



Becoming Disciples, Making Disciples

FOUNDATION • FREEDOM • FOLLOW • FLOW



Becoming Disciples, Making Disciples

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Introduction

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

The command of Jesus to His disciples couldn't be clearer. There are lots of things that the church has been given permission to do through the Word of God, but precious few things that we've been specifically commanded to do. Sadly, in many ways, the church has failed at this task. Even sadder is the fact that, when she's succeeded, it's largely as an unintended byproduct, not as an intentional focus.

Why have we so often missed this clear command of Scripture?

For starters, discipleship rarely has the glamour of other ministry activities. It takes time, is rarely clean and neat, and almost always hits bumps along the way. And sadly, many don't feel equipped to do it. The call to make *other* disciples assumes that one has already achieved some level of discipleship personally and is capable of transferring that to someone else. To make matters worse, the professionalization of ministry has created the illusion that discipleship is something that requires advanced skill levels, seminary education, or even more foolhardy, nearly perfect lives.

However, the biblical reality is quite different. Average, run-of-the-mill disciples are called to walk alongside others, and we are together called to "stir up one another to love and good works" and "to encourage one another all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25) Discipleship is the accessible yet intentional responsibility of every follower of Jesus.

This series is designed just for that purpose. We are called to *become disciples* and to *make disciples*. The former process is not to be fully complete before the latter

process begins; in fact, it's an impossibility for that to happen. As we *become* we are also to *make*, and so on and so on until Jesus returns. The tools that you hold in your hand aren't meant to be a set of educational objectives that somehow represent the full scope of discipleship. Nor are they meant to be a program that, once completed, can allow "make disciples" to be checked off the divine to-do list. Rather, these tools are to make *accessible* and *intentional* the relational process of encouraging and stirring one another up to maturity in Christ.

Don't miss the reality that discipleship is a relational process. Someone who reads these tools individually, in isolation, may gain some principles and, by the grace of Jesus, a small modicum of life change and progress. However, the working through of these tools with someone who is ahead of you in the journey, and subsequently, doing the same with someone who is behind you in the journey, will be transformative. God has designed us for one another, saved us into a community of believers, and wired us to respond most effectively to one another's stories. **Therefore, at the outset of this journey, let me encourage you to find someone to take this journey with you.** Use the concepts and the questions as starting points for honest discussion with one another. Share the joys and the challenges of following the counter-cultural ways of Jesus.

There are four steps to this process: Foundation, Freedom, Follow, and Flow. Each step contains six concepts, each with multiple questions for reflection and application which are designed to be the starting point for conversation. At the rate of one concept per day, these concepts could be completed in less than a month. At the rate of once concept per week, it would be completed in roughly six months. Some will choose to move through them more quickly, others will choose to dwell on some concepts or take breaks as a certain concept takes root in their lives. Most will find that 2-3 concepts per week is just about right. Whether tackled quickly or slowly, it's vitally important that these are not simply abstract truths, but vital components to life in Christ. James 1:22-25 warns us all about the folly of hearing the Word of God but not doing it.

At the end of each of the four steps, there is a specific action encouraged. As you consider each one, pray with intentionality about stepping into these practical components of discipleship. While each one fits into an aspect of who we are at

York Alliance Church, they are also built on the historical foundation of those who have become disciples and made other disciples for the last 2000 years.

One final note: There is a passage from the gospel of Mark which is to be read, as well as a "grace" to be prayed, prior to each concept. If this reading schedule is followed, these four steps will also include a complete reading of Mark's gospel. The passages aren't intended to parallel the concepts—rather, the goal is to develop the habit of going directly to God's Word as a regular part of our discipleship journey. The Gospel of Mark is a wonderful vehicle to contemplate the life, teaching, and work of Jesus. The "grace" to be prayed is a simple prayer that is intended to be meditative more than quickly read and moved past. In fact, it's succinct enough to be quickly memorized or jotted down and prayed over and over again throughout the day(s) or weeks that you are working through that specific concept. The point here is clear: these concepts are not solely ideas to be learned, but they are truths that are to be integrated deep into our lives—a work that can only be done by the Spirit of God at work within us.

As 21st century North American Christians, we are busy with lots of things. Our schedules and our minds are full. The question is: Are we doing the specific thing that Jesus has called us to do? His words from Matthew 7 so often describe the religious activity that we see all around us: "Did we not prophecy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?" And yet, as Jesus describes this activity, He also tells us the awful reality: the Master, in the face of all of their religious work, says to them, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Instead, I long for us all to hear the other words of Jesus ringing in all of our ears for eternity: "Well done, good and faithful servants." We must become disciples that make disciples.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

Step One: Foundation

Buildings come in all shapes and sizes, and can be used for many different purposes. Skyscrapers, art museums, small suburban houses, car dealerships, hospitals, and schools all look and function dramatically differently. However, one thing is consistent: they all have a solid foundation. Regardless of the eventual shape or function of the building, a solid foundation is necessary in order for the building to stand. This first step is all about establishing, or shoring up, the foundation we will build on as disciples. "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11) Each of the concepts in this step is incredibly important in order to have a solid foundation. Quite literally, these concepts will be "built upon" in the steps that follow, and if any of these pieces are missing or faulty, the entire structure could come crashing down. Therefore, although these concepts may seem somewhat basic, it's vital that we take time to be sure each piece is firmly in place.

What's a Disciple?

Scripture to Read: Mark 1:1-20

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, may I not just know about You, but truly follow You."

A productive journey has a destination.

When we pile the family into the car, there's always a purpose—whether that's a geographical point of arrival, or an emotional or relational outcome ("we're going to drive around and explore a bit, just so we can talk")—all productive journeys have a goal in mind. However, the reality is that many of us begin our journey with Jesus without any idea of the destination. In fact, there are times we seem to communicate that simply getting into the car is good enough! We find ourselves wandering around for days, weeks, years, even *decades* without a clear picture of where we're supposed to be headed. Is the goal for me to become a leader in my local church? If I become a pastor or a missionary, would that be the pinnacle of my journey? Am I supposed to tithe my money and give my time to the activities of the church? Should I just be trying to be a good person, trying as best I can to be a blessing in the world around me? If I read my Bible, pray now and then, go to church most weeks, and have some other Christian friends, isn't that good enough? *Where am I supposed to be going anyway?*

Read Luke 5:27-28. *What did Jesus call Levi to do? How did he respond?*

Jesus calls all who desire to pursue Him to be *followers* of His. The word used over and over again in the Bible is "disciple." A disciple is like a student or an apprentice who models her life after her teacher. In this instance, we are called to be like Jesus. In fact, the term "Christian" literally means "little Christ." Levi had no idea what the call to follow Jesus might entail, but he knew that the destination was to be like Him. Therefore, he left everything else behind him and followed after Jesus. This is what it means for us to follow Jesus as well.

Somehow, many in the church have gotten the idea that we can be followers of Jesus without actually being anything like Him. We change our religious designation on Facebook and go to church now and then, but our lives are not changed in any discernible way. We're followers that don't actually follow. "Little

Christs" that don't have the slightest resemblance to Christ Himself! Francis Chan states it this way:

This would be like Jesus walking up to those first disciples and saying, 'Hey, would you guys mind identifying yourselves with Me in some way? Don't worry, I don't actually care if you do anything I do or change your lifestyle at all. I'm just looking for people who are willing to say they believe in Me and call themselves Christians.' Seriously? No one can really believe that this is all it means to be a Christian.¹

Read and paraphrase (write in your own words) the following passages:

- Luke 6:40

- Romans 6:3-4

- Colossians 3:1-4

- 1 John 1:5-7

- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

What seems to be the consistent message of these passages?

Many who call themselves Christians have lost sight of the destination. However, in this case, the destination is not a physical location or an emotional result—our destination is a Person!

¹ Francis Chan, *Multiply*, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO., 2012), pg. 17.

Kyle Idleman, in his book *Not a Fan*, makes the case that many of us have the same relationship with Jesus that we might have with our favorite sports team. We "cheer for Him when things are going well, but walk away when it's a difficult season. [We] sit safely in the stands cheering, but know nothing of the sacrifice and pain of the field. [We] know all about Him, but don't *know* Him."² We believe in Jesus like one might believe in Abraham Lincoln—a historical figure who did some things that made an impact on the world around us. However, as we'll see in the next section, the call to follow Jesus goes far beyond that kind of belief.

Questions for Application:

- Up until this point in your life, would you say that you are more of a fan of Jesus or a follower of His? Why do you think that?

- In Luke 5, Levi left everything he had in order to follow Jesus. What are some things that Jesus might ask you to leave behind as you follow Him?

- When we follow Jesus, we know the destination, but we don't know what the journey will bring. What are some of the concerns you have as you begin this journey toward Jesus?

² Kyle Idleman, *not a fan*. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 2011.), pg. 25.

Notes and Prayers:

Repentance and Lordship

Scripture to Read: Mark 1:21-45

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, help me to understand both Your holiness and grace."

We've already seen that being a disciple is a *journey* with a specific *destination*, which is Jesus Himself. However, this process of following God has a significant barrier right from the beginning: You. Genesis 1-2 records a beautiful, harmonious relationship between Creator and the created. However, Genesis 3 describes the universal problem that we've all inherited—namely, we've rebelled against the King of the Universe through our sin.

One of Jesus' first sentences recorded in the gospels is "Follow me." (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17, John 1:43) However, both Matthew and Mark are clear that this is not his *first* public statement.

Read Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15. *What is the first public statement that Jesus made?*

Look at each part of this statement, as recorded by Mark in the ESV: "The time is fulfilled / the kingdom of God is at hand / repent / and believe in the gospel."

The time is fulfilled

For centuries, the people of God had waited for a Deliverer. From the very beginning of the story, there was the promise of One who would come and crush the work of Satan, who had originally tempted our first mother and father into sin. The promise was that there would be an offspring that would come from the woman, and that he would "bruise [Satan's] head, and [Satan] shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) As we'll see in parts 2 and 3 of the "Freedom" step, there was a long history of repeated failure as God's people waited for Him to send the Messiah. Though they passed in and out of political slavery, they were constantly enslaved by their sin and rebellion against God.

Jesus' declaration that the "time is fulfilled" was effectively saying to the whole world "the wait is over."

The Kingdom of God is at hand

Not only is the wait over, but the King is here! Jesus declares that the rule of the Creator God, which was interrupted in Genesis 3, has begun. In one sense, this would be great news for all who loved God—He is beginning His rule and reign!

On the other hand, the rebellion of Adam and Eve, which has been passed down to every one of us, is still a very present reality.

Imagine that a mighty king has come to take over the place where you live. He is a good king, and you know that he will ultimately be good for you and your people. However, your very presence as a citizen of your country is an act of treason against this mighty king—you are affiliated with an enemy nation. Not only that, but your actions and your way of life all fall in line with the nation in which you live, and each of these actions is an act of rebellion against the powerful king that is coming.

This is the very real situation we find ourselves in when Jesus announces the Kingdom of God. We, by our birth and by our actions, have become enemies of God! The King is coming, and we're on the wrong team!

Read Romans 3:11-18, 23, and Ephesians 2:1-3. *How do these verses describe our position before God? Is it difficult to see yourself in this position?*

It can be difficult to get our heads around our own sinfulness—we largely think of ourselves as good people. However, when we understand that we have lived as citizens of the world and lived as the world lives, we have *by our very nature* become enemies with God. (James 4:4) If we imagine that a new king is coming and we, by our position as citizens, are his enemy, what would we do?

Repent

Jesus' call to us is simple—repent. The word literally means “to turn” and move in the opposite direction. It's not a passive word, but an active one, just as if a powerful king was coming and we were his enemies! We immediately stop living in line with kingdom of which we've always been citizens and shift our allegiance to the new kingdom, in this case, the Kingdom of God. What does that process look like? We must recognize the sin in our lives, admit it before God in prayer, leave it there with Him, and turn toward a new life that is now defined by His rule and reign.

However, as we repent, the question remains: Will the King accept our repentance and take mercy?

Believe the Gospel

This is where the final phrase in Jesus' statement offers hope! The wait is over, the King is coming, hurry up and make yourselves right with God... but don't forget to believe the gospel. That word "gospel" literally means "good news" and it was actually a word used most often in the secular, political realm:

There is a Roman inscription from about the same time as Jesus and Mark which starts: The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus. A gospel was news of some event that changed things in a meaningful way. When Greece was invaded by Persia and the Greeks won the great battles of Marathon and Solnus, they sent heralds (evangelists) who proclaimed the good news (gospel) to the cities: 'We have fought for you, we have won, and now you're no longer slaves; you're free.' A gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that's been done for you that changes your status forever.³

What is this gospel that we are to believe? What is this announcement of something that happened in history that's been done for us and will change our status forever? Read Ephesians 2:4-10 and Romans 10:9-10.

The "good news" is that we actually can have access to God through grace by faith! The rebellion that separates us from God has been paid for in Christ. Salvation and forgiveness are guaranteed simply by faith: *Do you believe that Jesus came to earth, lived the perfect life you couldn't live, died the death that you deserved to die, and rose again in victory over sin, death, and hell?* If you believe this by faith, you can be saved! It's as simple as that.

Simple, however, doesn't necessarily mean easy. In Romans 10, Paul makes clear the challenge: "If you... confess with your mouth that *Jesus is Lord...*" Lordship is a designation for ownership, rule, and authority. The simple declaration that "Jesus is Lord" is an overall change of allegiance—He is asking us to move from one rule and authority to another.

³ Tim Keller, *The King's Cross* (Dutton, New York, NY, 2011.), pg. 14-15.

Many want to declare that "Jesus is Lord," but they want to remain in charge of their own lives. They want to be followers who don't follow; members of a Kingdom, but remain their own king. However, out of love for us, Jesus won't allow us to do that. He knows that we are lousy at being lords, and that the best way that we can engage His life is through His rule and reign. He doesn't ask us for perfection, but He does ask for us to determine that He will be Lord over all of our lives.

So before Jesus ever asked the disciples to follow Him, He showed them the only way that they would be able to follow and asked them to consider the cost of making such a statement. They did, and left everything behind to follow their Lord. He asks us to consider the same thing.

Questions for Application:

- Have you ever determined that Jesus would be Lord of your life? How has that been different than simply believing in Him?

- Read Luke 14:25-33. What might it cost you to obey Jesus? Be as specific as you can.

- Take some time to pray as you consider this call to repentance and lordship. Are you willing to turn from the ways of the world around you, as Jesus calls you to obey Him? Just like the disciples, you won't know everything that decision means until you actually follow Him. However, as you consider the cost at the outset, are you willing to follow Him, imperfectly but as completely as you can, by faith? Take time to journal your thoughts at the beginning of this journey—this decision is truly foundational to all that will follow.

Notes and Prayers:

Engaging the Word

Scripture to Read: Mark 2:1-17

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, develop in me a hunger and love for Your Word."

Jesus invited His first disciples into the Kingdom of God through the act of repentance, and then called them to follow Him. For three years, they left everything behind them and actively followed Jesus, listening to His teaching, getting insight into His daily behavior, watching Him interact with all of those around Him. They saw Him confront the Pharisees, heal the man born blind, raise Lazarus from the grave, feed the multitudes with a little boys' lunch, and sneak away early in the morning and late at night to meet with the Father. In the end, they watched Him face a brutal death on the cross, watched His body be laid in a tomb. They were among the first witnesses to His glorious resurrection, and were able to hear His own explanation of all that had happened. Two of them even got to walk several miles with Him while He explained the entire story of God and how it culminated in the resurrection. (Luke 24:13-35)

With all of that in mind, it makes perfect sense that Jesus' command to them immediately prior to returning to heaven was to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." They had, after all, received quite a bit of teaching from Jesus. They had seen and experienced so much, and had quite a story to tell. So of course they were told to pass on to others all that Jesus had taught them.

That brings up two very important questions: (1) If Jesus invites us into the Kingdom of God through the act of repentance, and then calls us to follow Him, how are we supposed to follow Him, considering He is now at the right hand of the Father? (Romans 8:34) (2) How can we possibly teach others to obey all that Jesus' has commanded us if we haven't directly sat under His teaching?

The answer to both questions, of course, is that we've been given the Bible. It contains the essential teachings of Jesus as well as those of the first disciples, so that we have what we need both to *become* disciples as well as to *make* other disciples.

What IS the Bible?

We often think wrongly about the Bible. We think of it as a book, simply because most of us have a single volume with lots of pages between two relatively fancy

covers. However, the reality is, the Bible is actually a collection of 66 different books.

39 books make up the Old Testament, which were all originally written sometime before roughly 400 B.C. These 39 books predominately tell the story of God's work through the nation that He chose as His people, Israel. Portions of these books contain history, portions contain law and regulations for worship, others contain poetry, and still others, words from prophets about what was happening in their day and what God would do in the future. The books are organized by the predominant literary genre, not necessarily by chronological order, so reading straight through from Genesis to Malachi without understanding the historical context of the books can get a bit confusing.

27 additional books make up the New Testament, which begins with four different eye-witness accounts of the life of Jesus, called the gospels. They are followed by a historical book telling the story of the early church, the book of Acts, and then the majority of the rest of the New Testament is made up of letters written to churches, individuals, and other groupings of people. The New Testament ends with what is called an "apocalyptic vision" called "Revelation," written by the apostle John near the end of his life.

More important than the fact that the Bible is collection of 66 different books is that these books are God's Word to us about who He is, who we are, and how we are to engage the world around us.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

- *Where does Paul tell Timothy the Scripture comes from?*

- *What is the purpose for which the Scripture has been given?*

If the Bible is "breathed out" by God, then one of the first questions many people have is why there are so many different versions of the Bible. Which one is right? Just like a letter sent to us from another country and culture, the Bible wasn't originally written in English. Therefore, it must be translated from the original

languages, which were primarily Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. Because of translation, there are minor differences between translations—some take great pains to be exactly accurate with the text, but sacrifice readability for the modern reader, while others use a bit more freedom in translating from the original text in order to gain readability. Because English speaking readers are always reading a translation, it often works best when studying a passage to utilize at least two translations. I recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) as a very accurate yet highly readable translation, and the New Living Translation (NLT) as an easy to read version that is still quite faithful to the original language.

Where do I start and what do I do?

Once we understand that the Bible is the Word of God to us, given so that we would grow as disciples and ultimately, help others to grow as disciples, most are anxious to read and learn. In fact, one of the marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, Who comes into our lives when we repent and enter into the Kingdom of God, is that we have a desire to read and understand the Word of God. (We will deal more with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a disciple in Step Two: Freedom.) But where should we begin?

There's no one way to approach the Scriptures, but here are a few tips to getting started reading the Scriptures for yourself:

- *Read strategically.* It's often best to start with one of the gospels, either Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, in order to understand more fully the life and teachings of Jesus. Following the reading plan in this book will take you through the entire gospel of Mark during this study.
- *Read slowly.* It's not a race! Don't solely read for quantity. The depths of the Word of God will continue to unfold to you all of your days on earth, so you won't be able to learn everything in a few months. Start by reading roughly a chapter at a time (more or less) and seeking to truly understand what that section of Scripture is teaching.
- *Read prayerfully.* The Word of God is alive, and God desires to speak to us through it. (Hebrews 4:12) Ask God to reveal Himself to you before you begin

to read, and then listen for His voice as you read. He will give you insights about who He is and who you are as you read.

- *Read obediently.* We should never be reading the Word solely for information or material that we can teach someone else. James tells us that we need to not simply *hear* the Word, but we need to *do* it as well! (James 1:22-25) As you read, allow God to show you ways that your life must change in order to be more conformed to His Truth.

The best advice for engaging the Word of God is simply to get started. As you read the Bible and ask others about it, you will quickly find that God speaks to you through His Word. When Jesus was being tempted in the desert (Matthew 4), His consistent response to temptation was to quote the Scripture. In one such response, He declared how foundational the Word is for our lives: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." (Matthew 4:4)

Questions for Application:

- What's the biggest barrier to you in reading the Word of God?

- Do you tend to approach the Word for information, for revelation, for inspiration, or for duty? Why is that?

- Read 1 Peter 2:1-3. Are there times that you approach the Word with negative motivations? Why is that?

- Do you long for the Word like a baby would long for “pure, spiritual milk?” (1 Peter 2:2) How would your life be different if you had that kind of hunger for the Word? Take some time to write a prayer asking God to increase your hunger for His Word and to reveal Himself to you as you study it.

Notes and Prayers:

Conversations with God

Scripture to Read: Mark 2:18 – 3:6

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, may I learn to abide in You as You abide in me.”

Day after day, the disciples followed Jesus. They saw Him do incredible things—powerful teaching, healings, miracles displaying power over the natural world and demonic forces, and many other things. It’s fascinating, however, that they never asked Him to teach them to do any of those things. Maybe they felt that they were uniquely within His power to do, so they didn’t think asking would be appropriate. Or, could it be, that of all that they noticed about the life of Jesus, none of these things were the most remarkable? They did make one request of Him to teach them, and it wasn’t about how to teach, heal, or perform miracles and exorcisms.

Read Luke 11:1.

- *What did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to do?*

- *What was the context of this request?*

Jesus must have had a remarkable relationship with His Father, and it was observable to the disciples. They saw what He had, and wanted to have it as well!

Read Luke 11:2. *How did Jesus teach the disciples to address God?*

As a pastor, there are many people who would like to talk with me at any given time. Sometimes they want to process a situation with me, sometimes they want my opinion, sometimes they want me to talk to God with them, and sometimes they’re just excited about something that they want to share! There are times each week that my schedule is open for these kinds of appointments, and there are other times that I’ll flex my schedule to make myself available for those who simply want to talk. However, there are other times (like the middle of the night) and other days (like days off and vacation days), when I’m simply not accessible to everyone within the church. I love and care for all of those in the congregation, and I’m accessible to every one, to a point. However, my kids are a different story. If they need me at any time of day (or night), on my day off, on vacation, or even

when I'm in the middle of doing something else, I'm available to them. They don't just have some access to me; they have total access!

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray by addressing God as Father, He was teaching them and us something fundamental about our relationship with God. Read 1 John 3:1. *What does John tell us that we are?*

As children of God, we have total access to God. We can come to Him at any time with anything at all, and He delights to hear from us. This reality is so wonderful that it's hard to even imagine! However, rather than us just coming before our Father babbling with excitement, Jesus gives His disciples a model by which we can pray. His desire is not for us to repeat His words like a parrot, but rather, to "mean" these ideas that He's laid out before us. As J.I. Packer says: "Every prayer of ours should be a praying of the Lord's Prayer in some shape or form."⁴ For centuries, Christians have used the Lord's Prayer as a model for prayer, either praying it phrase by phrase, or by summarizing the concepts in various forms. One such form that's easy to remember is the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication..

Adoration—"Our Father, hallowed be Thy Name..."

Many times, in what is essentially a self-focused desire to have our own needs met, we rush into prayer bringing our requests before God. And we are certainly invited to bring our requests to Him! (Philippians 4:6) However, when we first recognize His greatness and worth, our requests, His sovereignty, and the reality of our situation come into focus. One pastor I heard teach on prayer called adoration the "tent poles that support the tent of prayer" so that we can move around freely in the presence of God.⁵ Without adoration, he imagined us caught up in the rolls of canvas lying on the ground, bogging down our movement. However, when we adore God for who He is, we are free to move around in His presence.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *I Want to be a Christian*, (Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 1977.), pg. 173.

⁵ Fred Hartley, Lead Pastor of Lilburn Alliance Church, teaching at the Eastern Pennsylvania District Conference of the C&MA, Fall 2012

Confession—“forgive us our sins...”

We are given free access to our Father through Jesus; however, for many, we don't take advantage of that access because of our own sins. We know that we've fallen short, and we believe that by not coming before God in prayer, that sin will ultimately just fade away over time. However, that's a completely false notion! God, of course, knows everything about us—including our sin—and invites us into His presence anyway. Instead of hiding, He invites us to confess our sin before Him and receive His cleansing so that our relationship with Him is no longer marred by our sinful behaviors.

Read 1 John 1:9. *What is promised to us if we confess our sin?*

When we realize the deep blessing it is that we can confess our sins before a holy God and receive His cleansing, the next part of prayer will flow naturally...

Thanksgiving—“...as we forgive those who sin against us...”

Some see this phrase of the prayer as a conditional blessing: God will forgive us only if we forgive those around us. However, the Scriptures are clear that our forgiveness of those around us is really an act of thanksgiving—a marker that we've indeed been forgiven. Because we have been extended mercy, we can freely extend that same mercy to others.

Perhaps the clearest example of this principle is found in a story that Jesus told to Peter when he asked Him about forgiveness. Read Matthew 18:23-35. While this story can easily be read as conditional forgiveness, Jesus was displaying to Peter *the extent* of the mercy that has been offered to us through His sacrifice. If we understand who we truly are before God, and we accept the forgiveness He offers, our thankful response is to offer that same forgiveness to those around us!

