had been told them about this child....”

Shared sorrow is half sorrow/**shared joy is double joy.**

Romans 12:12 &15 “Be **joyful** in hope. Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer.... **Rejoice** with those who **rejoice**. Mourn with those who mourn.”

2 John 1:12 “I hope to come to you and talk **face to face**, so that our **joy may be complete**.”

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

Take a few minutes to check in with each other to see how everyone is doing, then answer the questions. Go around your group and give everyone the opportunity to answer either question 1 or 2 and then go around again to answer either question 3 or 4 and then 5.

1. Do any of the concepts around point "I. What is Joy" stand out (Resonate) with you, and if so, which ones and why?

2. Can you describe a time that you have experienced (or can imagine) what "Fullness of Joy" is like?

3. How do you think the Gospel, the good news of Jesus coming to bring salvation (see the Ed Stetzer definition) could bring us greater joy if we practiced it more? (Under point III.-1)

4. How does the simple idea of Replacing or Exchanging Bad News for Good News practically play out in our daily lives? (see point III.-1&2)

5. How important is our role with one another to "Share joy" for it to be multiplied? How could we improve this practice with one another? (see point III.-3)

As you close, ask your group members to pray a simple prayer of gratitude (joy) for either some trial or some blessing in their life.

Be Blessed in 2024

Numbers 23:19 *"God is not human that he should lie, not a human being that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"*

1. Unconditional Promises

Genesis 9:11 *"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."*

Revelation 22:20 *"He who testifies to these things says, 'yes I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."*

Conditional promises test our

1. Obedience

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 *"If you obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock- the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and when you go out. The Lord grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to him. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity- in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground- and in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you. The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them."*

2. Discipline

Psalms 119:11 *“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 *“These commands that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”*

3. Patience

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...”*

Psalms 46:10 *“Be still and know that I am God...”*

4. Prioritization

Matthew 6:33 *“**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**”*

Psalms 1:1-3 *“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither- whatever they do prospers.”*

“You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage- pleasantly, smilingly, unapologetically- to say ‘no’ to other things. And the way to do that is by having a bigger ‘yes’ burning inside.” — Steven Covey

5. Trust

Proverbs 3:5 *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding...”*

Isaiah 40:31 (NLT) *“[T]hose who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles.”*

“Life rewards action.” — Dr. Phil

We must take action

James 1:22-25 *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in the mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it-not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it- they will be blessed in what they do.”*

“Identify the payoffs that drive your behavior” — Dr. Phil

Payoff 1. Love and Presence

John 14:21 *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”*

Payoff 2. Peace

Numbers 6:24-26 *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace”*

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

Payoff 3. Provision

John 15:7-8 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

Small Group Questions

Open your small group in prayer. Give each person an opportunity to answer each of the following questions.

1. Look back to a time when you made a resolution. Were you successful at reaching that goal? What determined that success or unsuccessfulness?
2. If God is testing our obedience to his commands, where do you find yourself possibly lacking in obedience? Is loving your neighbor, hiding his word in your heart, mourning with those who mourn, etc.
3. What spiritual disciplines do you practice each day? What rule of life have you made a part of your spiritual practices?
4. If you were to make a spiritual resolution what would that be?
5. Where in your life can you use more of Jesus's presence? Marriage, relationships, work-life balance? Explain if appropriate.

Pray for each other that we would be bold and do what both God and Jesus are asking of us.