Our response of thanksgiving in prayer shouldn't simply be inward and meditative; as Jesus modeled, there should be action to our prayer. Because grace

has been shown to us, we should engage the world differently. This is true thanksgiving.

Supplication—“Give us this day, our daily bread... Deliver us from evil...”

Finally, we are invited to make requests before God. This section is the final portion of our prayer not because it's the least important, but rather, because each of the other sections give context to what we are asking God. When we recognize His greatness and majesty, we will not longer pray that He would make our name great in the world around us. When we confess our sins before Him, we will no longer pray that others would get what they “deserve.” When we are thankful for being the recipients of grace, we will no longer grumble and complain about how unfair our lives are. We are prepared to make requests before God in line with His nature and character... “in Jesus’ Name.”

That said, we can ask Him for anything that is on our heart. We bring our needs before Him (life, breath, food for the day, etc.), and we also bring our desires before Him. (“May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”) You may say, “What if my desires are not His Kingdom and will being done?” Fair question, and that’s the point of prayer! As you pray as a *follower* (see the first section of this study), God will shape your heart and desires in accordance with His. You’ll find yourself desiring more and more what He desires! In the meantime, we are called to bring our hearts honestly before Him, ask for what’s on our hearts, and He will shape us.

A Two-Way Conversation

Anne Lamott makes a statement about prayer with which many within our current cultural context would quickly agree. Essentially, she says that our view of God is not important within prayer. “Let’s not get bogged down on who or what we pray to. Let’s just say prayer is communication from our hearts to the great mystery, or Goodness... to the animating energy of love... We could call this force ‘Not Me’... or for convenience, we could just say God.”⁶ There are lots of

⁶ Anne Lamott from *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*, quoted in Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*, (Dutton, New York, NY, 2014.), pg. 59.

problems with this position, but let's highlight just one: If we don't know to Whom we're speaking, Who is speaking back to us?

Prayer is not intended to be a one-way monologue with the ceiling. Rather, it's communicating with a Divine Person who loves us and longs to both hear from us and speak to us. Therefore, prayer shouldn't simply consist of me talking to God, but also listening for Him to talk with me. This aspect of prayer is one that grows over time, but Packer helpfully describes the process for us as we begin our lives of prayer:

We shall probably not hear voices, nor feel sudden strong impressions of a message coming through (and we shall be wise to suspect such experiences should they come our way); but as we analyze and verbalize our problems before God's throne, and tell him what we want and why we want it, and think our way through passages and principles of God's written Word bearing on the matter in hand, we shall find many certainties crystallizing in our hearts as to God's view of us and our prayers, and his will for us and others.⁷

This is as concise of a description as I can find for how we learn to listen to the voice of God. However, like any relationship, the depth and intimacy of our communication will grow over time. Just as babies don't begin to speak in full sentences quoting Shakespeare, we must grow into our language of prayer as we grow in our relationship with Jesus.

Questions for Application:

- What's the biggest barrier to you in prayer? How might you address that barrier?

- Do you have time set aside to meet with God in prayer? If not, take some time to schedule at least 15 minutes a day for the next month to meet with Him. Consider times when you are awake and alert, can be alone and quiet, and times that you will be able to guard from interruptions and distractions. Write your plan for meeting with God below—and then do it!

⁷ J.I. Packer, *I Want to be a Christian*, (Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL., 1977.), pg. 172.

Notes and Prayers:

Need for Community

Scripture to Read: Mark 3:7-35

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of other followers of You."

Up to this point, we've largely talked about following Jesus as something that we each do on our own. However, despite the individualistic leaning of our culture, the New Testament is quite clear that following Jesus is not for "Lone Rangers." The Scriptural evidence for this is so overwhelming that it's almost impossible to document, but consider a few:

- There are dozens of "one another" commands throughout the New Testament, such as "love one another," "pray for one another," "encourage one another," etc. (see Colossians 3:12-16, for example) How would we be able to fulfill Jesus' call to teach people to "observe all that I have commanded" (Matthew 28:20) if there is no "other" with whom we can fulfill the "one another" commands?
- There are references to both the global and the local church in the New Testament. However, out of 114 times "church" is mentioned in the New Testament, at least ninety are referring to a specific local gathering of followers of Jesus serving together on mission.⁸
- God has clearly called leaders in the local church to teach, care for, and lead the church. (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-8, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-7) Who would they be responsible to lead if we weren't called into community?
- The writer to the Hebrews describes the necessity of community within our spiritual journeys, teaching us that if we don't have others to exhort and encourage us, our hearts will ultimately be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13) We need each other in order to pursue Jesus!

These are just a few of the many evidences that God has called us into fellowship with other believers. This entire four-step series (Foundation, Freedom, Follow, and Flow) is designed around the idea of followers of Jesus living and engaging in community. It's impossible to concisely state the need for other believers to walk this journey with us. However, there are four key relationships that each follower of Jesus should be intentionally engaging as a foundation for all other relationships within the body of Christ.

Membership in a Local Church

⁸ Francis Chan, *Multiply*, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO., 2012), pg. 53.

As followers of Jesus, we are each a part of the global and universal church, which is made up of all followers of Jesus across all time and places. However, this must not be the extent to which we engage the church! It's vitally important for us to also be connected to a specific local church as well. There are many reasons for this, but here are three extremely significant ones:

- We are called to submit to the authority of specific leaders that God has placed over us in the church, and to pray for them. Submission to the authority and leadership of a “shepherd” (pastor) can only happen within the context of one specific local church. This is also necessary in order for us to submit to the church discipline, should it be necessary, that leaders are called to enact. (Matthew 18:15-20)
- We are shaped by the difficult aspects of community even more than the enjoyable aspects of community. Difficult people, situations, and personalities are all part of the ways that God shapes us into His likeness. When we are not connected to a specific local church, we will always move toward places that are more comfortable for us—however, more comfortable isn't always God's best for us. (James 1:2-4)
- We are called to observe the sacraments of communion and baptism as administered by local church leaders. Sacraments were clearly intended to be overseen by leaders in the church (Acts 8:36, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34) and celebrated among a community of disciples. It is impossible for this oversight apart from a connection to a local body. (See the next section for more details regarding these sacraments.)

Connection in a smaller community, or cell group

It's very clear throughout the New Testament that God has given every disciple of Jesus at least one gift that we are to use for the building up of the body of Christ. For some, these gifts are a bit more “up front” in nature, whether through large group preaching and teaching, leading worship through singing or playing instruments, or even using the gifts of administration and hospitality to help those who attend a gathering feel welcome. However, even within the best case scenarios, only a small percentage of the total body of a local church are able to use the gifts that they've been given in any given week during the corporate gatherings. Furthermore, the “one another” commands of Scripture referred to

above must be worked out in levels to a certain degree. For instance, I can “love” or “encourage” someone I barely know at one level—however, both that person and I realize that we don’t know one another that well, so the love and encouragement is tempered a bit with that knowledge. While it still has a level of worth and meaning with someone I’m not extremely connected with, how much more worth and meaning does that same love and encouragement have when it’s given by someone who knows me deeply and intimately?

These needs, and many others, are met through smaller communities of disciples, or in some settings, “cell groups.” At York Alliance, we have groups called LIFE groups, standing for Living In Ellowship Everyday, that are designed to be a place where every person can use their gifts, build deep relationships where we know those around us and are truly known by them, and can follow Jesus together. Like a commitment to a local church, connection with these groups shouldn’t be taken lightly—the group will learn, over time, to truly rely on one another, and as above within the larger church setting, difficulties and disagreements can be used by God for our formation into the image of Jesus if we’ll stay committed to that group. After a period of time, as disciples become more mature in their faith and go on to walk with others who are becoming disciples, these groups often multiply into a number of different groups, allowing them to remain small and therefore, maintain their intimacy, connection, and opportunity for each person’s gifts to be used.

“Paul” and “Timothy” Discipleship Relationships

The last two kinds of essential relationships can be lumped together under a single heading: discipleship relationships. One of the great blessings of our journey with Christ is that there are those who are both ahead of us and behind us in our journey. These brothers and sisters in Christ may or may not be chronologically older or younger than we are, but they are on the same path we are, and we have the privilege of walking with one another in our journeys.

The apostle Paul was extremely aware of this dynamic, which is why these discipleship relationships are often signified using the names “Paul” and

“Timothy.” While these relationships can be seen throughout Paul’s letters, both relationships are clearly described in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17:

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Paul describes his relationship in terms of being a “spiritual father” to those behind him, and that Timothy, specifically, is his “faithful child in the Lord.” It is Timothy’s role, then, as one who has been specifically disciplined by Paul, to model what it means to be a disciple of Jesus to those who are coming behind him.

Hopefully there’s someone with whom you are already engaging this material. Maybe you are meeting after every few sections, or even after each section, and talking through all that you are reading and learning. If that’s not happening, let me encourage you to find someone! Most spiritual fathers and mothers are thrilled to walk with those who desire to be disciples of Jesus—all you need to do is ask. As I look back at my life, those spiritual father relationships are some of the most cherished people in my life.

However, as I began to mature in faith, I realized, like Timothy, that it was important for me to also be a “Paul” to those who were behind me in my journey! Wherever you are in your journey with Christ, you should begin to pray for someone that can be a “Timothy” for you, and in whom you will have the opportunity to intentionally invest.

Questions for Application:

- Are you fully committed to a local church fellowship? If not, what’s stopping you from making that commitment?

- Do you have a small community, or cell group, of people with whom you can share your gifts and your heart? If not, what would stop you from seeking out such a community?

- Who is your "Paul?" Do you need to give that relationship greater intentionality in your life?

- Who is your "Timothy?" Do you need to give that relationship greater intentionality in your life?

Notes and Prayers:

Sacraments of the Church

Scripture to Read: Mark 4:1-34

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, thank you for your gift of new life in You."

From the very beginning of this study, we've looked at Jesus' words to His followers immediately prior to His ascension, as recorded by Matthew:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

Seeking to establish a foundation on which we can build, we've discussed the idea of what it means to be a disciple, or follower, of Jesus. We've talked about a few of the ways that we can grow in our faith and maturity in Christ, so that we would be able to teach others to observe "all that [Jesus] has commanded." The final piece of our foundation will deal with the two remaining sections of this great command: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Baptism

Baptism is an outward symbol of the inward conversion to the Lordship of Jesus. Beliefs can emerge over time, particularly in a church culture like ours. Many of us have a story similar to mine: I was taken to church as a child, had a number of very positive "spiritual" experiences (as well as social and emotional experiences), and grew to understand the basics of who Jesus was and what He did on the cross from a very young age. Through my teen years, I began to wrestle with the exclusivity of Christian faith and the challenge of Lordship. While I loved Jesus and all that He stood for, I wasn't sure that I was interested in giving up control of my life. Through college, I was exposed to many disciples of Jesus who lived in ways that I admired and longed to experience. This led me increasingly to make decisions that were oriented around the Lordship of Jesus. By the time I had graduated from college and was making my next set of "life" decisions, I knew that I would follow Jesus and do anything that He called me to do. I had gone from knowledge through challenge and questioning to real belief and, ultimately, to Lordship.

Internally, my life was oriented in a dramatically different way. Externally, the decisions that I was making aligned with my pursuit of Jesus. But I hadn't had that

“moment” of conversion so many talk about—or better stated, I likely had that moment, but I had missed it somewhere along the way. There were certainly signposts and events that marked the journey, but my decision to submit my life to the Lordship of Jesus seemed to “emerge” over time. I became busy plugging into the local church and my cell group, being disciplined by my “Paul” and investing in a number of “Timothy’s,” and seeking to live a life submitted to the Lordship of Jesus. I had even been called by God to leave the business world and step full-time into pastoral ministry.

And then, as I was preparing to teach students about the baptism of Jesus, I realized that I had never been baptized as a believer. I had been baptized as a baby in the church we grew up in, but it wasn’t a decision that I ever made for myself. My belief had “emerged” over time because I had never chosen to follow this simple command of Jesus to be baptized. So, a few weeks later, for the first time anyone can remember, one of the *pastors* at York Alliance Church was baptized.

The simplest reason to be baptized, and the most straightforward, is the one seen in Matthew 28:19-20—Jesus commands us to be baptized. As the pithy bumper sticker says: “Jesus said, I did it, that settles it.” However, while that’s an appropriate response to our Lord, it’s not the only reason to be baptized.

Read Romans 6:1-11.

- *What does Paul tell us that baptism signifies in the life of a believer?*

- *According to Paul, what does the descent into the water of baptism signify?*

- *What does the emergence out of the water signify?*

Through baptism, we don't only obey the command of Jesus, we also identify our lives with His, and proclaim the gospel to the world around us! We make a statement to Jesus: "I will follow You." We make a statement to ourselves: "I have died to myself, and my life is now in Jesus." And we make a statement to the watching world: "I'm following Jesus now. Walk this journey with me."

Communion

Baptism signifies our conversion, while communion, the other sacrament of the church, signifies the ongoing cleansing work of Jesus and His presence in our lives. The symbols, the bread and the cup, represent the body and the blood of Jesus. He made this reality extremely clear as He celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. The Passover was an ancient ceremony that told the story of God's grace in freeing His people from slavery in Egypt. Here is how Luke records it in his gospel account:

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:17-20 ESV)

I can't imagine the surprise and confusion of the disciples as Jesus not only changed the Passover ceremony so completely, but did it in such an odd and ominous way. However, I have to wonder if, as they later watched Him dying on the cross, they recalled His words and began to put everything together.

The church is called to celebrate communion regularly so that we can remind one another of the truth of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Unlike many of the activities of the church, this remembrance is one reserved for those who are disciples of Jesus. Paul makes this quite clear. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

- *What are we proclaiming when we take communion?*

- *How does Paul say that we, in taking communion would be “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (vs. 27) and “eat and drink judgment on ourselves” (vs. 29)?*

Our worthiness to receive the sacrifice of Jesus is based wholly on His sacrifice, not on anything that we have done. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Therefore, when he says that we mustn't eat without “discerning the body,” Paul is reminding us that we come to the table not to get a meal or as a part of some religious ceremony, but as a reminder that Jesus has given His body for our sins. We then “receive” this sacrifice into our bodies, representing not just His cleansing work, but the incredible reality that Jesus Himself goes with us wherever we go.

Sacraments

The Greek word “mysterion,” where we get our English word mystery, was used for a variety of the practices of the early church, including baptism and communion. When the Latin language became the predominant language of the church, there was no word that corresponded to this Greek concept. Therefore, the theologians and preachers of the day began to use the Latin word “sacramentum” to approximate the Greek word “mysterion.” It's from there we get the English word “sacraments.”⁹ While there are portions of the church that recognize additional practices as sacraments, the two universally agreed upon sacraments of the church across all Christian churches are communion and baptism.

This history of these words is important to recognize because, while we'd love to be able to finally define the meaning and process of these two rites, there is a necessary level of mystery involved in both of them. While we live in a scientifically oriented society that is focused on the natural, there is a decidedly super-natural component to faith in Jesus. Through our conversion, He makes us a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), somehow transforming us in our essence.

⁹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol. IV (Eerdmans, Chicago, IL, 1939.), pg. 2636.

The prophet Jeremiah describes that transformation this way: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." (Jeremiah 31:33)

Baptism and communion both hold this same kind of supernatural mystery. They are symbols; outward representations of inward realities. And yet, the presence of God also accompanies their practice. The Spirit of God somehow meets us "in the midst" of our obedience to both practices, and spurs us on in our journey with Him. The extent to which this happens and the method He uses remains mysterious and the subject of much debate, but we are certain of this: Jesus has called all who follow Him to be baptized, and has told us to eat the bread and drink the cup of communion in remembrance of Him.

Questions for Application:

- Have you been baptized as a believer in Jesus? If so, what do you remember about the experience? If not, why not?

- Have you celebrated communion? What is the most meaningful aspect of the communion celebration to you? Why is that?

- Take some time to review not only this last section, but the entire “Foundation” section. What things stood out to you? What are some key things that you need to remember? Write a prayer below asking Jesus to seal these truths to your heart and to establish a firm foundation for following Him.

Notes and Prayers:

Action Step #1: Why *shouldn't* I be baptized?

Over the past several decades, the number of new baptisms reported within the church in the United States is dramatically lower than the number of conversions. It seems that people are “emerging” into faith, or even having dramatic moment-in-time conversion experiences, but aren’t choosing to obey Jesus in baptism.

Many who are reading this have already been baptized as a believing adult, which is wonderful. However, there are some who for one reason or another don't believe that they should be baptized. Maybe they aren't sure they're life is yet a good representation of Jesus, or maybe they aren't sure how to go about the process, or maybe they're just afraid of making such a bold statement. The reasons are numerous, but the bottom line is that Jesus has called all who are His disciples to be baptized.

Read Acts 8:26-39.

- *What is the process of the eunuch coming to faith in Jesus?*

- *When he sees the water, what is his question for Philip? (vs. 36)*

This is the same question with which we each need to wrestle: Why *shouldn't* I be baptized? If the answer is that you've already been baptized as a believer, that's great—you certainly don't need to do it again. But if the answer is anything else, we need to look long and hard at the call of Jesus, the pattern of Scripture, and the history of the church.

If you've never been baptized as a believer in Jesus, consider contacting one of your pastors and getting more information on how you can be baptized. While there is no magic power in baptism itself, Jesus always blesses our obedience. Consider if this may be an area in which He's inviting you to obey.

Pause and Reflect

As you complete *Step One: Foundation*, take a few minutes to look back at each of the sections. What has God called you to do? What action steps do you need to take to put these things into place? What resources are needed for these things to become a reality? Think back through the journey and summarize what you've learned and what your next steps need to be below.

What's a Disciple?

Repentance and Lordship

Engaging the Word

Conversations with God

Need for Community

Sacraments of the Church

Step Two: Freedom

The story of Jesus, which is to say the entire story of the Bible, is a story about freedom. The plot hatches in Genesis 3: our first parents, when tempted, chose to be enslaved to sin and rebellion through their disobedience. Throughout the rest of the story, God works on behalf of His people to free them from slavery. The Old Testament, as we'll see, is full of moments of partial freedom as God patiently shows His people that the real problem isn't outside, but rather, inside our own hearts. Jesus comes on the scene, fully God and fully man, able to live the life that Adam, as well as all of us who descended from him, couldn't live. The death He dies on the cross, a willing sacrifice of the just for the unjust, conquers sin, death, and hell, with the resurrection proving once for all the sufficiency of the sacrifice. Through Christ, we truly have been set free! Paul proclaims it: "For freedom Christ has set us free!" (Galatians 5:1a) The rest of that verse, however, describes our ordeal: "Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1b) The war has been won, but there are battles, inside each of our hearts, that rage on. This second step is all about understanding the victory that has been won, the battle that rages, and how we can live in the freedom that Christ has set us free to enjoy.

Identity in Christ

Scripture to Read: Mark 4:35 – 5:43

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, help me to truly know who I am because of You.”

Who are you really? Underneath the social position, the vocation, the family connections, the network of friends, the bank account, the belongings, the intellect, the achievements, and the outward appearance... who are you really? Who is the irreducible, essential you?

I remember being faced with that question years ago, and honestly, panicking as I heard the question. Up until that point, the way I had understood identity consisted of each of those things that I was being asked to mentally strip away. If my identity couldn't be defined by my family, my job, my possessions, my achievements, or my talents, what *did* define me? Even more frightening was the reality that I had worked all of my life to establish those things, and that all of them could disappear in an instant. None of them were firm and lasting. In fact, not one of our external identity factors is guaranteed to remain intact forever. Families fall apart, jobs are downsized, possessions break and get stolen, achievements fade in time and lose their luster, and even talents and intellect can be taken through sickness, accidents, and the simple fact of aging.

Who are we really?

Think about the ways that you would tend to describe your identity. List some of them below.

Now, read Jesus' words to His disciples in Matthew 16:24-26.

- *What does Jesus say that we need to do in order to save our lives?*

- *What does He say we gain by losing our lives?*

Such a counter-intuitive statement: In order to live we must die. However, if we die, it is then we will truly live. What's Jesus getting at?

Paul, in his letter to the church at Colossae, unpacked this statement a bit more. By looking at what he says, we can begin to get a sense of who we are and who we're called to be.

Read Colossians 2:16-23.

It seems that the young church in Colossae was not just seeking identity in externals, they were seeking identity in *religious* externals! Follow this law, avoid this, engage this, etc. Paul, however, makes three significant judgments about this church and their behavior.

- *What does he say they are not doing in vs. 19? What is the "Head?"*

- *What does he say about the effectiveness of their practices in vs. 23?*

- *What does he infer that they haven't yet done in vs. 20?*

Now, look at the next section of his letter. Read Colossians 3:1-17.

There's a marked difference in the way that Paul speaks of both behavior and the effectiveness of that behavior. At the end of Colossians 2, he was clear that all they were doing was ineffective in producing real life in them, because they

hadn't yet truly died. In Colossians 3, he's calling them to "put to death" certain behaviors and "put on" certain other behaviors, and these seem to bring real life. Why the difference?

- Read Colossians 3:3 again. *What is true about these disciples?*

It was in their death that they found real life in Christ. This theme will be found throughout the New Testament, but it's important to look in one other place.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

- *In vs. 14-15, what does Paul say is true about disciples of Christ?*

- *What does he then say happens to us in vs. 17 if we are in Christ?*

- *Read vs. 21—where does our life and identity come from, once we die to ourselves?*

Who are we when everything else is stripped away? If we have died to self and risen with Christ, *we are in Him!*

Big deal, you might say. What's that really mean? Imagine that everything that we listed above is stripped away—family, friends, job, finances, possessions, talents, achievements, physical looks, etc. What would you be left with, if you are in Christ? Without meaning to overwhelm (OK, maybe a little) consider this list:

- I have been healed. (Isaiah 53:5)
- I am the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13)
- I am the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)
- I am commissioned to make disciples. (Matthew 28:19,20)
- I am a child of God. (John 1:12)
- I have eternal life. (John 10:27)

I have been given peace. (John 14:27)
 I am part of the true vine, a channel of Christ's life. (John 15:1,5)
 I am clean. (John 15:3)
 I am Christ's friend. (John 15:15)
 I am chosen and appointed by Christ to bear His fruit. (John 15:16)
 I have been given glory. (John 17:22)
 I have been justified...completely forgiven and made righteous. (Romans 5:1)
 I died with Christ and died to the power of sin's rule over my life. (Romans 6:1-6)
 I am a slave of righteousness. (Romans 6:18)
 I am free from sin and enslaved to God. (Romans 6:22)
 I am free forever from condemnation. (Romans 8:1)
 I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father. (Romans 8:14-15, Galatians 3:26)
 I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him (Romans 8:17)
 I am more than a conqueror through Christ, who loves me. (Romans 8:37)
 I have faith. (Romans 12:3)
 I have been sanctified and called to holiness. (1 Corinthians 1:2)
 I have been given grace in Christ Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:4)
 I have been placed into Christ, by God's doing. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
 I have received the Spirit of God into my life that I might know the things freely given to me by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)
 I have been given the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)
 I am a temple...a dwelling place...of God. His Spirit and His life dwell in me. (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19)
 I am united to the Lord and am one spirit with Him. (1 Corinthians 6:17)
 I am bought with a price; I am not my own; I belong to God. (1 Corinthians 6:19,20; 7:23)
 I am called. (1 Corinthians 7:17)
 I am a member of Christ's Body. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:30)
 I am victorious through Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)
 I have been established, anointed and sealed by God in Christ, and I have been given to the Holy Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13,14)
 I am led by God in triumphal procession. (2 Corinthians 2:14)
 I am to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:15)
 I am being changed into the likeness of Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:18)
 Since I have died, I no longer live for myself, but for Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:14,15)
 I am a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
 I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18,19)
 I have been made righteous. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 I am given strength in exchange for weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:10)
 I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living is Christ's life. (Galatians 2:20)
 I am a son of God and one in Christ. (Galatians 3:26, 28)
 I am Abraham's seed...an heir of the promise. (Galatians 3:29)
 I am an heir of God since I am a son of God. (Galatians 4:6,7)

I am a saint. (Ephesians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)
I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. (Ephesians 1:3)
I was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and am without blame before Him. (Ephesians 1:4)
I was predestined... to be adopted as God's son. (Ephesians 1:5)
I have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13)
I have been redeemed and forgiven, and I am a recipient of His lavish grace. I have been made alive together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:5)
I have been raised up and seated with Christ in heaven. (Ephesians 2:6)
I am God's handiwork...born anew in Christ to do His work. (Ephesians 2:10)
I have direct access to God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:18)
I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family. (Ephesians 2:19)
I may approach God with boldness, freedom, and confidence. (Eph. 3:12)
I am righteous and holy. (Ephesians 2:24)
I am a citizen of heaven, seated in heaven. (Philippians 3:20 Ephesians 2:6)
I am capable. (Philippians 4:13)
I have been rescued from the domain of Satan's rule and transferred to the kingdom of Christ. (Colossians 1:13)
I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. The debt against me has been cancelled. (Colossians 1:14)
I am blameless and free from accusation. (Colossians 1:22)
Christ Himself is in me. (Colossians 1:27)
I am firmly rooted in Christ and am now being built up in Him. (Colossians 2:7)
I have been made complete in Christ. (Colossians 2:10)
I have been spiritually circumcised. My old unregenerate nature has been removed. (Colossians 2:11)
I have been buried, raised, and made alive with Christ. (Colossians 2:12,13)
I died with Christ and I have been raised up with Christ. My life is now hidden With Christ in God. Christ is now my life. (Colossians 3:1-4)
I am an expression of the life of Christ because He is my life. (Colossians 3:4)
I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved. (Col. 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4)
I am a son of light and not of darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
I have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)
I have been saved and set apart according to God's work. (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5)
Because I am sanctified and am one with the Sanctifier, He is not ashamed to call me brother. (Hebrews 2:11)
I am a holy partaker of a heavenly calling. (Hebrews 3:1)
I have the right to come boldly before the throne of God to find mercy and grace in a time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)
I have been born again. (1 Peter 1:23)
I am a living stone, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house. (1 Peter 2:5)
I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a People for God's own possession. (1 Peter 2:9,10)
I am an alien and stranger to this world in which I temporarily live. (1 Peter 2:11)
I am an enemy of the devil. (1 Peter 2:11)

I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God by Which I am a partaker of God's divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4)
I am forgiven on the account of Jesus' name. (1 John 2:12)
I am anointed by God. (1 John 2:27)
I am a child of God and I will resemble Christ when He returns. (1 John 3:1,2)
I am loved. (1 John 4:10)
I am like Christ. (1 John 4:10)
I have life. (1 John 5:12)
I am born of God, and the evil one...the devil...cannot touch me. (1 John 5:8)
I have been redeemed. (Revelation 5:9)¹⁰

Overwhelming, right? But let's be real—most readers just skipped over that massive list and said something like “yeah, I get that...” Go back and read the list! Why? Because this is *who we really are!* When everything else is stripped away, this is who Jesus has made us to be in Him. How did all of that happen? That's where we need to go next...

Questions for Application:

- Look back over the list of who we are in Christ. Mark several of those statements that are especially meaningful to you. List them below, along with why they are meaningful. Are there statements that you find difficult to believe? Why?

- We are called to die to ourselves and live to Christ. What are some areas of yourself that you know that you are hanging onto for identity?

¹⁰ Thanks to Risen King Community Church of Redding, California for making this list available.

- Take a few minutes and pray through the list of who you are in Christ. Maybe divide it up into 5 or 7 parts, and pray one section each day this week. Ask God to make these truths sink into your heart this week.

Notes and Prayers:

Story of the Old Testament, Part 1

Scripture to Read: Mark 6:1-56

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, make me aware of my sin and need for redemption."

The first 39 books of the Bible tell the story of all of history leading up to Jesus' birth, mainly through the lens of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. Understanding the major themes of the Old Testament help us to see the beauty of God's work in Jesus, as well as help us to understand our own hearts and propensities. There are lots of ways to organize the Old Testament story, but for our purposes, we will look at ten different ideas. The first five deal with the relationship between man and God, and the next five deal with places in which we try to find identity and hope. Through the entire journey, the identity which we've been given in Christ is completely absent, and mankind struggles to be free from bonds of various types and kinds.

Creation

The beginning of the story is beautiful. Genesis 1 and 2 records in epic poetic form the creation of all that is, all through the mighty voice of the Lord. There are brilliant scholars who debate the specifics of the creation account—whether the “days” are the 24 hour periods as we understand them now or if they represent long periods of time, whether there is room in the account for evolutionary activity or if each creation was from nothing, and other various details. While there is room for study, debate, and *disagreement* regarding all of those questions, what Genesis 1 and 2 is clearly communicating to us is that God is the Author of the universe, and that it was, as He created it, a beautiful place.

Read Genesis 1.

- *What statement does God make after every act of creation?*

- *What statement does God make after the sixth day and the creation of man and woman in His image? (vs. 31)*

The world of Genesis 1 and 2 is a vision of the way that God intended His creation to be. We see harmony between all of creation, between man and woman, and most significantly, between God and man. All is as it should be. This includes work (Genesis 1:28), ample food being produced (Genesis 1:29), care for the animals

and plants of God's creation (Genesis 1:30), freedom for man (Genesis 2:16), and companionship leading to marriage (Genesis 2:24-25). This is the world as God intended it to be... and it is good.

Fall

And then, everything took an abrupt turn. A bad one. The serpent, who we will later find out is Satan (see Revelation 12:9), enters the scene at the beginning of Genesis 3. He is also part of God's creation (Genesis 3:1). He approaches Eve first, and subtly twists the truth.

Read Genesis 3:1-13.

- *What does the serpent say to tempt Eve?*

- *Why is eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil such a significant issue, considering the context of Genesis 1-2? (especially Genesis 2:16-17)*

This event is what is called "the Fall," as Adam and Eve "fell" from grace by "falling" for the temptation of Satan. Francis Chan points out a key observation:

Satan is subtle. He does not show up dressed in a red cape with a pitchfork saying, "I am Satan, and I am here to destroy you. Follow me." Instead, he comes to us in ways that we would not expect and offers us things that seem good. This is what he did in the garden, and he does it to us today. He deceives people by making false promises. He takes what is evil and makes it appear beautiful. He takes the truth and twists it.¹¹

Once Adam and Eve rebel against the good ways of God, the harmony in their relationship with Him is broken. They try to hide from Him (Genesis 3:8), a silly idea that we have been trying to replicate ever since. Ultimately, God explains to

¹¹ Francis Chan, *Multiply*, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO., 2012), pg. 153.

Adam and Eve the result of their rebellion (Genesis 3:16-19), but not before He pronounces judgment on the serpent/Satan for his role in the whole debacle.

Read Genesis 3:15. *What does God promise Satan will happen through the offspring of the woman?*

From the first moments after the tragedy of the Fall, God is already promising to redeem His people. This is the first instance of a pattern that will be seen throughout the Old Testament: *People sin, people face the consequences of their sin, God redeems.*

Sin

The history that unfolds from Genesis 3 forward isn't pretty. Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden, lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever in their sin. (Genesis 3:22-24) Cain and Abel are born, and ultimately, Cain murders his brother out of jealousy. (Genesis 4:1-16) Cain's descendants spiral deeper and deeper into sin until God declared that the "every intention of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5) God determines that He will blot out all men and all creation, saving only a remnant through Noah's family and animals that he would rescue from the great flood.

God promised Noah that He would never again flood the earth (Genesis 9:11). However, He preceded this covenant by stating the result that remained, even after the destruction of all creation apart from Noah's family. Read Genesis 8:21.

- *What does God recognize is true about all men?*

The flood wasn't enough to straighten mankind out, and within several generations of Noah, all creation was gathered again in rebellion against God, seeking to "make a name for ourselves." (Genesis 11:4) Sin has continued to run

rampant, and mankind is out of control in rebellion against God. However, instead of destroying man, God begins a new redemptive process.

Covenant

In the face of man's rebellion at Babel (Genesis 11), God calls a man named Abram. His call to Abram is full of mercy and hope for God's redemptive plan for mankind. Read Genesis 12:1-3.

- *What does God promise to do through Abram?*

- *Based on vs. 3, how far will this blessing ultimately go?*

The next dozen chapters in Genesis tell the story of Abram, who would ultimately be renamed Abraham. Like all who had gone before him, he often disobeyed, but God continually upheld His promise to Abraham. This promise can most graphically be seen in one specific event in Abram's early journey with God.

Read Genesis 15.

This odd scene can be a bit disarming to our modern eyes and ears, but it depicted an ancient covenant ceremony. A covenant was a weighty promise between parties in which each party committed to fulfill their portion of the promise. In this particular ceremony, animals were sacrificially split in half, and the parties would walk between the halves. As they did, they would promise to fulfill their portion of the promise—and if they failed to do so, they would ask that their fate would be like that of the animals that were on either side of them.

However, in this vision, there is only one party that passed between the animal halves. Abram remained as an observer while God Himself, envisioned as the smoking fire pot, passed between the animals. In the face of man's repeated sin and rebellion, God had promised to bring blessing to the whole earth through

Abram's family. And He made the promise on the basis of His own life, covenanting to fulfill the promise on His own.

Faith

What was Abram's response to this promise? Read Genesis 15:6.

- *What did Abram do in response to God's promise?*

The New Testament will highlight the faith of Abraham again and again, and rightly so. Abram was hearing this promise as an old man with no children, and yet God was promising that He would bless the world through his line. He was hearing God declare these promises, but he had absolutely no role in seeing them fulfilled—he could only trust God.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, explains the importance of the promise the Abraham was being given. Read Galatians 3:7-9.

- *What does Paul say was "preached" to Abraham hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth?*

The "gospel" or the "Good News" of God's work through Jesus on earth (see *Step One: Foundation, "Repentance and Lordship"*) was preached first to Abram, and he believed God *by faith*. Paul then offered additional commentary on the faith of Abraham in Romans 4.

Read Romans 4:22-25.

- *For whose sake does Paul say that Genesis 15:6 was written?*

- *Why does he say that we needed to read it?*

- Read Ephesians 2:8-9. *How do we receive the free grace of God?*

The same faith that Abram had and is recorded for us is the faith God gives to us as a gift, and by which we are saved! Romans 4 tells us that we are to see Abram's model of faith—one who believed that God would do the impossible through him for all the world—and believe in the same way that Jesus, who died some 2000 years before we are reading these words today, has paid the penalty for our sin and is the fulfillment of the covenant love of God!

However, Abraham's descendants weren't so quickly convinced, as we'll see.

Questions for Application:

- As you think through this first part of the Old Testament story, which parts resonate most with you? Why is that?

- As you think about God enacting His covenant promise without any help from you, does that make you relieved or does it make you anxious? Why?

- Paul declares that Abraham's faith is meant to spur us on in our faith in Jesus. Think about the sacrifice of Jesus made for your sake, and think about the trust that Abraham had in God that He would fulfill His promise, despite so much evidence to the contrary. Write a prayer of faith as you think about the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf—and where you have doubts, be honest about them before God as well. If you read Genesis 12-23, you'll find that Abraham had both faith and doubt at times!

Notes and Prayers:

Story of the Old Testament, Part 2

Scripture to Read: Mark 7:1-30

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, save me from cheap replacements for hope in You."

Despite the covenant promises of God and the faith of their forefather, Abraham, the Israelite¹² people had a difficult time trusting God to provide in Himself all they needed. Over time, they began to believe that a variety of worldly substitutes would offer to them the identity and fulfillment that they desired. As we understand their story, it's easy to see ourselves in their shoes—constantly looking for the cheap substitute instead of the fullness of Jesus Himself.

Freedom

As God foretold to Abraham, the Israelite people became captives in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13), being afflicted by their Egyptian slave drivers. The first two chapters of the book of Exodus summarize *hundreds of years* of oppression and slavery with just a few short stories. The people of Israel must have wondered if God had forgotten them completely—if they remembered they had a God at all. Then, an Israelite who was raised in Pharaoh's house saw the unjust way that his people were being treated, and lashed out against an Egyptian slave master, killing him. Now a murderer, this man, Moses, fled to the wilderness and tended sheep for 40 years. It was there that God spoke to Moses through a burning bush (Exodus 3) and called him to be the deliverer of His people from Egypt.

Moses came before Pharaoh demanding that God's people would be released so that they could worship God again. When Pharaoh refused, God sent supernatural plagues against the Egyptian people. (Exodus 4-10) Finally, when Pharaoh would not relent, a final plague was promised—one that would devastate every family in Egypt and would provide freedom to the captive Israelites.

Read Exodus 11:4-8. *What is the plague that was threatened?*

However, God provided a sacrifice for the Israelite people so that they would be protected from this plague. Read Exodus 12:1-13.

- *What did every Israelite family need to do to ensure the plague of the death of the firstborn would pass over their homes?*

¹² "Israelite" is a term for the people who are part of the nation chosen by God to be His people. They are named after Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. (Genesis 32:28)

Of course, from this side of the life and death of Jesus, there are some clear parallels. The Israelites had been brutally oppressed as slaves in Egypt, just as we are oppressed as slaves to sin and death through the line of Adam. Both would require the tragic death of the first born son, as well as the blood of the spotless lamb, if God's people are to be freed from their slavery.

The final plague was enacted, and in heart-breaking fashion, the people of Israel were set free. They left as a massive nation of wanderers, set free in the wilderness just outside of Egypt, wandering on the Sinai Peninsula. However, it wasn't long until Pharaoh realized that, in his heartbreak, he had released his entire workforce that drove the economy of the nation. So he set out to recapture them. God led the people to the shore of the Red Sea, and with mountains on both sides and Egyptian army pursuing from behind, it seemed that the story would end badly. However, God miraculously parted the sea, and the Israelite people passed through on dry land—but when the Egyptians pursued them, the sea returned and they were drowned. The people of God were finally free. (Exodus 14)

Having miraculously been given freedom, God's people must have deeply trusted God and patiently waited for Him, right? Of course not. Read Exodus 16:1-3.

- *What did the Israelites complain about?*

- *What did they say they wished Moses (and God) would have done?*

This is simply the first of dozens of times when the freedom that they had been given didn't satisfy God's people. They had been oppressed by an outside nation, and they would be again at various points in their history, but freedom from outside oppression didn't give them what they needed.

Kingdoms

As we fast-forward through the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is established with God as their leader. They took possession of the Promised Land through the direct intervention of God's hand. He worked through various leaders, called "judges" to lead the nation. However, unlike other nations, Israel didn't have a king. That became the next point of contention for the Israelite people. Samuel was one of the men God used to judge Israel, and he was also a prophet who heard from God.

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

- *What did the people of Israel demand from Samuel, and ultimately from God?*

- *Why did they desire a king?*

- *What was God's response to them?*

Remember the pattern we saw established all the way back in Genesis 3: *People sin, people face the consequences of their sin, God redeems.* God has been following that pattern throughout the rebellion of His people, and He continues the cycle here as well. The desire for a king is clearly sinful, God tells the people through Samuel what the consequence will be, they demand that it happen anyway, and so God allows it—and He will ultimately redeem it.

Samuel calls Saul to be Israel's first king—a man that, from all outward appearances, made a perfect king. However, over time, he did exactly what God said he would do, and was ultimately oppressive to the people and stopped following after God. Samuel then anoints David to be king (1 Samuel 16), and God uses David to be a model through which His covenant promises can be seen. God

blesses Israel through David's leadership, and although he was far from perfect, he became a model for what a king of Israel should look like.

There's an important scene from King David's life that is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. David, after achieving many earthly victories and guiding Israel to peace, longs to build a temple for God. David brings this request to God, through the prophet Nathan, and God responds with a promise; the temple will be built by David's son, Solomon, but God renews and expands the covenant that He had given to Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, and 17).

Read 2 Samuel 7.

- *What are the promises that God makes to David?*

If you look carefully at the promises given to Abraham, God promised to make his name great (Genesis 12:1-2), give Abraham and his descendants the Promised Land of Canaan (Genesis 15:18), and that his descendants would become nations and that kings would come from him (Genesis 17:3-7). To David, God promises to make his name great (2 Samuel 7:9), to "plant" Israel in the Promised Land (2 Samuel 7:10), and that his line would be established and remain on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). While Israel has not been faithful, God has remained faithful to them and, through David, is renewing His covenant promise with them.

Wealth/Power

While it's not one of the most significant aspects of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, the idea of wealth and power are significant within our current cultural context, and it's important to see that they, too, were a part of the history of God's people. David's kingdom gave way, ultimately, to his son Solomon's kingdom. During Solomon's reign he amassed more wealth and power relative to the rest of the world than any king before or since. 1 Kings 4 documents the incredible amounts

of food and materials that were needed to supply Solomon's household for a single day.

However, many scholars also believe that King Solomon, near the end of his life, was the author of Ecclesiastes, one of the books that make up the section of the Old Testament known as "wisdom literature." Ecclesiastes does not record history, but rather, commentary on life and its meaning and purpose through eyes of one who has experienced much of it.

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11.

- *What are some of the things that Solomon experiences in his search for meaning and purpose?*

- *At the end of this phase of his experiments, what is his verdict? (vs. 11)*

The people of God were given political freedom. They were given a king and kingdom. They experienced incredible levels of wealth and power. And yet, the verdict was that it all didn't satisfy. Their external surroundings, it seemed, didn't satisfy their search for meaning and identity, and didn't give them the real freedom for which they longed. But those were simply their surroundings. What about the people themselves?

Law

In Exodus 20, after a long trek in the wilderness with the newly emancipated nation of Israel, Moses met God on Mount Sinai. Exodus 19 records the detailed process that God led the people through in recognition of His holiness and their sinfulness. The purpose of the meeting? God was going to give Israel their portion of the covenant—the law. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, God issued a

detailed law about the way that His people should live as a reflection of His holiness and goodness.

There was one significant problem with the law: The Israelites couldn't follow it. Try as they might, they just couldn't consistently live as God had called them to live. Take, for instance, the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) Clear enough, right? Well, when Moses comes down of the mountain, having met with God and received this law directly from Him, what did he find? Read Exodus 32.

- *What did the people do while Moses was meeting with God on the mountain?*

- *What was Aaron's excuse for facilitating this evil? (see vs. 24)*

Not only were the people immediately disobedient, but Aaron was already lying to cover up the disobedience. Make that two broken commandments... God had provided a detailed and bloody sacrificial system that allowed Israel to acknowledge their failure to keep the law and seek the forgiveness of God, but the sacrifices could never remove the sinfulness that was at the heart of their disobedience.

Despite that fact that they kept breaking the law, there was always a group of leaders throughout the history of Israel that believed that by keeping the law perfectly, they would gain the identity, purpose, and meaning that they lacked regardless of their external circumstances. They believed that the problem was *them*, and that once they fixed themselves, they would find the fulfillment for which they longed. Keeping the law, of course, was a noble pursuit. However, after working so hard to succeed at being holy and seeing so many others fail so miserably at it, this group of people tended to be a bit self-righteous and judgmental. Therefore, while their external behavior matched the law, their attitude was just as evil as Cain when he murdered Abel.

In Jesus' day, this group of leaders was called the "Pharisees." They longed to see Israel purified through keeping the law, and did their best to follow it perfectly as well as trying to force others to do the same. However, Jesus could see past their exterior righteousness. Read Matthew 23:25-28.

- *What metaphors does Jesus use to describe the Pharisees?*

- *What is the idea that Jesus is trying to communicate about them?*

Even the best attempts at following the law still fell miserably short. The external circumstances might change, and the external behavior might change, but the longing to be clean and right with God was never able to be fulfilled. The problem, it seemed, was inside.

The New Covenant

Despite the unfaithfulness of men, God was faithful to Israel time and time again. Throughout their history, God spoke to His people through the prophets. One of the consistent messages He spoke to them was the expectation that came with the Law given through Moses. If they obeyed the law, they would be blessed and He would establish them in the Promised Land of Canaan. However, if they disobeyed the law, they would experience the judgment of God, being removed from the Promised Land and exiled to foreign lands.

This is laid out clearly in Deuteronomy 28.

- *Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14. What are some of the blessings promised for obedience to the law?*

- *Read Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Summarize some of the main judgments that God promised would come upon Israel if they disobeyed.*

As the history of Israel unfolded, God indeed responded to their disobedience with judgment. First, the nation of Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12). Then, each kingdom fell to outside nations. Israel fell to the Assyrians (2 Kings 17), and Judah eventually fell to the Babylonians (2 Kings 25). The Israelites were forced once again into captivity.

Despite the judgment they were enduring, God continued to speak to His people through the prophets. He promised redemption for His people, not based on their righteousness, but based on His character and will. It was as though He was referencing them back to Abraham's vision in Genesis 15, reassuring them that His promises didn't depend on them, but on Him alone.

However, this promise of redemption was different in essence than God's previous promises—or, rather, it went a step further. They had experienced a variety of external blessings and the revelation of God's will to shape their external behavior, but they hadn't found real fulfillment in any of those things. The problem, they had learned, was inside them.

Read Ezekiel 36:22-32.

- *What is the redemptive action of God that is coming based upon?*
- *What does God promise to do that is distinct from His previous actions? (see vs. 26-27 specifically)*

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

- *What is the distinctive part of the new covenant, according Jeremiah?*

Think about how incredible this promise must have seemed to God’s people—they would no longer have to work to obey the law, but God would change their hearts so that they would know and do the law naturally! This was the “new covenant” promise for which Israel longed... and several centuries later, God’s fulfillment of His promise would be made remarkably clear.

Questions for Application:

- Think about the external “hopes” that Israel had: political freedom and influence, wealth and social standing, and external righteousness. Which of those do you find yourself trusting in? Why?

- Consider the promise of the new covenant. How have you seen the reality of a changed heart and desires in your own life? Take some time to write a prayer asking God to strengthen the desires that He gives you through the new nature that is yours in Christ.

Notes and Prayers:

Story of Jesus

Scripture to Read: Mark 7:31 – 8:26

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, help me to not just know You, but to follow You.”

In addition to the promise of new covenant, the prophets spoke many truths from God regarding both the present and future state of God's people. However, many of their messages had to do with the coming of the Messiah, who would be sent by God to enact this new covenant and once and for all redeem His people. The final prophetic declaration came from the prophet Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." (Malachi 4:5) Following that proclamation, there was silence from God. Historically, this is known as the "inter-testamental period." For 400 years, between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, God was silent and the people waited.

Each of the four gospel accounts opens slightly differently, but Luke begins his account the earliest, tying the angelic prophecy of the birth of John the Baptist with the final prophecy of the Old Testament: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:16-17)

Mark, on the other hand, cites the prophecy of both Malachi and Isaiah, speaks of the ministry of John the Baptist, and then quickly transitions to the beginnings of the ministry of Jesus.

Read Mark 1 slowly.

- *What stands out to you in the early ministry of Jesus?*

- *How does vs. 15 tie to vs. 38, and how do both define the future ministry of Jesus?*

The ministry of Jesus likely created quite a bit of excitement, both for his disciples and for the crowds that followed Him! One day he would captivate people with His teaching (Mark 1:22), the next day amaze them by healing the blind or casting out a demon (Mark 5:1-20), and the next He would astound them by feeding a

multitude with just a little boy's lunch (Mark 6:30-44). You can imagine amidst all the excitement, there was one underlying question: *Who is this guy?* That, in fact, was the question that Jesus Himself posed to His disciples.

Read Mark 8:27-38.

- *Who does Peter say that Jesus is?*

- *What does Jesus then explain to the disciples?*

Peter recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the long-awaited One sent from God. But when Jesus explained how the new covenant would be enacted, Peter wasn't happy with the storyline. In Peter's understanding, as well as that of the majority of Jewish people of that day, the Messiah would come and establish a physical and political kingdom, much as His ancestor, King David, had done. However, God's plan was far greater—He wasn't out to simply conquer political oppression and create a worldly rule, He was going to conquer the oppression of sin and death and establish an *eternal* rule! However, that path necessarily led through the suffering of the cross.

The night that Jesus would ultimately be betrayed into the hands of the Jewish leaders, which would ultimately result in His trial and crucifixion, he was observing the Passover dinner with His disciples. This meal remembered and celebrated the saving work of God through freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and recounted the covenantal love of God for His people. However, on this particular night, Jesus told the story a bit differently. If not before, it was certainly at this meal that the disciples understood that Jesus was no ordinary man, but that He was sent by God as the answer to countless prophecies and promises.

Read Luke 22:20. *What phrase did Jesus use that would clearly tell the disciples that Jesus was sent by God as a fulfillment of His promises?*

The cups of the Passover celebration all had unique and special meanings. This cup, Jesus said, represented the new covenant—and that new covenant would come through His blood. That’s why we are told that “for the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross.” (Hebrews 12:2) The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was a real man. He was born (Matthew 1:25), he grew up (Luke 2:52), he got hungry (Matthew 4:2), he grew tired (John 4:6), and he even wept (John 11:35). But even more shocking, Jesus was tortured and died. (Mark 15:37)

However, just as the Bible is clear that Jesus was a man, it is equally clear that He was fully God as well. John tells us that Jesus always existed (John 1:2), was integrally involved in creation (John 1:3), and that He was God in the flesh (John 1:14). We see Jesus forgiving sins as God (Mark 2:5), displaying power over nature (Matthew 8:26), and understanding the future (Luke 21). When He died, all of creation responded to the death of the Creator (Matthew 27:45-54).

Jesus died a brutal and horrific death on the cross. His body was taken down, and He was buried (Luke 23:50-56). Three days later, at the beginning of the week, some women visiting the tomb hoping to anoint His body with spices, found the stone rolled away and tomb empty, except for angels who greeted them: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (Luke 24:5-6) The Bible tells us that God raised Jesus from the dead, as the first among many who will have eternal life in Him. (1 Corinthians 15:20) Through the resurrection, we find that Jesus’ sacrifice for sin was sufficient and acceptable, and that in His death, we can be given righteousness and life. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The story of Jesus, then, leads us back to the very beginning of the foundation section of the book: Jesus’ call that we are to become disciples who make disciples. After His resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for 40 days. Then, immediately prior to His ascension into heaven, He spoke the following words to His disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

These are our marching orders, so to speak. Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth (Mark 1:15) through the blood of the new covenant. We are called to live in that Kingdom, and to pray that God would bring His Kingdom here on earth just as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10) That means that it's not enough to *know* and *believe* the story of Jesus—we need to follow Him!

Questions for Application:

- Peter declared that Jesus was Lord, and then immediately challenged His judgment on the best course of action. Do you ever find yourself in that position? What's an area in which you struggle to really trust God?

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and Colossians 2:13-15 slowly. What do these passages say about the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus?

- Think through the call of Jesus to follow Him as a disciple and to go into the rest of the world to make other disciples. Are there specific areas where you know that He is calling you to specifically obey that call? Write a prayer in response to His call, and don't be afraid to honestly wrestle with His call.

Notes and Prayers:

The Battle

Scripture to Read: Mark 8:27 – 9:13

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, teach me to live using the full armor you offer me.”

Now that Jesus has conquered sin, death, and hell, it's all smooth sailing for the children of God, right? You might think so... but you'd be wrong. If we are followers of Jesus, the Scriptures are clear that we've been given the new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17) that was promised in the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33). However, we still live in a broken world, we still have a sinful nature that is at work within us, and we still have an active enemy that is seeking to destroy all he can before his ultimate destruction. The apostle Paul was well aware of each of these realities, and throughout his letters to various New Testament churches, he addresses them.

The World

Paul spends several chapters in his letter to the church at Corinth counseling them about the temptations and distractions that are at work in the world around them. They wrestled, much as we do today, with a culture of sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5 and 6:12-20), materialism and greed (1 Corinthians 6:1-11), marriage, divorce, and sexuality (1 Corinthians 7), a preponderance of idols, questions of what foods and drinks were appropriate for believers (both in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9), and the ever present temptation toward pride (1 Corinthians 10:12). Paul doesn't deny these as very real temptations for the believer! What is his response?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 10:13.

- *What does Paul ask us to do as believers when faced with temptation?*

- *What does he promise that God will do when we are faced with temptation?*

The Flesh

It's very comforting to me that the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest figures in the history of Christianity, seemingly wrestled with his flesh through the majority of his life, if not all of it. His letter to Christians in Rome was written near the end of

his life, and it contains some very honest wrestling with the flesh in which Paul seemingly found himself entrenched.

Read Romans 7:15-23.

He records for us an internal battle that, if we're honest, is far too common in our experience as followers of Jesus. We know what we should do and we know what we definitely should not do. And yet, we find ourselves in the middle of doing the very thing that we shouldn't do!

Paul's answer to the dilemma is threefold:

- *Remember that we are not condemned if we are in Christ. (Romans 8:1)* We may find ourselves struggling with the flesh and even losing at times, but we are still not bound to the law of sin and death because of the sacrifice of Jesus.
- *We should set our minds on the Spirit, not on the flesh. (Romans 8:6)* We've been given the Spirit which works in opposition to our flesh, and Paul encourages us to dwell on the things of the Spirit, where there is life, not on the things of the flesh, which bring death.
- *We need to trust the Spirit to intercede for us, and then to fight on our behalf. (Romans 8:26-37)* Paul's reminder is that God is working on our behalf, because it was Him that chose us in the first place, and He is in the process of making us like Him in His glory. Therefore, we can trust Him, and when the flesh rises up, we press back into the Spirit and trust His power that is at work in us.

While these answers don't eliminate the struggle, they do give perspective to the fight. Our failures are never fatal, and the end of the story is rich with the victory of Jesus.

The Devil

Paul recognizes that there is an evil world all around us, and that our flesh is still battling within us. But he also recognizes that the battle is an intensely spiritual one. Near the end of his letter to the Ephesians, he encourages the believers there to be “strong in the Lord and the in the strength of His might” so that they might “stand against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:10-11)

Read Ephesians 6:12-18.

- *Who/what does Paul say our battle is primarily against?*

- *What is his advice for such a battle to those who are in Christ? (vs. 11 and 13)*

It's vitally important for us to remember that our battle isn't primarily against flesh and blood, but primarily against the devil and his cosmic powers. When we try to wage a spiritual battle with physical weapons, we will always come up on the losing end! Instead, he calls us to take up six distinct spiritual weapons, and through those weapons, engage the battle.

1. *Belt of Truth*—Paul begins with the belt because it holds everything else together, just as the truth of the gospel holds everything in place for the believer. The important distinction in beginning with truth is that the gospel of Jesus “isn't true because it works; it works because it's true.”¹³
2. *Breastplate of Righteousness*—The breastplate protects the heart and the most vital organs, therefore, it's a vital piece of armor. The righteousness we are armed with isn't a righteousness of our own, but Jesus' righteousness, which we can only gain by faith. (Philippians 3:9)
3. *Shoes ready with the gospel of peace*—The gospel of peace is both our sure footing and the message that we are constantly prepared to proclaim. In both ways, our spiritual “shoes” are made of the “leather” of the gospel.

¹³ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, (WJK, Louisville, KY, 2002.), pg. 74.

4. *Shield of Faith*—The Roman shield that Paul would have had in mind was a large, rectangular metal shield that both protected the front of the soldier and could be hoisted over the soldier’s head to create a “protective ceiling.”¹⁴ In the same way, our faith in Jesus and His work for us at the cross forms a shield of protection around us when we are under the attack of the enemy.
5. *Helmet of Salvation*—The helmet was perhaps the most important piece of equipment, protecting the head which would stick out over the shield in battle. The knowledge of salvation, knowing that ultimate victory has been won and the ultimate foe conquered, is a great protection against the attack of the enemy.
6. *Sword of the Spirit*—The final weapon is the only truly offensive weapon given to the believer: The Word of God. The sword Paul had in mind was a *machaira*, a short sword that would be involved in a close personal encounter.¹⁵ Our knowledge and use of the Word of God, both written and experientially known, has the ability to defeat the enemy.

Tim Keller rightly reminds us that each of these items has been won for us through Christ, but must be

...personally appropriated for daily life... At the end of the passage, Paul comes out of the metaphor and says, ‘And pray in the Spirit on all occasions...be alert and always keep on praying.’ You can’t get more basic than this. Prayer is the way that all the things we believe in and that Christ has won for us actually become our strength. Prayer is the way that truth is worked into your heart to create new instincts, reflexes, and dispositions.¹⁶

There are two primary truths that we need to remember when we face the battle:

- First, *we are fighting for our joy*. This isn’t a matter of simply behaving rightly because Jesus said so—this is literally a matter of choosing the way that leads to life or the way that leads to death in hundreds of little choices every day. When we fight well and find ourselves victorious over the world, our flesh, and the devil, we also have deep joy and peace through Christ. When we give

¹⁴ Herschel Hobbs, *New Men in Christ*, (Word, Waco, TX, 1974.), pg. 124.

¹⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, TBST (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL., 1979.), pg. 282.

¹⁶ Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*, (Dutton, New York, NY, 2014.), pg. 131.

Notes and Prayers:

Living Free

Scripture to Read: Mark 9:14-50

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, fill me with Your Holy Spirit."

We began this step by looking at the grand declaration of Paul to the church in Galatia: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) We've looked at who we are because of Jesus, the grand narrative of the Bible and the story that it tells of Jesus coming to secure our freedom, and the battle that still rages all around us. We've seen lots of the individual pieces, but the question still remains: How do we live in the freedom that Jesus has bought for us?

Forgiving as those who are forgiven

During the "Conversations with God" section of *Step One: Foundation*, we looked briefly at Jesus' prayer that He taught the disciples to pray, and the odd sentence that we find in it: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) If we'll allow ourselves to listen with fresh ears to this familiar prayer, I think we're all a bit surprised that we're praying for forgiveness that seems to be conditional upon us forgiving others! The disciples must have had a similar reaction as Jesus was teaching them to pray, because He immediately explained and reiterated that section of the prayer: "For if you forgive others their trespasses (or sins), your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15)

As in many other places in the New Testament, Jesus is describing a test, or a marker, of whether or not we have understood and appropriated the gospel, and therefore, have truly been forgiven. If we have received forgiveness, we will also freely forgive others. If we are confident of the forgiveness that we will receive through faith in Christ, we will be quick to forgive others of their offenses toward us. Most of all, if we understand how desperately we are in need of forgiveness as a sinful person before a holy God, it will be much more reasonable for us to offer forgiveness to someone else, one sinner to another.

However, we must remember that forgiveness and trust are not the same thing. In many different counseling situations, I have walked with men and women who have been badly hurt by a loved one who has sinned grievously against them. As they process the pain caused by this sin, I will always eventually counsel them in

the need to forgive. However, particularly in situations where the relationship is ongoing, I will be quick to assure them that their forgiveness does not necessarily mean that they are ready to trust that person again. Trust, once broken, must be earned back over time. Forgiveness, however, cannot be earned—it must be given as a gift.

That gift, however, isn't just for the person that we're forgiving; it's even more importantly for us. Joel Comiskey says it this way: "Forgiving someone else is actually doing ourselves a favor. It releases us from pain, hurtful memories, and anger. Living with bitterness tears holes in our soul."¹⁷ He continues: "The actual Greek word "forgive" means to send away, to liberate, to cancel. When you forgive, you recognize the pain the sin caused. You calculate what the other person has taken from you. But then you must mentally release the person."¹⁸

Forgiveness in no way says that the offense is no big deal. On the contrary, if it was no big deal, it wouldn't be worth the time spent on it. Rather, because it's such a big deal, it's worth working through a process and coming to a point of being able to forgive. There are times that this process requires a gifted counselor to work through the pain and hurt in order to truly forgive. In such instances, following that process is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of incredible strength.

There are times that the most difficult people to forgive are the two that are least logical to us: ourselves and God.

When we've done some terribly wrong, we can live in the guilt and shame of those actions for years and years. The event may have long since passed and the consequences of the event have been paid and forgotten, but we find ourselves still living with incredible guilt. It's at times like this that it's important to remember who God is and who we are. Many people say to me: "I know God forgives me, but I just can't forgive myself!" There's a significant logical whole in that argument. If God, the perfect Judge of the entire universe and the One from Whom our sense of justice is derived, finds it appropriate and just for the sin that

¹⁷ Joel Comiskey, *Encounter!*, (CCS Publishing, Moreno Valley, CA., 2007.), pg. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

we've committed to be placed on Jesus on the cross and forgiven in Him, who are we to argue otherwise? When we do so, we effectively place ourselves over Him as the ultimate judge, and say by our action that the sacrifice of Jesus is not sufficient for our sin. It's not easy, but allowing the forgiveness of Jesus to permeate us so deeply that we are able to forgive ourselves is vitally necessary to live free in Christ.

God, of course, cannot sin nor do anything "wrong," so it seems odd to say that we sometimes need to "forgive" Him. However, there are times that, from our perspective, God has acted (or failed to act) in a way that seems to us to be unjust. Even though we logically know that God is not wrong, we also can't hide our thoughts and emotions from Him. (Psalm 139:2-4) By holding onto the perceived injustice, we subconsciously separate ourselves from God because we feel as though He has betrayed our trust. It's in these instances that a prayerful mediation on Isaiah 55 can be helpful, particularly vs. 6-9:

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:6-9, ESV)

Breaking Strongholds

The term "stronghold" is used often in Scripture. At times, it is used very positively, speaking of the Lord: "The Lord is a *stronghold* for the oppressed, a *stronghold* in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:9) But it can also be used with negative connotations: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have the divine power to demolish *strongholds*." (2 Corinthians 10:4) Literally, *stronghold* just means a heavily fortified place, as in a battle.

When there were strongholds in ancient lands, the entire land might have been conquered by an invading army, but the strongholds were still in the control of the conquered foe. In the same way, strongholds of sin can remain in our lives far past the time that we have been "conquered" by Christ and have relinquished

control of our lives to Him. Things like bitterness, anger, habitual sins like pornography and drunkenness, gossip, and the like can hold control over areas of our lives for many years if we don't deal with them intentionally.

Thankfully, God has not left us helpless to these powers, but has given us the authority of Jesus as His children to come against these strongholds. Consider the context of the verse above:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have the divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

In Christ, we are not the victims of these strongholds, but rather, we are able to take authority over them, demolishing them and taking every thought captive to obedience in Christ. The question is: How do we do this?

We must first identify the strongholds that we have in our lives. This is a prayerful process of identifying root sins and brokenness through illumination of the Holy Spirit in prayer. As we talk to Jesus about the strongholds in our lives, He will often bring to mind specific areas that we need to deal with. A few areas where strongholds often appear are a good place to start: deception and false beliefs, addictive behaviors and habitual sin, sexual immorality and deviances, prideful behavior, and specific curses that have been spoken over your life. It can often be helpful to walk through each of these areas with the "Paul" that's in your life, and ask them to prayerfully help you identify the potential strongholds.

Once you have an idea of where strongholds might be, it's best to find a prayer partner, mentor, or pastor who is willing to pray with you. There are two reasons for this: first, deeds of the darkness that remain in the dark have some power, but when they are brought into the light, their power is gone. (Ephesians 5:11-14) Secondly, strongholds are often not simply physical behaviors, but they are often spiritual as well. Therefore, while God knows your every thought (Psalm 139:2), Satan and his demonic cohort do not. Praying out loud and taking the authority that we are given as believers in Jesus' Name holds great power to break these strongholds. Therefore, praying these prayers from Scripture out loud with

another person is the best way to utilize the divine power that you've been given through Christ to demolish strongholds.

With a prayer partner, pray out loud a prayer that is similar to the following:

Lord Jesus, you desire that I would not let sin reign in my mortal body so that I would obey its evil desires, but rather, that I would live free from sin through Christ. I therefore bring before you the stronghold of _____, and I declare it destroyed in Jesus' Name. I pray that you would smash any controlling images or bondages that tie me to this sin, because where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. I declare, through the power of Jesus, that I am free today. Amen.

Continue to pray this prayer, out loud, over each stronghold in your life. Your prayer partner will likely offer you words of reassurance or encouragement as you pray or after you are finished. Trust God to do His work so that you can live free!

Being filled with the Spirit

Every disciple of Jesus has been given the Holy Spirit. Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, and the new has come!" However, it's also clear from Scripture that we can be followers of Jesus but not be filled with the Spirit. Paul, writing to the Christians at Ephesus, declared: "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) and "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." (Ephesians 4:1) Both of these declare the salvation of those Paul is writing to in the past tense. However, later in the letter, he writes: "Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18) In our modern context, many fixate on the first part of the verse, but Paul is simply using the example of wine because its properties were clearly known to his listeners. His point was the latter half of the verse: "Be filled with the Spirit." This command is not stated as a past event, as the references to the salvation of the Ephesians are, but in the present imperative tense¹⁹, indicating that they not only needed to do it now, but they needed to *be filled continually with the Spirit*.

¹⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, Pillar NTC*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI., 1999.), pg. 391.

As disciples of Jesus, if we are to live in the freedom and with the power that He has promised us, we need to be filled with the Spirit. There are times in our life where God may fill us without us specifically asking, but most of the time, God desires that we ask Him to fill us. He desires for us to thirst for His Spirit (John 7:37), and out of that thirst, to ask. Jesus makes it clear to us in Luke 11:

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:11-13, ESV)

The examples that Jesus uses might sound a bit strange to our modern ears, but His point is clear—our Father delights to give us the Holy Spirit when we ask for it!

Questions for Application:

- Take some time to look back over this section on forgiveness, strongholds, and being filled with the Spirit. Are there specific things that you know that you need to do in response to these things? Write down an action plan of when and how you will do them.

- What are the things that keep you from living in freedom as Jesus intends for you to live? Bring those things before Him specifically, and ask Him to show you how to step into the freedom He desires for you.

- Take some time to review not only this last section, but the entire “Freedom” section. What things stood out to you? What are some key things that you need to remember? Write a prayer below asking Jesus to seal these truths to your heart and to lead you into a life of freedom in Christ.

Notes and Prayers:

Action Step #2: Joining a Group

Unlike the culture of Jesus' day, we live in an individualistic culture. On top of that reality, we tend to be resistant to making any kind of significant commitment, for fear that something better might come up, or that we might not be able to

follow-through on our commitment. The intersection of these two cultural realities has left hundreds and thousands of Christians with far less support, encouragement, and power than is available to them.

At York Alliance Church, our LIFE groups are far from perfect. They are simply communities of people who, together, are seeking to work out the gospel in their daily lives, support one another as disciples, and impact the world around them. Each group has its own personality, which means it has its own unique strengths and weaknesses. *There is not, nor will there ever be, the perfect group for you or for anyone else.* The reality of community is that it's rarely convenient, mostly frustrating, often undesirable, and deeply necessary for our journey with Jesus. If you're already a part of a LIFE group, you resonate with these realities. Maybe you've been a part of a group in the past, but have stepped out for various reasons—this would be a perfect time to step back in. Consider talking to a friend that's connected to a group and asking about visiting that group, or contact one of the pastoral staff and they can get you in touch with a group that might be a good fit.

It may be that you recognize that you're not ready for a LIFE group at this time. For all that LIFE groups have to offer, they are not counseling services, they are not support groups, and they aren't ideal for crisis intervention. If you recognize that you need to work through some issues from the past, addictions, habitual sin patterns, or deep unforgiveness, it may be that Redemption Group is a better first step for you. Redemption Groups are gender specific groups that walk through the gospel as it relates to specific areas of brokenness, with the goal of bringing victory and redemption to that area of your life. If that sounds like a better fit for you at this point in your journey, contact the York Alliance Church office, and they can let you know when the next group is set to begin.

Pause and Reflect

As you complete *Step Two: Freedom*, take a few minutes to look back at each of the sections. What has God called you to do? What action steps do you need to take to put these things into place? What resources are needed for these things to

become a reality? Think back through the journey and summarize what you've learned and what your next steps need to be below.

Identity in Christ

Story of the Old Testament, Part 1

Story of the Old Testament, Part 2

Story of Jesus

The Battle

Living Free

A Note to the Reader after the completion of *Step Two: Freedom*

First of all, congratulations on making it through the first two steps of this process! I pray that you've found helpful information, and that you are more equipped to truly follow Jesus than you were before you began.

The first two steps, Foundation and Freedom, speak to the necessary elements that we each must have in place as individuals to be able to truly follow Jesus. While there are many references to the need for others to be a part of our journey with us, these first two steps are very focused on our personal journey with Christ. At this point in the process, we will begin to look outside of ourselves into the world around us, and begin the slow and steady growth into maturity in Christ. These are the purposes for which we were created, and there's great joy and excitement in that process!

However, I would encourage you, before you continue, to look back at the first two steps and be certain that you have not just *read* and *understood* the material, but that you've *acted on it* as well. As has been mentioned previously in this study, the New Testament writer James is quite direct about us not simply hearing the Word of God in order to gain information or to complete a process; we are called to *do* the Word as well. (James 1:22-25) If you have been moving through this material quickly, this might be a good place to pause and to go back and revisit some of the concepts in the first two steps. You will, obviously, not reach perfection in any of these areas, so waiting until perfection to proceed would be a vain exercise. However, it is important to move forward having the solid footing of the first two steps in place.

If you're uncertain about whether you're ready to proceed, have a conversation with your "Paul" that is accompanying you in this journey. If you don't have a "Paul," this would be the time to find one! Once you together determine that it's time to move forward with the next step, continue on the journey! There is great joy that lies ahead.

Step Three: Follow

From the outset, Jesus' call is that we are to "follow" Him. (Mark 1:17) His purpose in our following, however, goes far beyond our own individual lives: "...and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17b) God has designed us to make an impact on the world around us! Eugene Peterson, quoting the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, called the path of discipleship "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction." We won't arrive at our destination overnight, but through a steady pursuit, we will ultimately get there. Along the way, we will find great blessings as we serve those around us, lead others into the faith and toward maturity in Christ, and sense God's heart for the world developing within. Jesus said that the *gate* is narrow and that few will find it (Matthew 7:14). However, He doesn't describe the road itself as narrow—just hard! While there were many commonalities in all of our journeys through the first two steps, we will now start to see great variation in the road that we each walk toward maturity in Christ. Despite the variety, this step is all about the consistent "markers," or values, that will show up in each of our journeys over and over again. In the midst of the great variety on the paths we each walk, these markers establish the rhythm of being filled up, being transformed, and being poured out. It's vital for each of us to find our own rhythm in our growth toward maturity so that we might maintain that long obedience in the same direction.

The Church

Scripture to Read: Mark 10:1-52

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, help me to value Your church as You do.”

In the “Need for Community” section of *Step One: Foundation*, we talked a bit about the local church and the need that we each have to be connected to the church. That section was largely focused on the need that we have for the church, as well as the call in the Scriptures for us to be connected to a local church. However, there’s another side to the story...

Every Member a Minister

As the nation of Israel, following Moses, approached the base of Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19, God spoke to them. Often lost in all of the preparations to encounter God and the giving of the law is a phrase that God used to describe those who would follow Him. Read Exodus 19:5-6.

- *What are the three things that God called the nation of Israel?*

- *Think about each one of those phrases. Do any of them surprise you? Why?*

The fact that God saw Israel as a “treasured possession,” while profound, had already been demonstrated by the incredible lengths to which He went in order to free them from their slavery in Egypt. The idea of a “holy nation” might be a bit difficult to understand—holiness isn’t a characteristic that we have much experience with, in that it’s a character trait that’s unique to God Himself. However, a nation that is called by God and identified by the One who is the only “holy” being in the universe, might well be called a “holy nation.”

But a “kingdom of priests?” Priests were those who, by their calling and vocation, acted as the “connect point” between God and man. They would serve people as an extension of God, acting as His voice, face, hands, and feet on the earth. They would also speak to God on behalf of the people, acting as their representative

before a holy God. It was a somewhat specialized and unique calling—what could God mean that Israel would be a *kingdom* full of priests?

Many centuries later, after Jesus ascended to heaven and the church was established, the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians that had been exiled to various places in southwest Asia. His description of these believers is strongly reminiscent of God's words at Sinai:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Each of these precious believers was chosen, made holy, they belong to God, and they have received mercy. And they are *royal priests*. Every one of them.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, brings some clarity:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16 ESV)

Paul makes it clear that pastors and leaders are given by God in order to *equip* the saints, so that we *all* might do the work of ministry! And it's through that ministry that the entire body grows up into maturity. So what does that look like?

Bearing One Another's Burdens

The idea of each one of us as followers of Jesus being ministers of the gospel can feel intimidating. Not all of us are called to teach, preach, develop new ministry

paradigms, or lead weekend retreats. However, we are each called to do ministry in some way.

Read Galatians 6:1-2.

- *What are we called to do for one another in the body of Christ?*

Ministry doesn't need to be complex. It doesn't need to be intimidating. Ministry to one another can be as simple as really getting to know one another, and then helping one another carry the burdens we each have in our lives. You may feel as though you don't have all the answers—but can you really listen? Are you willing to get a little “messy” as you get involved in someone else's life, and then trust God to give you what you need as you walk with them? Are you willing, at that point, to be equipped by those that God has gifted to equip us so that we can do the work of the ministry to which He's called us?

Unfortunately, through the professionalization of ministry in the last 50 years, there has been a shift in thinking within the church. The “minister” is someone that is hired by the “members” to do the work of the ministry, and everyone else, or at least most of us, are simply called to attend. However, there's no biblical precedent for that way of operating as the church! Rather, the Bible is clear that *every disciple of Jesus is needed* in order for the church to fulfill its God-given responsibility. There can be no spectators.

Francis Chan says it well: “The moment you begin to believe that your church can be healthy while you sit on the sidelines, you have given up on God's plan of redemption.”²⁰ God has called each of us, in our specific situation, to be an integral part of what He's doing through the local church. It's only through all of us working together that we can grow into maturity. (Ephesians 4:13)

Known by our Love

In Galatians 6:2, Paul states that we should “bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” What law is he talking about and why is it so important?

²⁰ Francis Chan, *Multiply*, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO., 2012), pg. 62.

Read John 13:34-35.

- *What is the new commandment that Jesus gives to His disciples?*

- *Why is fulfilling this command so important?*

God hasn't simply designed us to be redeemed as individuals, but to be a redeemed community that models the love and grace of Jesus to the world around us. He was insistent to his disciples that they were to love and serve one another, and they should be known by that love. In fact, as Jesus prayed in the garden before His arrest, He prayed specifically for us, as those who would believe through the testimony and ministry of His disciples. Here is what He prayed:

I do not ask for these only [the disciples], but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, *so that the world may believe that you have sent me*. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23 ESV)

The greatest testimony to the reality of Jesus and His sacrifice for us is the unity of the body of Christ and the love that we have for one another. This means, of course, that we need to live our lives in view of the world around us! Our "unity" can't simply be lived out behind the walls of church buildings on Sunday mornings and in one another's living rooms one evening a week—we are called to be "salt and light" to impact the watching world! (Matthew 5:13-16)

Questions for Application:

- Do you take the body of Christ as seriously as God does? Why or why not?

- What are some practical things that you can do to express love for those in the church around you and to “bear one another’s burdens?” Be specific!

- What needs to change in your life in order for the community of faith to hold the priority in your life that it should? What needs to change in the way that we live as the church in order for the world to see the love we have for one another? Write a prayer asking God to lead you and your community within

the church to make the necessary changes so that you might reflect His love to the world around you.

Notes and Prayers:

Filling Up

Scripture to Read: Mark 11:1-26

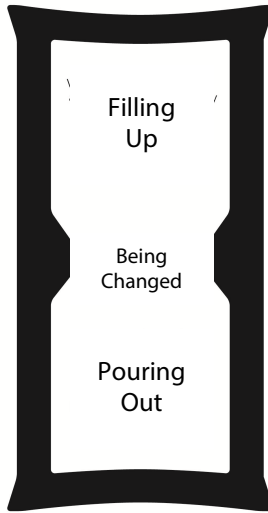
Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, may I encounter You throughout my life today."

For many of us, visual images can help take concepts and move them from information to real understanding. Discipleship was always that sort of concept to me—I had the cognitive knowledge of what a process of discipleship was like, but I had a tough time really understanding it and explaining it to others. I knew there needed to be an aspect of encountering God, gaining information, and learning to see my life through His eyes. I also knew there was a mysterious aspect to the discipleship process that I had very little control over—there were times where God just changed me and moved me forward in my journey. Finally, I knew that there was an active aspect to discipleship where I actually needed to live out the things that I was learning, so that love for God always translated to love for people. Teresa of Avila, in her work *The Interior Castle*, makes this statement: “Here in our religious life the Lord asks of us only two things: love of His Majesty and love of neighbor... The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbor.”²¹

The informational pieces of the discipleship process were somewhat clear to me, but I didn’t feel like I *understood* it. It was then a friend and Elder within our church suggested the image of an hourglass. The top portion of the hourglass represented the environment in which we encounter Jesus—through our worship, the community of other believers, and through His Word. The center of the hourglass represented those transformational encounters with Him, where He generates something new in us by His Spirit at work in us. And the bottom of the hourglass represented those things that have been generated in us being poured out for the sake of the world around us—first to the church, and then to the local and global community.²² When the cycle was over, just like with an hourglass, it’s turned over and everything starts again. Now the pieces finally made sense!

²¹ Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, *The Interior Castle Study Edition*, (ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 2010.), Kindle location 2805.

²² All of these ideas are expounded upon in much more detail in my book *Follow Me: Discipleship That Moves Us*. While a brief overview is presented in this material, reading the whole book will give a much better picture of the entire hourglass model and how best to engage it as a disciple.



Using this image as a model, I'd like for us to consider the process of being filled up by Jesus, being changed by Him, and being poured out into the world as a model for our journey with Him—a cycle that repeats again and again and again throughout our lives on earth. By evaluating each area, we are able to consider the possible pitfalls and shortcomings in our own spiritual journeys, and see areas where we need to focus our attention so we will continue to grow.

Elements of the Top of the Hourglass

There are three primary elements that we can look for in the top of the hourglass—worship, community, and the Word.

- *Lifestyle of Worship*—Worship must move beyond a musical expression or emotional response within a church gathering. Worship biblically is the connection of every aspect of our life to that which God is doing in the world around us. (Romans 12:1-2) Our singing, praying, reading, and declaring in worship gatherings prepare our hearts for worship through working, loving, relating, serving, and engaging the world around us.
- *Authentic Community*—One of the deepest needs that we have is to love others and be loved by them. However, when we either pretend to be something we're not or hide our lives from those around us, we can no

longer truly experience that love because we know that the “person” being loved doesn’t really exist. We need to be engaged in communities where we can be honest and transparent about our lives, and through that community, we can encounter the unconditional love of God.

- *Foundation of the Word*—The Word of God is both the written Scriptures (Psalm 119:105) and the person of Jesus (John 1:1). This Word is the only solid foundation on which we can build our lives. We engage the person of the Word through the written Word, and it is through the Word that the person of the Word teaches us, reproves us, corrects us, and trains us. (2 Timothy 3:16)

At any given time, our lives may resonate more with one of these values than another, but all three of them make up the environment in which we encounter God.

Potential Pitfalls

While these values seem somewhat straightforward, there are some key ways that we can get off track in the top portion of the hourglass.

Tunnel vision is what I’m calling the pitfall of focusing on one value to the detriment of the others. While there may be one that resonates more with us than others, either consistently or during specific phases of our journey with Christ, all three values are vitally important. By focusing solely on one as the way that we will always encounter God, we’ll miss the breadth of relational and emotional opportunities He is inviting us into. Rather than focusing solely on the value that comes most easily to you, it’s best to actively invest in the values that are typically the weakest for you. Through this process, you’ll broaden your spiritual experience, and in doing so, find yourself encountering God more often and in a variety of different ways.

Closely related to tunnel vision is the *one trick pony*. Instead of focusing on just one of the values, now the focus is on one specific form of engaging each of the values. I’m drawn into worship through a certain type of music in a certain type of environment, and can’t seem to engage my worshipping heart through any other

format. I find myself truly entering into late night, emotional conversations about my heart, but struggle to be transparent during a morning coffee meeting. I encounter God through His Word—particularly with the aid of a specific devotional book or at a specific time of the day. Of course, preference is a normal and healthy part of our spiritual journey, but we always need to be careful that our focus is Jesus Himself, not the form by which we seek to engage Him.

Finally, one of the pitfalls to which the top of the hourglass is especially susceptible is *going through the motions*. Hang around the church long enough, and just about anyone can figure out what the most “spiritual” people are “supposed” to be doing. Hands raised during worship, the well-timed “mmm-hmm” and “amen” and even “hallelujah” during prayer, the emotional but vague heart sharing in a cell group that doesn’t actually say anything, the appropriate kind of quiet time, complete with well-timed mentions of “In my reading this morning, I came across...” Again, these things aren’t necessary bad in and of themselves—there are times that they are deeply genuine. However, we each need to guard our hearts against simply doing what we know we should do without actually engaging our spirits. When we find ourselves in that position, it’s time to get honest before God and a trusted accountability partner or mentor and ask God for a renewed passion for Him.

Engaging the top of the hourglass

It’s in the top of the hourglass that our hearts and spirits are filled up by God. When we’re weary, dry, or simply not sure where to turn, the top of the hourglass is the place to go. It’s important for us to press against the pitfalls through intentional engagement of the values that are most difficult for us, venturing outside our comfort zones in the ways we engage these values, and practicing these values in private just as much as we do in public, so we are able to be completely honest before God.

- Think about the way you currently engage the lifestyle of worship, authentic community, and the foundation of the Word. What action steps can you take to strengthen your time in the top of the hourglass? Write a prayer asking God to guide you in this process.

Notes and Prayers:

Being Changed

Scripture to Read: Mark 11:27 – 12:12

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, transform me increasingly into Your likeness.”

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is found in Isaiah 55. The prophet uses a metaphor that captures my imagination:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. (Isaiah 55:10-13, ESV)

The passage captures my imagination because God through Isaiah is speaking about the essence of transformation. Thorn becomes cypress; brier becomes myrtle. Author and counselor Paul Tripp says is this way:

If you have a little thornbush in your backyard and it's nourished by the snow and rain, what do you expect to get? The obvious answer is a bigger thornbush. *But not so with the Word of God*; when this rain falls on the thornbush it actually becomes something organically different! When the Word of God, faithfully taught by the people of God and empowered by the Spirit of God, falls down, people become different. The ultimate purpose of the Word of God is not theological information but heart and life transformation.²³

I love the idea that God, through His Word empowered by His Spirit, is producing something organically different in us! We are sinful at birth and by genetic code (Ephesians 2:3, Romans 3:11-12), but God is producing in us love and joy and peace and the like. (Galatians 5:22-23) How great is that!

²³ Paul Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, (Crossway, Wheaton, IL., 2012.), pg. 51.

That's the essence of the center of the hourglass—that God is doing something *in* us that's not primarily *of* us.

Prayer is the First Work

At the end of our Vision Statement at York Alliance, we say that “In all of this, prayer is the first work.” What we mean by that statement is an acknowledgement that, while God has invited us into His work, He definitely doesn't need us, and without Him, there's nothing that we can do that makes any real impact. It's a statement of dependence and humility that we keep in front of us, but one that we rarely live up to. The reality is that we like to be in control of things; we like to be in charge. When Jesus is Lord, we're not... and that's our primary problem—not just before we come to the point of following Jesus, but every day following!

The center of the hourglass can be summarized by that single statement: Prayer is the First Work. There's a process of transformation that begins at conversion and continues until we're in heaven completely pure and holy before Him. Every time we truly encounter Jesus—or each time we pass through the hourglass—a little bit more transformation happens.

Potential Pitfalls

Of course, there are significant pitfalls possible when we talk about the center of the hourglass, and they can wreak havoc on our spiritual lives.

Fake transformation is obviously a significant pitfall. We know that we are supposed to love the people around us, so with all of *our* strength, we do. We know that we're supposed to have a heart for the world, so we engage mission work with our time, energy, and money, but we're not able to do it with our heart. I remember once talking with a young couple who felt that God was calling them to the mission field. However, as I observed their lives, they didn't love the people that God had placed right around them. Instead, they tended to be very focused on themselves and what they wanted, not what was best for the world. It was a difficult conversation to try to explain to them that God doesn't automatically give us a love for people on the plane as we cross the ocean—instead, He

transforms us right where we are. They had never intended to do it, but they had faked transformation.

Another pitfall that happens at the center of the hourglass is *passivity*. Because transformation doesn't come through our own effort, we simply sit back and wait for God to do something. It's absolutely true that transformation is solely the work of the Holy Spirit and that we can't generate it on our own; but that doesn't mean we can't ask for it! We're responsible, through the top of the hourglass elements, to put ourselves in a position to encounter God, and then to ask Him to change us. Two prayer stories come to mind—one, a historical account from the Old Testament, and the other, a parable that Jesus told.

Read 1 Kings 18:41-46 and Luke 18:1-18.

- *What is the common theme in these two passages?*

Another pitfall that we need to be careful to avoid is getting *stopped up*. The top of the hourglass, for many of us, is enjoyable and comfortable. Once we have been transformed by Jesus, we long to immediately get back to worship, community, and the Word. Of course, these things aren't bad, but we need to be very careful of spiritual gluttony. The work that God is doing in us is intended for the world around us! In the next section, we'll look at the elements that make up the bottom of the hourglass, but it's vitally important that we have somewhere for the transformation of Jesus to flow.

A final pitfall is simply *jumping the center*. Just as there are the inward, mystical types who can tend to get stopped up in the inward disciplines, there are also the all-action types. They move quickly from engaging in worship, community, and the Word to serving the world around them, running a hundred miles an hour in every direction all at one time. Being used by God to serve the world is a wonderful thing—but we need to make sure that we are truly being changed by God and called by Him to serve. Otherwise, we'll very quickly find ourselves worn out, burnt out, and disenfranchised with faith.

Engaging the Center of the Hourglass

As has already been stated, the center of the hourglass is God's work, not ours. We can't force His hand, but we can ask persistently for Him to work. It's our responsibility as disciples to follow Him, as He's called us to do, and ask Him to transform our hearts.

In the world that we live in, sometimes the most spiritual activity that any of us can do is to simply stop. Put the top down on the laptop, turn off the cell phone, turn off the television, stop binge watching Netflix, disconnect from social media and "being connected," and simply rest. Wait on Him. For many of us, if we're quiet enough, we may find that Jesus has been doing lots of work in our lives for some time, but we just haven't stopped long enough to recognize it.

Questions for Application:

- What are some of the ways that you've seen Jesus transform your life in the past? Are there specific areas in which you're asking Him to work now?

Notes and Prayers:

Pouring Out

Scripture to Read: Mark 12:13-34

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, use me as Your hands and feet in the world."

Possibly the greatest tragedy in modern evangelicalism is that we're bored. Of course, I don't mean that we're not busy—we're all quite busy. But we're not busy with anything of substance. We're busy catching up on the HBO series that we missed over the last few weeks. We're busy running our kids (or ourselves) from one activity to another, without ever engaging the people that are a part of those activities. We're busy with the latest gadget that will save us time, and of course, spending the hours and hours it takes to figure out how to use it. We're busy playing the latest version of the super-addictive game on our smart phone, completely consumed with the process of making the pixels on the screen move the right direction so that we can get more points than we got last time... and gain nothing, of course. Except, depending on how you read Jesus' words in Mark 8:36, we might be gaining enough of the world to be losing our soul.

We're busier than we've ever been, but we're bored. I call it a great tragedy because we have the opportunity to take part in truly life changing activity, if we'll simply lift our heads from our portable screens long enough to see it.

Read Ephesians 1:7-10.

- *What is the plan that God is working out in the "fullness of time?"*

- *Based on the first portion of this passage, who is invited to be a part of God's plan?*

- *Read Ephesians 2:10. What has God prepared for those of us who have been saved by grace?*

There is an incredible global movement happening, according to the Scriptures, whether or not we have eyes to see it. God is in the process of uniting all things in heaven and earth under the headship of Jesus—and we're invited into the process! Not sure how you could be a part of such a grand process? He's planned good works for you and I to do. We simply have to walk in them.

This is the message of the bottom of the hourglass—the God of the Universe has *something* for you to do. Actually, lots of somethings. So many somethings that you and I should never be bored again.

Elements of the bottom of the hourglass

The bottom of the hourglass can be described in lots of different ways. For these purposes, we'll look at serving, engaging mission, and bearing peace.

- *Serving the Body*—God has given every believer in Jesus at least one gift that is to be used for building up of the church and for the blessing of the world. The use of each of these gifts is necessary if the body of Christ is to grow into maturity. However, beyond the empowering and release of the gifts of the Spirit, there is simply a need to serve one another in basic ways within the body of Christ as Jesus did. When He washed feet (John 13:1-20), it wasn't because that was His spiritual gift or the best use of His time and energy—it was because He loved the Church. We must do the same.
- *Missional Living*—God is in the process of reconciling the world to Himself through Jesus, and we've been allowed a part in that process. Every aspect of our life is to be seen through the lens of this task. God in His sovereignty has established the times, positions, locations, and events of our daily living and has placed us within them in order to proclaim His truth. He has also entrusted us with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:15-20) for the lost world, and we must live sacrificially with that end in mind.
- *Shalom of the City*—The Hebrew concept of *shalom*, often translated peace, is one that reflects harmony, rhythm, and things being as they should be. This is the state that we find ourselves in as followers of Jesus—He has set our hearts at *shalom* through His sacrifice. We should not cloister ourselves within environments that we feel are safe and comfortable, but we should

bear that peace into the world around us as a counter-cultural force, bringing the shalom of Christ into every environment with which we are connected. We pray for the peace of Christ to reign in our communities, for we know that as they have peace, we will also have peace. (Jeremiah 29:7)

Potential Pitfalls

Again in the bottom of the hourglass, there are several pitfalls of which we need to be aware and guard against.

Perhaps the most common pitfall is what I'll call *sticking with the program*. While there is great value in participating with the planned and programmed activities that the church is putting together, that shouldn't be the limit of our bottom of the hourglass activity. There are two primary reasons for this. First, following a program that's designed by a larger organization doesn't take into account the specific ways that God is shaping and molding us in the center of the hourglass. While these things may sometimes align, that won't always be the case. Second, we are called to pour our lives out as a lifestyle, not a program. When we simply engage planned and programmatic opportunities, we miss the day to day and minute to minute opportunities to serve, bear peace, and live on mission.

Another pitfall is *either/or*. The call to serve the body of Christ is just as crystal clear in the Scriptures as the call to be on mission in the world. (See Ephesians 4:12, 1 Corinthians 12:22-26, 1 Timothy 5:8, etc.) We are all called both to the church and to the world. Of course, the degree to which we serve will necessarily look different—one who has the gift of evangelism should serve in small ways in the church while spending the majority of time in the world, which one who has the gift of shepherding would do the opposite. However, none of us are called solely to one or the other—we are called by Jesus to both.

A final pitfall is being a *bottom dweller*. Just as one of the great pitfalls of the center of the hourglass is to get stopped up and not flow out to the world, a pitfall of the bottom of the hourglass is to focus all of our energy outward without recognizing that Jesus is the source of our serving. Returning to the "prayer is the first work" concept, there is nothing that we are capable of doing that will make a

lasting impact in the world around us if it is not led and sponsored by the work of the Holy Spirit through us. As Ephesians 2:10 declares, it is *God* who has prepared the good works for us to do. If we stay in the bottom of the hourglass without taking appropriate time to be filled and be changed, we will quickly find ourselves serving in our own strength.

Engaging the bottom of the hourglass

As has been stated, there are many different ways to categorize these “outflow” activities. What is consistent, however, is that God has created us to glorify Him *and* to love others. Jesus was clear when He was asked about the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” But He quickly added: “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40) Serving the body may be as simple as looking for something in the church that needs to be done and doing it, or asking a pastor or leader if there’s something that you can do to serve. Living on mission may be traveling across the globe—but it may just as well be walking across the street and having a conversation with your neighbor about your faith. Bearing the peace of Jesus doesn’t usually require new activities, but simply a new recognition of the holiness of our mundane activities. Above all, when we understand why God has placed us in the world, we should never be bored.

Questions for Application:

- Which of the three values in the bottom of the hourglass is the strongest in your life? Which is the weakest? Why do you think that is?

Notes and Prayers:

Gifts and Serving

Scripture to Read: Mark 12:35-44

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, show me the gifts You've given and how to use them."

One of the most remarkable aspects of God is His useless, extravagant, beautiful creativity. It's useless because, at least in many cases, it serves no function. For example, God could have created us so that we would plug in at night to recharge and gain strength, or He could have made a gray, tasteless sludge that we ingest for energy. Instead, He made the color and taste explosion of the chicken and chorizo burrito! It's extravagant because it's so much more than necessary. The sun must "come up" and "go down" due to the rotation of the earth; but the incredible palate of colors that appears every morning and evening is so much more than is needed! And His creativity is beautiful because it all points us back to Him. (Romans 1:20)

The "grace-gifts"²⁴ given by His Spirit are just such creations. Some may argue with the term "useless," as they are specifically given for our use. However, when we understand that they are given to us, the redeemed "creatures" of God, by the ultimate Creator, they are useless in the sense that He could easily do anything that He's gifted us to do in an instant. They are extravagant in that they are far more than we deserve as broken sinners. They are beautiful because, when they are used joyfully in the context and for the purposes they are given, we experience great fulfillment and delight in what we are doing.

Nature of the Gifts

There are four primary listings of gifts in the New Testament. Look up each of the passages, and write a list of the gifts that you find in each of them:

Romans 12:6-8

²⁴ This term is coined through a literal translation of Romans 12:6 by Marva Dawn in *Truly the Community*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.), pg. 93.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

Ephesians 4:11

1 Peter 4:10-11

One of the great misunderstandings in the church is that we are supposed to “find our gift” and use it. Interestingly, there is no command of Scripture that calls us to “find” our gift or gifts. The plural (gifts) is most often implied, but they are clearly and simply just *given* to us. Even the word “having” found in Romans 12:6 is “in a continuing present participle form and thereby proclaims that we are in a constant state of having.”²⁵ We don’t need to work for them, search for them, or generate them—we simply have them as a gift of God’s grace.

Humble Usage of the Gifts

In Romans 12, Paul begins his writing on the gifts of the Spirit by reminding us to “not think of [ourselves] more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

²⁵ Marva Dawn in *Truly the Community*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.), pg. 93.

(Romans 12:3) He's insistent that we remember that every gift that we have is given by the grace of God, so they never point to our personal greatness. We need all of the gifts that He's given to us, and He's made us to be one body (locally as well as globally) so that we would have all of the different gifts that we need in order to fulfill the purposes to which He's called us.

But we're clearly called to *use* our gifts! This is the imperative of Romans 12:6: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let us use them.*" We don't need to go on a wild chase trying to uncover the gifts that we've been given, but we should live in a constant state of readiness and anticipation, planning to use that which God has given to us.

What gifts have I been given?

If we're not supposed to chase after our gifts so that we can "find" them, how are we to know which gifts that we've been given? There are several ways of determining gifts that are deficient and several others that are much more useful.

The two primary *deficient* methods of determining our spiritual gifts are (1) taking spiritual gifts tests and (2) finding our gifts on a spiritual gifts list or inventory.

Gift tests, while immensely popular, are deficient in several areas. First, they test our passion and proficiency in the areas with which we have experience, but have no way to test those things to which we've not been exposed. The simplest example is the gift of interpreting tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10). If a person has grown up in a tradition in which they've never heard someone speak in tongues, they will automatically test as not having that gift. However, they have no way of knowing what would happen in their Spirit if they were ever in an environment where they were exposed to someone speaking in tongues. A second deficiency of gifts tests is that they only test at a single point in time, within a single environment. However, our gifts seem to change in their strength and intensity, if not in their actual presence, depending on our situation and the ministry to which we've been called.

Many have combined the four “spiritual gift” passages above and created a list of the biblical gifts that are listed. This seems like a logical approach to determining what the gifts actually exist so that we can at least narrow down the potential options. The problem is that each of the four lists seem to either list gifts as representative of a much larger whole (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4) or as specific kinds of gifts that are given to leaders (Ephesians 4). There is really no evidence that the New Testament writers had any intention of creating a comprehensive listing of gifts.

While these methods have significant deficiencies, there are more useful tools that can be used to get an idea of the gifts that we’ve been given. A few such tools are (1) passions, (2) proficiency, (3) community and (4) needs.

Our individual passions are a great indication of our gifting, or at least of the gifts that are stating to develop in us. We can sometimes forget that the same Creator God that has lavishly given us “grace-gifts” has also woven together our personality and interests. (Psalm 139:13-16) Often, we’ll find ourselves drawn to the things that God is gifting us to do, and as we gain experience in those areas, discover our gifts are developing as well.

Similar to passions, we can also see our gifts by looking at our proficiencies. The areas in which we are gifted are often areas that we find we are able to do things better, easier, and more effectively than most of the others around us. This doesn’t mean that we won’t need to work at our gifts to develop a greater level of excellence, of course. Ray Stedman says this well: “It is called ‘grace’ because it is not a difficult, painful thing to do; it is something you delight in doing. And you can improve in it as you do it. Therefore it is one of the things that will make life interesting and fulfilling for you.”²⁶

The community around us is an incredibly useful tool when we are struggling to see the grace-gifts that God has given to us. Just as we can often miss details about our own homes because we’re simply too “used to it,” at times we can miss the gifts in our own life due to over-familiarity. However, those who truly know us

²⁶ Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory, Vol. 2: Reveling in God's Salvation* (Multnomah Press, Portland, OR, 1978.), pg. 113.

and love us are able to see things that we might easily miss. A cell group filled with people that you are seeing week in and week out will quickly be able to point out areas in which you are strong, where you seem to experience joy, and where God seems to particularly bless the work you do.

Finally, our gifts can be exposed simply by the need of the church, community, or world around us. One of the gifts that I've had the privilege of operating within over the years is the leadership and development of children and teens through coaching youth sports. Prior to stepping into the role of coach for the first time, I didn't have any particular passion for youth sports. (In fact, if I'm being honest, I had a bit of disdain!) I had never done it before, so I hadn't demonstrated any proficiency, and there really wasn't anyone who knew me that was suggesting that it would be a great usage of the limited amount of "free" time I had in my life. However, there was a need on my daughter's team, so I stepped in to fill that need. Along the way, I found an area of great passion, proficiency, and one that is now recognized as an area of gifting by many in my community. However, if the need hadn't been there and if I hadn't been willing to step into that need, it might have been a gift that went unnoticed and unused.

The gift of finances

One gift that we've each been given, to one degree or another, is the gift of our material resources: Money! It may surprise you to know that Jesus talked quite a bit about money. In fact, he talked about money more than heaven and hell *combined!* Depending on how they are counted, Jesus told between 32 and 46 parables—and 11 of them directly spoke to issue of finances! While this is not the place to address the area of finances in depth²⁷, it's vitally important to consider a subject on which Jesus spent so much time.

The church has always understood one of the ways that we are to spend our lives and our resources is as a generous blessing to those around us. The Levitical law provided for the poor through leaving portions of the harvest in the fields so they could be "gleaned" by those who couldn't afford land or food (Leviticus 19:9-10).

²⁷ Mark Allen Powell's book *Giving to God* is an excellent starting point for understanding the impact of finances and generosity on our lives as disciples of Jesus.

The Israelite people were also expected to give a “tithe” (a portion equaling 10 percent) of their income to the priests and Levites in the temple (Numbers 18). In addition to the tithe, there were additional giving requirements throughout the Old Testament law, and they were extremely complex—as evidenced by Jesus rebuke of the careful tithing of the Pharisees, who had no regard for the poor and needy among them. (Matthew 23:23-24) However, there is very little mention of a specific percentage or amount that we are called to give in the New Testament. While the “tithe” has been maintained as a good benchmark for giving throughout the history of the church, it is clearly something that was not required within the new covenant.

How are we called to handle our finances as followers of Jesus?

- **We are called to be stewards.** We are not owners who get to determine how we will handle what we’ve been given; rather, God owns everything, and we are simply getting to manage what He’s given to us. (Psalm 24:1)
- **We are called to give generously and sacrificially.** Jesus modeled for us a giving that actually costs something, and we are called to do the same. (2 Corinthians 8:2-3, 9)
- **We are called to give regularly.** Giving should be a part of the regular rhythm of our lives, not something that we do only when it’s convenient or when we feel like it. (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- **We are called to give cheerfully out of our free will.** There is joy in giving because we recognize the blessing that comes from releasing our grip on our resources and being a blessing to others. (2 Corinthians 9:7)
- **We are called to give as a spiritual discipline.** Jesus told us that when we put our money somewhere, our heart will go that direction as well. Therefore, when we invest in the things of God financially, we find ourselves invested spiritually and emotionally as well. (Matthew 6:21)

Just as our talents are part of the “grace-gifts” that we’ve been given by God, our financial resources are as well. Learning to give generously is a key part of the path to maturity as a disciple of Jesus. Billy Graham said it concisely: “If a person gets his attitude toward money right, it will straighten out almost every other area in his life.”

Serving the Body and the world

We have been gifted by the grace of God “for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7) Basically, that just means that God gives us gifts so that we can make our local church, our local communities, and the world around us a better place. However, we must be willing to use them! In our modern culture, this will require us adding some discipline into our lives so that we are available to serve. Our schedules are always full, and the “to do” lists are never completed. We need to be willing to moderate that which we do for ourselves in order to focus more intentionally on the world around us.

For instance, some of us need to relax our standards of perfection in our homes or with our yards, flower beds, etc. A slight layer of dust or a few weeds might enable a ministry connection that would be otherwise impossible.

For others, this means limiting our time consuming various media—television, web surfing, social media, movies, magazines, books, etc. I’m constantly amazed when people tell me that they “don’t have time” to do a variety of different things, but are quickly ready to discuss the last season of the hit TV drama or are constantly re-posting on Facebook.

For still others, this may mean moderating the amount of work that we are willing to do within our vocations. While we are certainly called to work “with a good will as to the Lord and not to man” (Ephesians 6:7), that doesn’t necessarily entail 80 hours each week. Often, by being willing to sacrifice that next promotion or turn down that offer of overtime, we are able to maintain a sufficient level of income while greatly increasing our ability to serve the Lord.

In the useless, extravagant, beautiful creativity of God, He has gifted us each with an overflow of His Spirit. Paul declares in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” We simply need to open our eyes and step into that grace that He’s already laid out for us.

- Think about your life. What are some of the ways that God might be calling you to either use gifts that you already know about or explore areas of passion, proficiency, need, or those recommended by community? Think about how this might practically happen. Write a prayer asking God to direct you and use you as you serve Him.

Notes and Prayers:

A Rhythm of Life

Scripture to Read: Mark 13:1-37

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, meet me in the midst of my daily life today."

One of the most readily apparent things about the world around us is that there is a rhythm to it. Day is followed by night which is followed by day again. The days flow into weeks. Weeks flow into months, and several weeks match up with the slow and steady rhythm of the moon growing and shrinking and then growing again. Months flow into seasons—summer into fall, into winter, into spring, and then back into summer again. Twelve months and four seasons make a year, a cycle that's been on repeat for many thousand times thus far.

A Daily Rhythm

We don't have a ton of details from the life of Jesus, but we do see that He prioritized time with His Father. There's not enough detail in the Scriptures to determine exactly how that time was spent and how often He did it, but we know for sure that it happened.

Read Mark 1:35-38.

- *When and where does Jesus spend time with the Father?*

- *What is the result of that time spent?*

Coming out of a busy and wildly successful day, Jesus likely needed to be re-centered. This time with His Father drew Him back to the primary purpose of His coming (Mark 1:15), which He tells His new disciples. While Mark only records a handful of these quiet encounters with the Father (6:46 and 14:39 are the other references to Jesus at prayer), Luke presents Him at prayer during just about

every phase of His ministry. It's not at all a stretch for us to imagine that Jesus daily spent time with the Father, hearing from Him and recalling the purposes for which He had been sent.

Throughout Christian history, a daily rhythm of time spent with God has been a hallmark of disciples of Jesus. There are tons of ways that this time has been spent, and a great variety of stories and models that can be followed. Martin Luther famously spent hours each morning in prayer. St. Ignatius developed an Examen that is practiced at noon and at evening, reflecting on the work of God in the day. Modern devotionals such as "Our Daily Bread" and the popular "Jesus Calling" fall within this category as well.

While there is great variation to how daily time with God is spent, there are a few key elements that must be present:

- *The Word of God*—Despite the abundance of devotional works and great literature that has been produced over the centuries, nothing should replace the actual Scriptures in our daily time with God. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that God's Word is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of the soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) There's no replacement for the living and active Word in our lives.
- *Meditation*—The reading and study of the Word is highly valuable and should not be shortchanged. However, in addition to study, meditation on the Word is a consistent way in which the devotional giants of the past encouraged and modeled for us. Meditation is nothing more than a slow, prayerful reading, often with the same passage being read multiple times. Psalm 1 calls us into this practice: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of the mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2)
- *Prayer*—A developing conversation with God is the final key element that should be a part of our daily rhythm in our time with Him. Like every relationship, this involves both us speaking and us listening. As we looked at during *Step One: Foundation*, in the "Conversations with God" section, Jesus gave His disciples, and us, a model for this conversation in what we know as

“The Lord’s Prayer.” Meditation on the Word also will often lead us into prayer, giving us a healthy balance of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

These are elements that I would deem to be necessary for a strong daily rhythm with God. However, there are lots of additional elements that can be very helpful in developing this daily rhythm: worship music, journaling, devotional reading, walking, etc. The important thing is not which elements are used, what time of day this time occurs, or how long it takes—the important thing is that it works for you at the stage of life in which you’re currently living.

I think one of the reasons that we’re not given a lot of specifics about Jesus’ daily prayer life is because there is a significant level of personality involved. What works for one person may not work well for another person, and what works at one phase of life may not work well at another phase of life. For instance, when our children were very little, I struggled to have a morning devotional time because by the time I could drag myself out of bed, the kids were already awake. During that phase of life, I found the hour or so after the kids went to bed to be an ideal time to spend with the Lord. However, in recent years, as both the kids and I are getting a little older, they are sleeping a little later and my body clock is operational a bit earlier—and I’m finding those morning times to be perfect times of quiet fellowship with Jesus.

A Weekly Rhythm

It’s startling to me how quickly we disregard one of the most clear and basic commandments in Scripture. It’s one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and it’s reiterated to the nation of Israel again and again. Even the commands that we can’t seem to help but break at times (“Thou shall not bear false witness,” including little white lies, withholding the truth, and embellishing stories, anyone?) we at least still recognize as being wrong. However, in this instance, our crazy busy culture seems to actually *glorify* our blatant disobedience of Scripture!

What's the command? "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Exodus 20:8) In fact, take just a minute and read the following Scriptures regarding Sabbath:

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Exodus 31:14-17
- Exodus 34:21
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15

God couldn't have been clearer: Six days we work. On the seventh, we rest. That's the rhythm of how He designed life. However, our culture believes that we are the exception to God's rule. Mark Buchanan says it this way:

In a culture where busyness is a fetish and stillness is laziness, rest is sloth. But without rest, we miss the rest of God: the rest He invites us to enter more fully so that we might know Him more deeply. 'Be still and know that I am God.' Some knowing is never pursued, only received. And for that, you need to be still.²⁸

Beyond the biblical commands and exhortations, even secular sociologists are uncovering the value of a weekly Sabbath.²⁹ Our bodies, minds, and lives are designed for rest. Furthermore, as believers in an Almighty, personal, and active God, we must cease from our striving (a literal translation of Psalm 46:10) on a regular basis so that we remember that He's God and we're not.

Like our daily rhythm, there's great variety as to how we practice this rhythm. For most disciples, the Sabbath day will be Sunday. However, as a pastor, Sundays are quite full work days for me—therefore, my Sabbath is currently from Thursday evening until Friday evening each week. The point is not a specific day, but rather, a full 24-hour period every seven days is set apart for rest and honoring the Lord.

So what does "rest" look like? The gospels are full of the disputes that were happening in Jesus' day as the legalists tried to standardize what was appropriate and inappropriate on the Sabbath. In Buchanan's book "The Rest of God," he lists

²⁸ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2006.), pg. 3.

²⁹ Pico Iyer delivered a TED talk on this topic in November 2014, and is in a long line of writers who have written books and articles on the topic of Sabbath without being connected with a faith perspective.

thirteen practices that we should engage once we stop “working.” Eugene Peterson simply calls us to “[give] ourselves to being present to what God has done and is doing, this creation in which we have been set down and this salvation in which we have been invited to be participants in a God-revealed life of resurrection.”³⁰ The Scriptures seem to be both simple and clear: stop working, and keep it holy. Holy, of course, is simply a reference to the One to Whom the day truly belongs, as there is only one being that is *holy* in the universe. The day belongs to God. We are to cease from our work, remember that God is in charge of the universe (including my little corner of it) and is fully able to run it without my help. We are to rest. In Him.

My standard rule for Sabbath is pretty simple: I won’t do anything that I *have* to do. I enjoy mowing the lawn, so I’ll do it for fun. However, if I see it’s getting high and I feel like it’s something that must be done—no longer a joy that I get to enter into—I’ll either squeeze it in on Thursday afternoon or bag it on Saturday. I love to read and study the Scriptures, which I’ll gladly do on my Sabbath. But, no matter how much I’m enjoying it, I won’t study the passage I’m preaching on Sunday or a topic that I know I need to teach down the line. Sabbath is a day to be quiet, to pray, to play, either alone or with family and friends, to eat good food, and to generally relish the good world in which God has placed us.

While I’m far from an expert on Sabbath, I have worked diligently over the years to make it a part of my weekly rhythm. Along the way, I’ve discovered a few pointers:

- *A consistent day is vital.* If it’s sundown Saturday until sundown Sunday, it should be that way every week. If it’s all day Sunday, or if it’s a day during the week, it should always stay the same. Picking a day that’s convenient for your busy schedule both rarely works and works in opposition to the point of Sabbath.
- *A consistent pattern for the day works best.* When you have typical Sabbath activities, you’re much more able to be fully present in the day and not thinking through what comes next. Taking walks, reading, napping, playing games, worship and prayer are all great parts of the routine.

³⁰ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*, (HarperCollins, New York, NY, 2011.), pg. 220.

- *Preparation is the key for good Sabbath keeping.* I love the “Shabbat” tradition in Jewish homes. Lots of work and effort is put into a bountiful and beautiful evening meal, served just past sundown on the Sabbath evening (usually Friday night in Jewish homes). Preparations are made through the week, and much of the day on Friday, so that the meal is ready. The next day is planned for as well, often through the leftover food from the dinner the night before. Every detail is thought through so that everyone (Including Mom! What a concept!) is able to rest on the Sabbath. Whether it’s through a Shabbat meal or simply saving enough to order pizza, cleaning the house ahead of time or making sure the yard work is completed, good preparation paves the way for good rest.
- *Take it seriously, but don’t go crazy.* It shouldn’t be lots of work and stress for you to rest from your work and stress. If Sabbath isn’t currently part of your weekly rhythm, incorporating it will take some intentionality and planning. However, once it’s in place, it shouldn’t be rocket science. Just rest. If something unforeseen happens and you’re called into action, don’t sweat it. Next week is coming. Don’t take it so lightly that anything and everything can interrupt your Sabbath, but don’t be so militant that you cease to enjoy the gift of rest that God’s given to you.

Monthly, Seasonal, and Annual Rhythms

In addition to a daily and weekly rhythm, the nation of Israel observed larger rhythms as well—monthly, seasonal, and annual festivals that pointed them back to the nature and character of God, told His story, and prepared them for the future. These rhythms are much more adaptable and personal in our day, but they are valuable to think about and engage with intentionality.

The *church calendar* provides an annual rhythm for disciples to engage. Advent is the season of waiting made up by the four Sundays, as well as the week days in between, prior to Christmas each year. Christmas is then followed by Epiphany on January 6th, which is traditionally the close of the Christmas holidays and leads into the new year. The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, which is the Wednesday 40 days before Easter, not counting Sundays. Lent is marked by repentance and fasting in preparation for the celebration of Easter. Following

Easter, there is another 40 days of observance leading up to Pentecost, which celebrates the sending of the Holy Spirit and the inauguration of the early church. There are also dozens of smaller holidays and feast days that are a part of the calendar for those who desire to engage these annual rhythms on a deeper level.

There are two main *seasons of fasting* that followers of Jesus have observed at various times throughout history. The Lenten season is the most often recognized season, where a fast might be from a specific kind of delicacy throughout Lent, abstention from meat on Fridays, or partial fasts of various kinds throughout the Lenten season. Another popular fasting season is during the latter part of September, corresponding with the “high holy days” of the Jewish calendar. A third time frame that has gained popularity in recent years is the month of January, specifically following Epiphany on January 6th, as a preparation for the new year. Seasons of fasting are intended to develop self-discipline and curb gluttony, seek the will of the Lord, and act as penitence for sin.

Finally, there are many who engage in either seasonal or annual *retreats*. These times, which can occur at any time throughout the calendar, are intended to be times where the everyday “grind” of life is removed for a period of time and the person is able to pray and gain perspective on life. This is a great time for setting goals, confessing sin, seeking new direction, and developing daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal rhythms for life. There are also guided retreats, often held at spiritual retreat centers or monasteries, where participants are guided through a process of introspection, prayer, worship, and seeking the Lord. The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, engaged over a 3, 5, 7, or even 30 day period under the direction of a trained spiritual director, are among the most popular guided retreats.

Starting somewhere

For many of us, a healthy rhythm of life seems like a far off dream that has little to no bearing on the reality of our lives. It’s mostly an exercise in futility to go from not having any life rhythm to seeking to put each of these practices in place—our lives simply aren’t positioned for it yet. However, if we are ever to find a healthy life rhythm, it’s vital to start somewhere. Maybe a daily rhythm seems possible,

Notes and Prayers:

Action Step: Establishing a Rhythm of Life

We will all reach the end of *Step Three: Follow* at different places in our spiritual journeys. For some, our journey with Jesus has only recently begun, and the daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms of life haven't even been a consistent thought up until now. For others, we've been on the journey with Him for quite a while, and many of these disciplines have been in place for years.

Take a few minutes and evaluate the rhythm of your life and the way that you relate to Jesus each day, week, month, and year. Look for areas in which you know that you're strong as well as areas in which you know that you need to take another step toward Him. Choose one of the three areas—daily, weekly, or yearly—that you desire to develop. While all three areas are important, only choose yearly if you are satisfied with your current daily and weekly practices.

If you chose daily, consider your current practice of spending time with the Lord each day, if there is one. How would you like to see it improved? What are some tools that you feel would be helpful for you? When should it be scheduled, and how long would like it to be? Are there specific materials you need to have in place in order to facilitate that time? Write notes below:

If you chose weekly, consider your current Sabbath practice, if there is one, as well as the other rhythms of the week. How would you like to see this improved? What are some tools that you feel would be helpful for you? When should your 24 hour Sabbath be? (Or a shorter Sabbath time if 24 hours is unreachable for you at this point.) Are there specific preparations that you will need to make in order to facilitate that day of rest? Write notes below:

If you chose yearly, consider the current rhythm to your year, if there is one. What would you like to see added to your yearly rhythm? Would adding a season of fasting, a personal retreat time, or both, be an effective addition to your rhythm? When should those things be scheduled, and how long would they last? What preparation would need to happen in order for those to occur? What potential outcome would you prayerfully like to see emerge from this practice? Write notes below:

Now, as a step in moving these dreams and ideas into reality, share your plans with a mentor or co-pilgrim that would be willing to hold you accountable to this practice. If you chose a daily practice, talk with them about committing to following that practice for the next 30 days. If you chose a weekly practice, talk with them about committing to following that practice for the next 3 months. And if you chose an annual practice, commit to completing that practice this year. Ask them to both hold you accountable for doing what you've committed to do, as well as to ask you about the results that you experienced along the way.

Pause and Reflect

As you complete *Step Three: Follow*, take a few minutes to look back at each of the sections. What has God called you to do? What action steps do you need to take to put these things into place? What resources are needed for these things to become a reality? Think back through the journey and summarize what you've learned and what your next steps need to be below.

The Church

Filling Up

Being Changed

Pouring Out

Gifts and Serving

A Rhythm of Life

Step Four: Flow

One of the consistent messages of the Scriptures, from beginning to end, is that the blessing of God is not primarily intended to terminate on us, but intended to flow through us to the world around us. When God first called Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, His promise was this: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will bless you and make your name great, so that *you will be a blessing*. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you *all the families of the earth shall be blessed*.” (Genesis 12:1-3, *italics added*) The flow-through of the blessing of God was part of our spiritual DNA from the beginning. The final command of Jesus, which we’ve been looking at throughout this study, reiterates God’s desire: “Go therefore, and make disciples of *all nations*...” (Matthew 28:19) This step is all about fulfilling our calling to not simply *be* disciples of Jesus, but to *make other disciples* as well! This idea of the “flow” of God through us to the world is both our greatest calling and, when engaged, our greatest joy. Just as living organisms multiply, which is a sign of their vitality and life, our faith should multiply into the world around us as well. When we are truly alive, we will see new disciples, new groups, new churches, and even new tribes and tongues declaring the name of Jesus!

The Disciple-Maker's Heart

Scripture to Read: Mark 14:1-11

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, give me a heart of love for the world around me."

Having gotten all the way to Step Four in this study, it's probably a fair time to ask the question: Why do you want to not just *be* a disciple, but also to *make* disciples? You may have multiple reactions to that question. If your first thought is something like, "*Make* disciples?? I never said I was interested in doing that!" you might need to go back and review some of the earlier material. If your first thought is "I'm just reading this book because I thought I was supposed to read it" let me be the first to give you permission to stop reading. Making other disciples should never be an obligation, duty, or the outcome of some divine "bait and switch" technique. However, if your response is something like "Well, I love Jesus and He's changed my life, and I would love to see Him do the same thing in the lives of the people around me, particularly those I love the most" then you should definitely keep reading. The single motivation for making disciples, which has two primary directions it flows, is very simple: Love.

Love for Jesus

Have you ever tried to convince someone of something that you didn't truly believe yourself? I remember learning to debate in middle school and being assigned the role of defending a point of view with which I complete disagreed. I may have done it, but I can assure you that my heart wasn't in it! The primary and overarching motivation for making disciples of Jesus is that you have personally fallen in love with Jesus yourself. Of course, Jesus is more than a position you're defending or a product you're peddling—He's the God of the universe and the Savior of our souls! To the extent that remains a joyless doctrine to which you have given your mental assent, you are certainly not in the position to make other disciples, and you should probably ask yourself some hard questions about your own relationship with God. However, when that reality brings us joy, meaning, purpose, and vitality, we've arrived at the necessary starting point for making disciples!

Read John 14:15.

- *What is the qualification that Jesus gives His disciples when calling them to obedience?*

- *Based on Matthew 28:19-20, what is the natural outflow of our love for Jesus?*

You may not feel that you're fully equipped and prepared to reach out to the world around you, but if you love Jesus, you are ready to get started. None of us will ever reach the point where every question is answered, every possible objection is considered, and our lives are perfect representations of the gospel. Jesus simply calls us to love Him, and as we do, to step out in obedience.

Love for people

Jesus said that our love for God would naturally be related to our love for people. (Matthew 22:39) Love for God can get very theoretical, personal, and almost invisible. However, the Scriptures give us a way to tell if we truly love God—do we practically love people? In fact, two of the New Testament writers, James, who was the half-brother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and John, the gospel writer and close companion with Jesus, were quite concerned that we not deceive ourselves by saying that we love God but failing to see that love translate into the world around us. Read James 2:14-17 and 1 John 2:9-11.

- *What do both of these passages list as a clear "test" for the reality of our faith?*

- *In James 2:14 and 1 John 2:9, what is the common behavior of the person that does not love their neighbor and therefore, doesn't have true love for God?*

It's a bit scary to study how many times Jesus, Paul, and the other New Testament writers said that there would be many who would declare with their mouths that they loved God but would have lives that reflected the opposite—and in every case, they declared that their lives, not their mouths, were the true declaration of their hearts. (See Matthew 7:21-23 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Our greatest disciple-making tool

Once you've determined that you truly love God and love others, your next question is probably something like: "How do I actually make disciples?" You may think that this book is the primary way, but you'd be wrong. This book is designed to be a help and an outline to point you toward some of the key areas that will need to be addressed in the lives of every maturing disciple, but it's not the primary tool. You might think that the Sunday morning celebration gathering with the corporate worship experience and the teaching from Scripture is primary, but you'd be wrong again. The gathering of the body is very important, and is to be made a priority and not be taken lightly (Hebrews 10:25), and it can be a great encouragement for our journey with Jesus, but it also is not primary. Aha, you think... the cell group gathering. Again—wrong! Having a basic Christian community is a key aspect of understanding and growing in faith, as well as learning to use the gifts and express the passions that you've been given, but again, it's not the most important thing. So what's the *most important*?

Read Hebrews 13:7, 1 Peter 5:3, and 1 Corinthians 11:1.

- Now what do you think is the primary tool which you've been given?

The example of our lives, not just in specific times of “making disciples” but in the day-in and day-out realities of living life, is the most important tool that we have as potential disciple-makers. Some of the harshest words that Jesus spoke were reserved for those who taught one thing, but lived another:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:25-28, ESV)

Hypocritical teachers and leaders have caused immeasurable damage throughout the history of the church. We need to be careful to be those who live a life that reflects that which we teach to others. Of course, that can't mean perfection—Paul was clear that we are constantly a work in process, and that we won't “arrive” this side of heaven (Philippians 1:6, 3:12-14), but we should be seeking to live in a way that matches that which we teach.

However, as much damage as hypocrisy can cause, a life of integrity has that much power and more! You might not be the most gifted teacher or you might not be as intentional in discipling others as you should, but the example of your life can be a powerful tool in the hands of Jesus “teaching” others about what it means to follow Him!

Heart requirements

With that in mind, there are really only a few requirements for those who are ready to step into the call of Jesus to make disciples. They aren't knowledge or experience requirements, and they aren't practical requirements of materials, programs, or systems that aid in the process. All of these can be good and helpful, but they are not required. The requirements all have to do with our hearts:

- *We need to love God and love people.* As stated above, this is the single most important requirement.
- *We need to be willing to be honest.* Pretending that your life is perfect will only be frustrating to someone who is seeking to follow Jesus and finding that their life is far from perfect. Be honest about your struggles, your failures, and your doubts, and model what it means to go back again and again to the foundation of Jesus.
- *We need to be available.* This isn't primarily about how much time we have to devote to the process, although there will certainly be time sacrifices that need to be made. Rather, this is about having a life that's available to be seen by someone else. The way that you talk with your neighbor, handle disagreements with your spouse, raise your kids, and engage the stranger in the grocery store will have just as much impact as that Scriptural truth that you're looking at any given week. In fact, your life will often be the best "proof" of that Scripture that the world will ever see.
- *We need to be humble.* The simple truth is that you, in and of yourself, are not qualified to disciple anyone. None of us are. However, Jesus is transforming us, and by His work and through His strength, we actually have something of value to offer to the world around us. When we forget that it's His strength and transforming work and not ours, we tend to be judgmental, impatient, and hypocritical. A humble disciple-maker simply points back to Jesus in every area of their life.

Questions for Application:

- When you look honestly at your heart, do you truly want to make disciples? If so, why?

- As you look at the list of heart requirements, do you find yourself within them? Is there an area with which you know you struggle? Remember, you might not “feel” qualified, but you are trusting the Holy Spirit to work through you!

- Think about what it means to be a disciple-maker, and those whose lives you might have an impact on through your life. Write a prayer confessing your fears, your short-comings, the areas where right desire is lacking, etc. and ask God to change your heart in every way that’s necessary.

Notes and Prayers:

Multiplying Disciples

Scripture to Read: Mark 14:12-52

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, give me passion to see You formed in others."

There was a man named Bob. I know this sounds like the beginning of really poorly written short story, but bear with me, I promise you it's true. Bob was a very good friend of my wife Amanda's family, and someone that I got to know a bit during our early years of marriage. Bob had been a sort of "father figure" in Amanda's dad's life. Her father grew up across the street from Bob, and spent countless afternoons either helping or watching as Bob piddled around in his workshop. Bob was an eccentric carpenter and amateur inventor. He loved to either find unique creations that he would model his own designs after, or come up with unique inventions of his own. I remember the first time I walked into Bob's house—it was like walking into a wonderland! There were colors, lights, and moving parts literally everywhere! His living room was filled with life, although nothing except for him was truly alive. Carvings of fish, birds, and various other animals popped out of every possible corner. The kitchen table was a working model of a historic oil well, complete with recorded sounds of the actual well in operation. The staircase was lined with puppets, colorful wooden creations, and various moving parts. But maybe the most profound moment happened once every hour. When the clock reached the top of the hour, the house just about exploded with activity as dozens of clocks sprang to life—singing songs, popping out of wooden doors, and flashing lights. It was truly incredible.

One of the saddest moments of our early life in marriage was pulling up to Bob's old house a year or so after his death and seeing all of the color and intricacy of his living room, dining room, staircase, and everywhere else in his home laid out on the front lawn, ready to be auctioned to the highest bidder. Despite all of the years of protest by many in Amanda's family, Bob insisted that his house was full of "junk" that no one could possibly want. The little bit of family he had wasn't interested, so this house full of treasures was being lost to those who could never truly appreciate the depth of the man behind all that was spread out on the lawn that day.

Bob had a treasure. More than the “stuff” in his house, as amazing as it all was, he himself was the treasure. And the heart-breaking reality is that the treasure was never truly passed on to anyone else.

This is the drive that’s the essence of making disciples. Paul tells us that we each, as believers in Jesus, have a treasure. But this great treasure isn’t housed in an elaborate container lined with gold and silver and decorated with precious jewels—no, it’s held in jars of clay, Paul says. (2 Corinthians 4:7) The plain container (that’s us!) reminds us that the treasure is God’s, not ours. And we are called to pass it along to someone else, or lots of someone else’s, so that when our “jar of clay” is broken, dissolved, and ready to go back into the earth, the treasure still continues.

Paul modeled this well in his relationship with Timothy. These are his words in writing to his young disciple: “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells with us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” (2 Timothy 1:13-14) He reminds Timothy that he has received a treasure, or “good deposit,” from him and that he needs to guard it. However, it wasn’t a simple transaction where he “passed on” this treasure—Paul consistently invested his life in Timothy, seeking to see Christ formed in him. “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands...” (2 Timothy 1:6)

We all need a Paul and a Timothy

Back in *Step One: Foundation*, in the “Need for Community” section, you were asked if there were intentional “Paul” and “Timothy” relationships in your life. As we look at multiplying disciples, it’s a great time to re-visit that question! These relationships rarely just happen—they need to be sought out, invested in, and developed over time. But it’s clear that there are two kinds of people that are necessary for the multiplication of disciples to occur: we need Pauls, who recognize that they have a treasure that needs to be passed on to someone else, and we need Timothys, who can flourish under the investment and inspiration of

a Paul into someone who can, in time, pass the treasure on to someone else. So, consider:

- *Is there a “Paul” in my life currently? If not, who are some people that I might ask to intentionally invest in my relationship with Jesus?*

- *Am I ready to take the role of Paul in the life of a Timothy? What is the treasure that I have to pass on?*

- *Is there a “Timothy” in my life currently? If not, who are some people that I might begin to pray about intentionally investing in?*

It really can be as simple as that. Who’s investing in me? What do I have to invest? Who am I investing in? It’s within these simple questions that disciples begin to be multiplied.

A simple process

Not only is the starting point relatively simple, the process itself needn’t be overly complex. Multiplying disciples is far more about sharing lives with one another than it is about completing a complex program. Consider a few basics:

- *Be intentional about the relationship.* Talk about the idea of investing in someone or having someone invest in you. If you are seeking a Paul, be specific about the areas of your life that you would like to see this person speak into, and try to be honest about your expectations of what that process will look like. If you’re investing in a Timothy, invite them intentionally into the relationship, letting them know that you’d like the opportunity to invest your life in theirs. Of course, with both types of relationships, it’s important to

give people the opportunity to prayerfully consider and then either accept or decline the offer of relationship.

- *Determine meeting times and agendas.* If the expectation is to meet together weekly, make sure that both parties are aware of that expectation. If the expectation is an open door to “Paul’s” home, dinner together monthly, or coffee every few months, make clear your desires and discuss whether it’s possible or not. In the same way, clarify what the agenda for the relationship will be. Will you cover some kind of material, such as a book like this? Will you read the Scripture together and discuss? Will “Paul” set the agenda, or will “Timothy?” It’s good to know these expectations up front.
- *Determine the time frame of the relationship.* Discipleship is never a completely finished product, but relationships change over time. Relationships that begin with a high level of time and investment intensity will often lessen as the parties mature in faith. With a pre-determined set of materials, completion of the material itself marks a somewhat clear break point. Determine a period of time at the front end so expectations are clear.

Imitation, not impersonation

In addressing the Corinthian church, Paul said: “I urge you then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in the church.” (1 Corinthians 4:16-17) Scripturally, we see Paul as a “hard-nosed driver renowned for his ability to focus. He had a quick mind and boldly fulfilled his calling regardless of the price he had to pay. [He was] tough, [and had] determination and courage.”³¹ That’s a pretty clear personality profile! “Timothy, on the other hand, was shy and retiring, possessed a nervous tummy, and was easy to intimidate.”³² Paul and Timothy may have had dramatically different personalities, but Paul could send Timothy and say “imitate me through him” because there were several key qualities that transferred between them. They can be seen in Paul’s commendation of Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4, above:

- *He was faithful.* Timothy, though he was quite different than Paul, was completely devoted, unswervingly, to the truth of the gospel. This was the

³¹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2006.), pg. 287.

³² *Ibid.*

- Are you ready to be a Paul in someone else's life? Who might be a good "Timothy" for you to begin to invest in?

- Consider the process of multiplying disciples, and think about your life currently. What kind of discipling relationship do you need to be the recipient of, and what kind are you prepared to invest in? Write a prayer as you process both sides of this relationship, and ask Jesus to guide the process.

Notes and Prayers:

Multiplying Community

Scripture to Read: Mark 14:53 – 15:5

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, help me to see beyond myself.”

Several years ago, missiologist Paul Borthwick wrote a book called “Six Dangerous Questions.”³³ In it, he posed six questions to Christians that he believed would transform their view of the world, largely because the answer to each of the questions was opposite of the way that most North American followers of Jesus live. Some of them made perfect sense to me: questions like “Who is Jesus?” and “Do I believe that God wants to use my life?” immediately struck a chord with me as I perused the book. But one question stuck out: “Do I believe in heaven?” Don’t we all believe in heaven? And more importantly, how does that belief, focused on some future eternity, transform my view of the present world?

Borthwick’s words were painfully accurate for me:

I find it easy to say that I believe in heaven and yet to live like a functional existentialist, as if this life were all there is. In our materialistic culture, it is easy for me to proclaim a hope in heaven but actually put my hope in my career, my achievements, or my possessions.³⁴

“Do I believe in heaven?” is a question that has rung in my mind for over a decade, since first reading Borthwick’s book. What I find is that, whether through material possessions, safety, comforts, or preferences, I far too often live as though this life is all we have and that heaven, if it exists at all, can’t be as good as my life is here. While I know theologically that’s not true, my life far too often reflects this attitude.

There will be community in heaven—but not this one!

³³ Paul Borthwick, *Six Dangerous Questions*, (IVP, Downer’s Grove, IL., 1996)

³⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 54.

Keeping an eternal perspective as it relates to things like finances, possessions, and the like is challenging enough. However, keeping an eternal perspective in regards to community is incredibly difficult! There are God-given graces that are a part of a healthy community for which we are created to long for and to enjoy: belongingness, deep friendships, heart and life sharing, and co-pilgrimage, to name a few. However, each of those things, because they're good, can easily sneak into the "ultimate" place that is reserved for God alone.

The community of the church, from its smallest expression to its largest, is designed to be a vehicle through which the gospel of Jesus is communicated to a watching world. "In a community-starved world, the most potent means of witness to the truth of the gospel is the magnetic power of the oneness that was committed by Christ to his new community at the center of history."³⁵ This is important for two different reasons:

1. *It means that the way that we engage one another in community has eternal ramifications.* Being connected to a group of believers within which we can each exercise our gifts, receive and express grace, and work out the various "one another" commands of Scripture is not an optional exercise for those who desire that specific expression of faith. Rather, it is the primary way that God is expressing His love to the world around us. By loving the sometimes difficult people in our community (and by receiving that love when we are that difficult person!), we don't just offer grace, we are witnesses to the gospel.
2. *It means that community is not an "end," but a means to the end.* One of the expressions we use regularly is that we are not called to the "mission of community," but rather, we're called to be a "community on mission." Because the call to community is so explicit in the Scripture, we can forget that the primary mission to which Jesus called us was to make disciples to the ends of the earth. (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8) If we have "achieved" great community but failed to make disciples, we've ultimately still failed in the calling that Jesus has given to us.

³⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 1997), pg. 37.

The promise of eternity means that all community on this side of heaven, regardless of how good it seems, is flawed and imperfect. However, it also means that there's a flawless and perfect community that is coming! Just as an endless pursuit of material wealth and comfort forsakes our spoken belief in heaven, settling into this temporary community as though it's eternal does the same.

Maturing and Making Space

When community is formed, particularly in the context of a cell group or small missional community, there is a somewhat predictable growth process that occurs. This maturation needs to happen with the eternal perspective of community in mind, in recognition that the goal of every basic Christian community is to make disciples who are positioned and equipped to make other disciples. Boren and Tillman³⁶ describe these stages of maturity as follows:

- *Forming*: This is the process of getting to know one another, getting used to one another, and understanding the flow of the group. If there is a specific format to group gatherings, such as the 4 W values of a cell group (Welcome, Worship, Word, and World), the flow of those values will be modeled and learned. The interpersonal dynamics that occur between members start to surface in this stage.
- *Norming*: With the expectations established and relationships growing, the group starts to settle into a comfortable routine. Roles are established, community members have a much greater level of comfort with one another, and patterns of behavior begin to be set. Stronger personalities tend to be dominant, for better and for worse, and the group starts to progress toward maturity.
- *Storming*: At this stage, the interpersonal dynamics come to the surface and begin to create friction. Members of the community have learned to trust one another enough to challenge each other and confront each other as necessary. Often the expectations and standards set by the stronger personalities are challenged by the group, and relational dysfunction is addressed in what are hopefully grace-filled and loving ways. It's vitally

³⁶ Scott Boren and Don Tillman, *Cell Group Leader Training Manual*, (TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Houston, TX, 2002.), pgs. 85-120.

important for conflict to not be avoided, but to be engaged and handled in a healthy, biblical fashion. The storming stage is vitally important for the group to grow into maturity.

- *Performing*: With the tool of conflict resolution in place, the group begins to have strong group life and ministry outside the group. Conversations deepen, heart passions are expressed and worked out, and co-pilgrimage moves from being a spoken goal to a reality. During this stage, discipleship relationships begin to bear fruit—not only is the group moving toward maturity, its individual members are as well. This is also the stage that group leaders should be actively developing new leaders within the group, anticipating the arrival of the fifth stage.
- *Reforming*: The natural process of discipleship in the group as well as in individuals will eventually lead to evangelism and growth. Newer believers, seekers, and older Christians seeking a community to which to belong will likely have moved into the group throughout the last several stages, pushing the capacity of the group to communicate effectively between members, care well for one another, and engage the gifts of all members. The emerging leaders which have been developed and equipped now become partners with the original leaders in helping the group determine the best way to reform so that space can be created for new members to join the group and experience the proclamation of the gospel that happens through community.

There are times that the “performing” stage goes so well that the group struggles to move into the final stage of maturity. So what happens when a mature group determines that it shouldn’t reform? Sadly, the “performing” stage can only be sustained for a limited period of time. Every basic Christian community is designed by God to impact the world, and when a group is filled to capacity but doesn’t create space through reforming, it will either try to add additional members anyway and find that the joyful and productive dynamics of the group dissipate, or it will determine not to add additional members, and over time, it will stagnate. Both options will ultimately lead to reforming anyway, either through disbanding the group or attrition of members as the group loses health and vitality, but that process will be much less joyful and much less a celebration

than if the group would have proactively engaged reforming as a natural outflow of the life cycle of the group.

The Joy of Parenthood

When the multiplication of a community is looked at using the language and image of maturity, it is truly a joyous occasion. My wife and I have been blessed with four children. As they grow and mature, the dynamics of the family continually change. Giggly wrestling matches and loud living room dance parties have given way to board games and walks in the park. Every stage is wonderful, and full of memories and events that will impact our lives forever—however, they have also given way to the next stage, which is also wonderful and is forming its own set of memories and events. As hard as it is to imagine at this moment, there will come a day when our little angels will begin dating, and will ultimately choose a spouse and get married. At that stage, not multiplying a new family would be a bad choice! While there's still a permanent relationship there that will never go away, the nature of that relationship *must* change in order to it to be healthy.

Part of the joy of parenting is enjoying every stage in the process—making memories, having good conversations, and enjoying one another. However, it all happens with an eye to the fact that the family, as we know it, won't always remain together in this same way. Therefore, much time and effort is put into preparing each member for the next phase of life. That preparation, then, leads to the other part of the joy of parenting—seeing mature children succeed! While the relationship is certainly different, there's a deep joy that comes from seeing the healthy formation of a new family.

In the exact same way, communities must multiply. Reformed communities create room for those who are not presently following Jesus, and thereby, give growing disciples the opportunity to make other disciples. After all, there will be all of eternity to enjoy our time with one another.

- As you look at the steps of maturity and the process for multiplying a community, what is the next step for either you or for your group? Take some time to consider all that you've read, and then write a prayer that expresses your heart for the multiplication of community.

Notes and Prayers:

To the Ends of the Earth

Scripture to Read: Mark 15:6-47

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, give me a vision that's larger than my own church."

John Piper begins his treatise on global missions with the following statement: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man."³⁷ It's easy for us to get caught up in our systems, our plans, our dreams, and even our prayers, while forgetting the driving reality of the glory of God. The goal of the church is not to accomplish a task. Rather, the goal of the church is the fame of Jesus—and spreading that fame requires accomplishing a task.

Luke was the writer of both the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, both written to a man we know simply as "Theophilus." We know very little about the man to whom these two books are dedicated, but we do know that Luke intended to tell a cohesive story that gave certainty in regards to who Jesus was (Luke 1:4) and what He intended for His followers to do (Acts 1:2).

Read Luke 24.

- *What are the key events that Luke describes in the last chapter of his gospel?*

- *What is the last thing that Jesus tells his disciples in Luke's gospel? What does Jesus call His disciples to do? (vs. 48) What does He promise will happen to them before they are called to do this?*

³⁷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993.), pg. 11.

The beginning of the book of Acts, then, continues the story. Read Acts 1:1-8.

- *In Acts 1:4, Luke picks up the story from the end of his gospel, but clarifies the “power” that will be sent. What does he say specifically will happen?*

- *Acts 1:8, then, acts as a summary of all that Jesus said to His disciples before His ascension, reiterating all of the specific words of Jesus. He also clarified the calling on the disciples to “be witnesses.” Where are they/we called to be witnesses?*

The message of salvation in Jesus and real life through Him is not intended just for one group of people or one place—from the very beginning, it was intended for the whole world! Paul, in Romans 10, declares that Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient for all people everywhere: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13) However, despite the sufficiency of Jesus, there’s still a problem. Read Romans 10:14-15.

- *What’s the problem that Paul describes?*

- *What is the solution that Paul calls us into as followers of Jesus?*

Since the power of the Holy Spirit came upon believers nearly 2000 years ago (Acts 2), and Paul's letter to the Romans was written no more than a few decades after that, it would be easy to assume that this work of "going" to the ends of the earth is already completed. In fact, looking around at our context in the U.S., we see lots of churches and lots of opportunities to hear about Jesus—radio, television, mercy ministries, and even street evangelism. It's easy to forget that the same isn't true all over the world.

Imagine you were to just walk around a random neighborhood and knock on doors asking people how you could have your sins forgiven and be made right with God. Say you spent 10 minutes at each house talking to the person there and then moving to the next house until you found someone who could answer your question. In the U.S., it would take just over an hour or two, statistically speaking, to find someone who could answer your question. However, if you went to postmodern Europe, things would be a bit different. If you knocked on another door every 10 minutes, and you did so for 8 hours a day without taking a break, it would take you over *two weeks* of knocking on doors before you could find someone who could tell you about Jesus. Even more startling—in many places in Southern Asia and through the Middle East, it would take over *two years* of knocking on doors every 10 minutes, seven days a week, eight hours a day.³⁸

The issue, in Paul's day when he was writing to the Romans as well as in our day, is not the sufficiency of Jesus or the clarity of His message. Rather, it's *access*. While the gospel of Jesus is equally sufficient for all people, not all people have equal access to that gospel.

What do we do with this reality? At the risk of sounding formulaic, our response is not complex or surprising, but it does require commitment and sacrifice:

- *Give*. Paul commended the church in Macedonia to the church in Corinth because they had given generously, even in their extreme poverty. (2

³⁸ Statistics taken from www.cmalliance.org/resources/missions/mcck14.

Corinthians 8:1-3) The statistics of the imbalance of wealth tilted toward places like the United States are startling. Jesus taught that to those to whom much is given, much is expected. (Luke 12:48) We have been given much, and we have the responsibility to steward well all that we've been given. It's not practical or even desirable for every follower of Jesus to move into the places in the world with the least access. There is a high requirement of training, language learning, cultural engagement, and time commitment required, and not everyone is called to serve in that specific way. However, we can all partner with this work by financially partnering with those who are going to those places that have the least access to the gospel, and by giving to organizations that are actively working among those people groups.

- *Pray.* Jesus' words regarding mission work couldn't be clearer: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38) The work of taking the gospel to the least reached parts of the world is difficult, and passion and excitement will quickly run out. Men and women need to clearly hear the call of Jesus on their lives, and know that He is calling them into these difficult parts of the world. Our role is to pray earnestly that God would call laborers, and that they would hear His voice clearly. As we pray, then, our hearts are in tune to what God is specifically calling *us* to do in regards to the harvest as well.
- *Go.* Finally, we need to be willing to do what God has called us to do. For some, that may mean simply researching, learning, and praying for a specific part of the world that lacks access to the gospel. For many others, however, it will mean taking vacation time from work, making financial sacrifices, and going on a short-term trip to support missionaries and churches that are working full-time to proclaim the gospel. Through short-term trips, we not only offer support and encouragement to those who are serving full-time, we also have our eyes opened and our perspective broadened to what is happening in other parts of the world. Finally, for a few, being willing to do what God has called us to do may mean "going" in a permanent, full-time kind of way. Through opportunities such as "Business as Mission," "Marketplace Ministries," international schools, humanitarian aid organizations and, of course, more traditional missionary service, there are

- Think about the three simple opportunities to “give,” “pray,” and “go.” How might God be calling you to get more involved in the work of being His witnesses to the ends of the earth? Write a prayer committing to this next step in the journey.

Notes and Prayers:

Growing Toward Maturity

Scripture to Read: Mark 16:1-8

Grace to Pray: “Lord Jesus, keep drawing me nearer in my relationship with You.”

I’m a far better runner when I run outside, on the roads, than when I run on a treadmill. It’s not so much that the terrain speeds me up or the change in scenery keeps me interested, although both may be true to some degree—the primary reason is my destination. Although I somewhat enjoy exercise, I’m not all that disciplined. When I’m headed outside for a run, I head down my street, turn left at the third intersection, run down that street, and before I know it, I’m already quite a ways from home. There’s no point in stopping or turning around and heading home—I’m already too far away! I might as well complete the loop and get in my 3 miles or 5 miles or whatever distance I’ve planned for the day. I know in my undisciplined mind that I’m done running once I get home again, and not before.

The treadmill, however, is another story. I start running with good intentions. I resist looking at the numbers in front of me and try to focus elsewhere. I run for what seems like a long time, and figure I’m safe to glance down—and I see that I’ve barely gone a half mile. I keep running, but now my undisciplined mind is filling up with excuses as to why I shouldn’t run as long today. I try to push through, but now every time I look at the screen in front of me, the “STOP WORKOUT” button seems to be glowing. I can’t seem to look anywhere else. The button is beckoning me, with a nearly audible voice, “Push me!” After another half a mile or so, my weak mind finally gives in. Button pushed. Workout stopped. If I’m lucky, I’ve squeezed out 2 miles of pain and suffering. Why the difference? Because there’s no destination. I’m not actually *going* anywhere, and that means that I can basically stop at any time.

If we’re honest, many of us would describe following Jesus more like a treadmill than an enjoyable run through the country. And the reason is the same—we have a difficult time discerning a destination. Where’s this whole thing headed? We

know that we started to follow Jesus at one point in time, but as the years have gone by, it seems like we're most spinning our wheels but not getting anywhere. We may not have pushed the "stop workout" button, but we've definitely begun to coast a bit. The speedy early miles have given way to a slow, meandering walk that has no real destination. That is, at least this side of heaven.

We began this journey by talking about the need we have to know that we are moving toward a destination. (See *Step One: Foundation*, "What's a Disciple?") Having walked through this entire process, is there a destination in front of us that we are called to run toward here on this earth?

John Stott, one of the greatest evangelical minds of the 20th century, wondered the same thing. He asks it this way: "What is God's purpose for his people? Granted we [have] been converted, but what next?"³⁹ As he approached the end of his life on earth, he began to see that there was, indeed, a destination; a goal for our life here on earth. "God wants his people to become like Christ, for Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God."⁴⁰

Before we dismiss this "destination" as an impossible dream, we need to consider the Word of God on which this call is based. Read Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and 1 John 3:2.

- *As you read these texts, who is doing the work of transformation?*

- *Do these verses seem to classify Christlikeness as something that we will never reach, or something that followers of Jesus should strive toward?*

Romans 8 recognizes that God has predestined us (past tense) for His purposes of forming us to be like Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul brings our transformation into

³⁹ John Stott, *The Radical Disciple*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 2010), pg. 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the present tense, telling us that we are “being transformed” in a moment by moment kind of way into the image of God. Finally, in 1 John 3, we are reminded that “when He appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Likeness to Christ is not just a present destination, but it’s also a future reality.

If Christlikeness is the destination, the next question, of course, is “How do we get there?” God has created us uniquely, so that question must be answered a bit differently for all of us. However, as I’ve had the privilege of interacting with many men and women in whom I can see the image of Jesus forming quite clearly, there are some common themes that I’ve observed:

1. *They are men and women of prayer.* There is simply no other pathway that will lead us into transformational encounters with Jesus. Learn to speak to Him, but especially learn to listen to Him. Get around men and women who are further along in their journey, and ask to pray with them. This is one of the great values of public prayer gatherings—you can listen to people who really know Jesus talk with Him, which will only help you get to know Him better yourself. Cultivate a prayer time, even if it starts small. Resist simply bringing a list—worship, confess and repent, thank God, and listen for His voice in addition to bringing your list. Don’t obsess over how long you pray, but do obsess over actually praying.
2. *They are men and women of the Word.* If we are to become like Jesus, we need to truly get to know Jesus, and the best place to find out about Jesus is the Bible. Jerome, the early Church father, said “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” Spend time, daily, in the Word. Read passages slowly and meditate on them. Tie your time in the Word together with your time in prayer, using a slow reading of the Word as a chance to enter into conversation with the living Word. (John 1:1) Also, listen to good teaching on the Word. In our world today, that no longer is limited to the message you hear in church on Sunday morning—some of the greatest Bible teachers have sermons, classes, and seminars available for free online. Learn to discern good teaching from entertaining teaching, and fill your life with the former while being cautious about the latter.

3. *They are men and women who are committed to the local church.* One of my favorite images of the community of faith is sandpaper. It's through the roughness and grit of the sandpaper that the wood becomes smooth and attractive with which it comes in contact. In the same way, community can often "rub us the wrong way," and in doing so, smooth off our rough edges and make us a bit more like Jesus. However, like sandpaper, it doesn't work if it's held at arm's length. Unless we are immersed in the messiness and frustration of the local church, we will fail to be shaped by the community in the way that God intends. Men and women who are mature in their faith all display a deep commitment to the community of the church, and their lives show the fruit of being shaped by the pain and difficulty, as well as the joy, of being shaped by it.

4. *They are men and women who serve the "least of these."* The "least of these" was how Jesus described those who were poor, naked, hungry, sick and imprisoned in Matthew 25. While these designations certainly apply in our context as well, there are other categories that could be added: children, the aged, those with mental and physical disabilities, and those with deep emotional pain and scarring. The key seems to be found in serving those who cannot pay the service back or bring benefit in any way. Whether serving generates Christlikeness or Christlikeness generates serving, they seem to be found in tandem with one another.

5. *They are men and women who live simple lives.* This is a difficult one in our culture today, but I have a difficult time thinking of a single person who displays a high degree of Christlikeness and lives a complex or extravagant lifestyle. It stands to reason that, if Jesus was a homeless carpenter, our lives will take on a certain level of simplicity as we become more like Him. This isn't necessarily poverty or asceticism, but just simplicity—lives that aren't unnecessarily cluttered, and which are relatively unconcerned with the "latest and greatest" version of anything. Extravagance and complexity seem to tie us to this world; simplicity propels us into the next.

These are just a few of what I would see as common traits. There are certainly others that could be argued to be at least as prevalent, if not even more so;

however, the list isn't intended to be complete as much as to give a portrait of what maturity might look like. As we eye the destination that's before us, these traits give us some tracks on which we can start to move forward.

Each person, then, will have their own personality and preferences that also round out their individual pathway to maturity. For instance, I enjoy reading books written by old, dead men and women who really loved Jesus—they aren't for everyone, but for me personally, they nudge me onward toward Him. My wife, on the other hand, spends time in nature as a way to connect with the One who created all that is. For some, it's just a simple walk in the woods—for others, it's a worship experience.

Whatever your individual path, the point is to move toward the goal, and that goal is to be like Jesus. God has predestined it for us, it is in the process of happening to us, and we will someday realize it completely when we see Him face to face.

Questions for Application:

- Does your journey with Jesus feel more like the treadmill or running outside, as described above? Why?

- As you look at some of the common traits of those who demonstrate a high amount of Christlikeness, in what areas are you strong right now? In what areas are you weak?

- Think about your own personal journey. What are some things that you find really stir your affection for Jesus? How might those things move you forward in maturity in faith? Take some time to write a prayer asking Jesus to move in these specific areas.

Notes and Prayers:

Living in the Kingdom

Scripture to Read: Mark 16:9-20

Grace to Pray: "Lord Jesus, rule over every area of my life."

As a lifelong resident of the United States born in the late 20th century, the very air I breathe is the air of democracy. There are certain principles that simply infuse my thinking and my living, mostly without me even noticing. Try these on for size: Everyone gets a vote. The majority always rules. Logic, through the method of public debate, determines the appropriate answers to complex issues. Those in leadership are placed there to represent me and my interest. It is my inherent right to complain (loudly) about the current leadership to which I'm submitted, and it will be my right to still complain (loudly) when the leadership changes. These principles are normative for my life—so clearly assumed that I rarely even notice them.

That's a long way from life in a kingdom.

The first words that Mark records coming out of Jesus' mouth, which would act as a sort of thesis statement for His ministry, are "The time is fulfilled, and the *kingdom of God* is at hand." (Mark 1:15) Inherent in the idea of a kingdom is the presence of a king. Inherent in the presence of a king is absolute rule. This is monarchy, not democracy. The kingdom of God, in all the best ways, is a totalitarian regime. There are no votes. The majority doesn't get an opinion. Logic is disposed of in favor of the omniscience and sovereignty of the King. The Leader doesn't represent me, which would be disastrous, but is leading me even through difficulty and pain in a way that is best for me. (James 1:2-4, Romans 8:28)

I've found in my life one of the most difficult steps to take as I grow into being a disciple of Jesus is to recognize that in pursuing Him, I'm giving up my rights. I'm no longer in charge. Democracy is left behind, and as Paul says, "I know longer live, but He lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) As we come to the end of these four steps, it's vital for us to get a picture of what ongoing life in the Kingdom—life under the rule of the King—will look like.

Ongoing Repentance

Jesus' initial proclamation of the kingdom of God that was at hand was followed by an oft-repeated command: "Repent!" (Mark 1:15) Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, listed as first among his "95 Theses" that are credited with onset of the Reformation: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent" (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Repentance isn't a one-time activity that we engage only when we turn to Jesus in faith for the first time. Rather, it's an ongoing way of life in seeking to bring our lives in conformation to His life in us. The word itself simply means "to turn" or "to change." Wrapped up in the idea of repentance is not just "turning from" something, but "turning towards" something else. Therefore, life in the Kingdom is an ongoing process, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, of turning away from behaviors that He identifies as sinful, as wasteful, as carnal, as selfish, as prideful, etc. and turning into behaviors that are godly and Spirit-led. This process must be more than a weekly activity or even a daily one—it's an ongoing, constant way of life. When we recognize that our lives are out of sync with the will of the King, we begin the work of bringing our lives in line with His will immediately, because we've already surrendered our control.

Increasing our belief in the Gospel

Jesus' command in Mark 1:15 was actually a compound declaration: "Repent and believe in the gospel." Like repentance, we can often see belief as a one-time event, but it also must be an ongoing ethic. The simplicity of the gospel states that Jesus Christ, who was completely God as well as being completely man, came to earth born of a woman to live the perfect life that you and I are not capable of living. He then died the death that you and I deserve to die, bearing our sin and guilt. He rose again in victory, conquering sin, death, and hell, and offering us freedom and new life, both now and in eternity.

At the outset of following Jesus, we will understand that to a degree. However, the extremity of the righteousness and love of Jesus for us, as well as the depth

and depravity of our sin, will need years to unfold. Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, defines the gospel this way:

We can say that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope—at the very same time. This creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth. It means that the more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God’s grace appears to you. But on the other hand, the more aware you are of God’s grace and acceptance in Christ, the more able you are to drop your denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions and character of your sin.⁴¹

This is a picture of our ongoing belief in the gospel. When we truly understand the breadth and depth of God’s love for us, we are freed to radically admit our wickedness and sin. We don’t mature out of this process—in fact, in reading some of the giants of the faith over the last twenty centuries, it seems that we may mature *into* this process. Walking with Jesus will only bring a greater awareness of His love and mercy while giving a deeper awareness of our own sin, creating in us a deep humility.

Inward growth

Imagine if a great man or woman desired to take you under their wing, mentor you, and develop you. Their greatest desire was to do anything they could to make you more like them. How would the process happen? It would, of course, be an absolute necessity that you spend time with them. In fact, you would need to spend lots of time with that person, seeing how they respond to various situations and getting their input on how you should respond. You would likely debrief your life with them regularly, getting their feedback and direction. As you got to know them more and more, it would almost be like they are with you all the time—you would begin to think like them and act like them intuitively, without even needing to check with them. It would be almost like their life is being formed in yours.

⁴¹ Quoted in a 2003 sermon on Galatians, “Living in Line with the Truth of the Gospel.”

the Gospel, and inward growth will all result in an outward life that makes an impact. If we seek to live a life of impact for the Kingdom without developing the first three, we'll find that, eventually, the Christian veneer that we use to cover over our life will break down and our impact will be compromised if not outright destroyed. However, if we patiently grow in repentance, belief, and inward relationship with Jesus, our exterior life will ultimately be transformed as well.

Our impact is made through several key aspects of the character of Jesus shining out of us:

- *Incarnation.* Jesus left His place with God to come to earth and reach us. We, too, must leave our places of comfort and ease in order to love those who can be difficult to love. Loving the unlovable might mean going to a place that's outside of our comfort zone, or it might simply mean taking that phone call or spending an hour or two with someone who is broken, hurting, and in need of a touch from Jesus. As the Kingdom of God is formed in each of us, you might just be that "touch."
- *Serving.* As Jesus neared the end of His earthly life, there had to be so many things that He desired to pass on to His disciples. But, at least for a few moments, He didn't speak. Rather, He bent down and washed their feet. (John 13) In this quiet act of serving, He spoke incredibly loudly, establishing a Kingdom principle on which the church would be built—followers of Jesus are those who serve.
- *Loving.* There is a dramatic difference between being nice and being loving. Nice is an inherently selfish act that is concerned about my own appearance; love is a selfless act that's concerned with the other and their best. As Christ is formed in us, we become a community that's truly loving and not just nice. This takes the form of sacrifice for one another and for the world, honest confrontation that longs for God's best in each of our lives, and a willingness to die to our own reputation, desires, and preferences for the sake of those around us. True love is contagiously attractive. (1 Corinthians 13)
- *Patience.* Henry Blackaby once said that if the darkness of the world is too great, we need to remember that the problem is not with the darkness, but with the light. The darkness is simply acting according to its nature. It's this perspective that gives us patience to endure. While persecution for faith is far from many of our minds as North American followers of Jesus, it's a very

present reality for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. The call of Scripture is that we are not to live in such a way that warrants suffering, but we are to patiently endure suffering that comes because of our righteous lives in the world. (1 Peter 2-4)

- *Mission.* Finally, we live our lives driven by the mission of Jesus. We certainly become disciples, but even that is for a purpose—to make other disciples. Every aspect of our lives has been ordained by God for the purpose of others seeing the Kingdom of God at work in our lives—the time and place in which we live, the relationships that we have, the interests and passions that we’ve been given. (Acts 17:26-27) We represent Jesus in the world around us, with our lives acting as a fragrant aroma, both drawing some and repelling others based on the work of Jesus in the lives of those around us. (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) Just as Jesus came with a specific mission (Mark 1:38), we too have a singular call through which all the rest of our lives are filtered. (Matthew 22:37-39)

Life in the Kingdom means that there is one King, and I’m not Him. Learning to live under His rule is not just a project to be completed, like reading and studying this book, but a lifetime to be explored. This is not a Kingdom of repression and begrudging submission—we don’t forsake our joys because we’re afraid that God will send us to hell. Rather, we recognize that Jesus came to give us abundant, joyful life. (John 10:10) Living under His rule and reign is actually the place where we’ll find that deepest joy, contentment, and fulfillment on earth. Our response to His Lordship, then, is glad submission.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

(Jude 1:24-25 ESV)

- As you look at the call to live in the Kingdom, where are you seeing the life of Jesus come out of you? Where are you seeing your life stick out more than His? Take some time to pray, submitting your life to His rule.

Notes and Prayers:

Action Step: Enter into the Leadership Development Program

While the book is just about completed, the journey has only just begun. Becoming a disciple and making other disciples is a lifelong process, with constant challenge, change, sorrow, and joy. I can honestly say, having invested in the formation of dozens of disciples, that it is the most difficult and rewarding thing that I've ever done.

Before this final action step, it's vital to look back at the first three. Obedience to God through water baptism, committing to a basic Christian community, and establishing a rhythm of life are, in many ways, prerequisites to this final step. I call them prerequisites in the sense that, until these are all in place, the chance of success in leadership is very slim. With these in place, however, you are well positioned to consider the specific calling that God has placed on your life.

The idea of leadership can be petrifying. If you feel that way, there are typically two different reasons for that: (1) God isn't calling you to lead, so the idea of it doesn't resonate with the Spirit in you, or (2) you have a misperception of what leadership truly is, and you don't picture yourself fitting into that position. If the former is true, there is one path to follow—if the latter is true, you need to push through and at least begin the journey toward leadership. But how do you know?

If you have completed the first three steps, you have two resources that will prove to be invaluable to you in this process (as well as in many other decisions that you'll face throughout your journey as a follower of Jesus): a basic Christian community, and a developing personal relationship with Jesus. In the quiet times that are a part of your regular rhythm of life, bring this before Him and listen for His guidance. Allow Him to challenge your preconceptions and lead you, even if He leads in a direction you don't desire to go. However, don't bring it before Him in isolation—He's given you the gift of community, which comprises another method through which the Spirit speaks to us. Ask them what they see in you, and what the next step should be in your journey. Take into special consideration the thoughts and words of those who are closest to you and most invested in your life. Then, take this feedback into your time with the Lord, and listen for His voice of confirmation or redirection.

If, ultimately, you sense that God is not calling you into any level of leadership, the next step for you is simply to find someone who is just beginning their

journey with Jesus and invest your life in them. Don't wait for them to come to you—aggressively seek them out! Ask pastoral leadership for recommendations of people in whom you can invest, and listen carefully to conversations when you engage those who are new to the church or new to the faith. This material you hold in your hand isn't the “be all, end all” of discipleship, but it's a great place to start.

If you sense that God may be leading you into some level of leadership, the first step is within your cell group or basic Christian community. Talk to your leader about the need to explore leadership, and ask them to be a part of your journey. At York Alliance, we have a Leadership Development Program (LDP) that is designed to equip developing leaders in leading LIFE Groups, which is the first and most foundational level of leadership. The LDP pairs classroom teaching with apprenticeship exercises and coaching relationships, providing multiple opportunities for feedback and development along the way.

Once you have completed the LDP, you will likely step into leadership. At that stage, it's vitally important to continue or redevelop the “Paul” and “Timothy” relationships that you've been engaging throughout this process. Now, your “Paul” should be someone who has gone before you in *leadership*, and can help you develop your character and skill as a *leader* and navigate the choices and opportunities that will come to you. Your “Timothy” should be someone that, like you, has leadership potential and that you can guide in their leadership journey, just as others have for you.

Following Jesus, when we truly submit our lives to Him, is the greatest adventure we can possibly imagine. It's full of mountains, valleys, twists and turns, and lots of unexpected joys. We have been given one another as the church so that we will never need to walk alone. So join up with a partner or a team of followers, and jump into the adventure! Here's to the journey.

Pause and Reflect

As you complete *Step Four: Flow*, take a few minutes to look back at each of the sections. What has God called you to do? What action steps do you need to take to put these things into place? What resources are needed for these things to become a reality? Think back through the journey and summarize what you've learned and what your next steps need to be below.

The Disciple-Maker's Heart

Multiplying Disciples

Multiplying Community

To the Ends of the Earth

Growing Toward Maturity

Living in the Kingdom

Annotated Resources

This book is not intended to be a complete treatment of any specific area of study, but rather, designed to help *believers* in Jesus become *followers* of Jesus who are able to then produce other followers. Because many topics are covered only in brief ways, there are some who will desire to dive deeper into one or more of the areas that were touched upon briefly within this book. The following list of resources, with brief explanations, is a good source of further study for the topics covered within each step.

Step One: Foundation

David Platt, **Radical** and **Radical Together**. Both of these books are soaked in the Scripture and challenge the typical thinking about what it means to follow Jesus. They are written at a popular level and speak directly into many of the assumptions present within modern Western culture.

William Law, **A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life**. Law wrote in the eighteenth century and the language can be difficult to wade through in its original form. However, there are numerous abridged and edited versions available. Law lays out a clear call to a whole-hearted pursuit of Jesus. While the style and language can be a bit difficult, the message is excellent and clear.

www.biblegateway.com. This website offers just about every English Bible translation in existence. It's a great tool to compare one translation to another. They also have reading plans, devotional emails, and a variety of study tools.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, **How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth**. This is the best popular level treatment of Bible study giving readers basic principles to study and interpret the Bible without advanced tools and training.

E.M. Bounds, **Power Through Prayer**. This is a classic treatment on the purpose and motivation of prayer, giving readers motivation as well as many examples.

Timothy Keller, **Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God**. This is a newer resource, but it's an excellent and relatively comprehensive treatment on

the essentials of prayer. Keller's book is balanced, well researched, theologically sound, and grounded in the historical church. However, it can be a bit dense at times for some readers.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, **Life Together**. This short book is perhaps the best treatment of the role of and need for community written in the last hundred years. Bonhoeffer isn't always easy to read, but the effort is worth it.

Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright, editors, **Believer's Baptism**. This is a compilation book at a more scholarly level, but provides an excellent overview of perspectives on the sacrament of baptism.

Francis Chan, **Basic: Communion (video)**. The "Basic" video series is a great teaching tool as a whole, and this video is a beautiful expression of the mystery and intimacy of communion. It's not heavy on theological depth, but more an expression of the heart of communion.

Step Two: Freedom

Robert McGee, **Search for Significance**. This is one of the best resources available on understanding and appropriating our identity in Christ.

Philip Yancey, **The Bible that Jesus Read**. An excellent beginner's level overview of the Old Testament book by book. Helps the reader see how everything fits together and how the breadth of the Old Testament points us to Jesus.

Philip Yancey, **The Jesus I Never Knew**. Yancey also has a great treatment of Jesus in the Gospels. Very readable and informative.

Neil Anderson, **The Bondage Breaker**. All of the "Freedom in Christ" material that Anderson has published is extremely helpful, understandable, and grounded in both Scripture and experience. This is the classic work, and can tie with "Seven Steps to Freedom," which is also a great resource. *Note: The Seven Steps should always be done with a mentor, pastor, or counselor.*

York Alliance Church/The Village Church, **Redemption Group**. This small group and class is an incredible process of engaging the truth and living free. Developed as "The Steps to Recovery" by The Village Church in Texas, sponsors walk with

participants through a journey that covers the redemptive work of Jesus and the process of engaging it.

A.W. Tozer, **How to Be Filled with the Spirit**. This little book is a great and practical guide to the necessity and process of being filled with the Spirit.

Miroslav Volf, **Free of Charge**. An informed, practical, and detailed treatment of forgiveness, written by a native Croatian who taught in Croatia during the Yugoslavian wars. Volf's writing is deeply informed by Scripture, theology, and his breadth of experience.

Step Three: Follow

Brian Kannel, **Follow Me: Discipleship that Moves Us**. Written specifically for the congregation at York Alliance Church, this book expounds on the core values of discipleship and how the interplay between those values, utilizing the hourglass metaphor, leads us toward maturity in faith.

Marva Dawn, **Truly the Community**. This is a popular level exposition of Romans 12, and is a great treatise on what it means, practically, to be the church. Dawn unpacks this profound passage of Scripture in an accessible and applicable way, teaching us about "hilarity" of what it means for us to be the community of faith and learn to grow together.

Mark Allan Powell, **Giving to God**. There is no shortage of writing about money and stewardship in the church, but Powell's work stands out as being very balanced between the theological/biblical and the immensely practical.

Watchman Nee, **The Normal Christian Life**. Using key passages from Romans, Nee uses penetrating illustrations to teach profound truths. His concept is that, as we pursue Jesus, what is extraordinary to the world should become normal for us. One of the best books on the breadth of discipleship available.

Gordon MacDonald, **Ordering Your Private World**. This is one of MacDonald's greatest works, offering help for ordering the personal life of the believer. Tackling subjects like busyness, disorganization, spiritual filling, and rest, MacDonald encourages a rhythm of life while giving practical tools.

Patrick Lencioni, **The Three Big Questions for a Frantic Family**. Using Lencioni's trademark story-based style, we engage a story of a family that we can all relate to on some level, and then learn profound lessons about leading our families with purpose and meaning.

Step Four: Flow

Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, **The Tangible Kingdom**. Halter and Smay show how the ancient practices of the church translate to the 21st world we find ourselves in. They give activities, habits, and practices that allow a community to be a tangible presence in the world.

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, **Total Church**. Gospel and Community are central to any healthy expression of church, and Chester and Timmis push us to shape our lives and practices around these two values.

Thomas Ashbrook, **Mansions of the Heart**. A modern exploration of St. Teresa of Avila's classic "The Interior Castle" (which is itself highly recommended for readers who are willing to wade through 15th century Spanish Catholic terminology), "Mansions" gives markers for maturity that are beyond simply coming to faith, growing in faith, and serving in the church. Ashbrook pushes us toward the necessity of the inward life with Christ.

John Piper, **Let the Nations Be Glad!** Piper's classic work on the necessity of mission work is a great read—both motivating and encouraging.

www.operationworld.org This website contains the most up-to-date statistics and prayer needs for every country in the world. You can also sign up to receive daily prayer updates so that you can pray for one or more countries every day.

Acknowledgments

I went into this project thinking it would be one of my easier writing projects, and it turned out to be by far the most difficult. The process of determining what needed to be said and how it should be communicated was, at times, overwhelming. However, there was such incredible joy in revisiting some of the basics of the faith and putting a path toward growth and maturity on paper, while remembering those whom I've had the privilege to watch grow into disciples and who are now making other disciples. My earnest prayer is that the finished product will aid in this process repeating time and time again.

There are so many people who played a vital role in seeing this project come to fruition. First, a huge thank you to our York Alliance Elders, staff and leadership team. You not only believed in this project, but you gave me the margin to complete it. I'm so grateful for the ability to "disappear" for a few weeks and know with certainty that the flock at York Alliance is cared for so well. Thanks to the LIFE group "Think Tank," who all committed lots of pre-dawn Saturday mornings throughout the winter months to gather and have bleary-eyed discussions which ultimately became quite animated. It was through your hard questions and challenging conversations that I recognized the need to create a tool like this. Also, thank you to all of our LIFE group leaders—you have been so affirmative of the need to press into discipleship, and I pray that this tool will be a significant part of the way that we live that out. I'm also grateful for Joel Comiskey—you both encouraged me to write this book on the front end, and then took it a step further by publishing it on the back end. Thanks to the whole team at CCS for your ongoing support.

Elliott Shuey gave his time, creativity, and passion in creating the cover design and layout for this book. Thanks, bro—you're incredibly gifted and a great encouragement to my heart, well beyond your design capabilities. I'm looking forward to us spending a few hours in the same zip code at some point soon! Kristin Roberts and Amanda Shuey: you guys did an incredible job, along with my wife, of looking through this book through the eyes of a discipler. Your challenges and suggestions were spot on, and the book is better because of them.

“Art begets art,” someone once said, and I’m grateful for beautiful, thoughtful, and energizing music that became the soundtrack for this writing project. Josh Garrels’ “Home” album is brilliant, and if you don’t already have everything he’s ever recorded, you’re missing out on one of the deepest joys in life. Josh, as well as The Gray Havens, Wilco, The Followers, Sandra McCracken, The Lone Bellow, Leon Bridges, Brandi Carlile, The Brilliance, Dustin Kensrue, The Decemberists, and The Innocence Mission all played a significant role in my not going crazy while writing this book.

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Finally, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Thank You for salvation that I could never merit, grace that’s beyond my comprehension, and joy that never fades. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1)

Brian

About the Author

Brian Kannel is the Lead Pastor of York Alliance Church, a growing cell church in south central Pennsylvania. He is the author of "Follow Me: Discipleship That Moves Us" and numerous study guides, including "Joy: A Study in Philippians" and "The God of Promise: A Study in Genesis 12-35." Brian and Amanda live in York, PA with their four children.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

– MATTHEW 28:19-20, ESV –

It was with these famous words that Jesus left the formation of the global church in the hands of a rag-tag band of misfits. Their instructions? To reach out with the message of Jesus to the world around them, seeing people become disciples themselves and make disciples of others. Incredibly, this message, empowered by the Spirit of God, has continued to go forth for 2000 years, transforming this small band into what is now a global army.

However, studies are increasing showing us that this global army is faltering. Church affiliation in the West is decreasing at an alarming rate. Even more concerning is the lack of growth toward maturity in those who are a part of the church. Foundational truths are being missed, forgotten, and even discarded. Faith seems to take on less significance with each passing generation. Those who have grown in faith are often at a loss as to how to pass that faith on to those who are behind them in the journey.

Becoming Disciples, Making Disciples is humbly offered as a part of the solution. Heavily relying on Scripture, the essentials of discipleship and the path to maturity are distilled into four steps: Foundation, Freedom, Follow, and Flow. Each step contains a series of vital concepts necessary for growth as a disciple of Jesus, as well as concrete actions through which the follower of Jesus can personally apply the truths they are learning. These steps also provide a practical pathway to pass the essentials on to those who are newer in faith, thus providing a framework to not only become disciples, but make other disciples.



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