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RHYTHMS OF GRACE

A STUDY ON SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



STUDY GUIDE

RHYTHMS OF GRACE

A STUDY ON SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed for use by groups who want to grow in Christ together (Small Groups, discipleship groups, bible studies, families, etc.). The goal is to both *learn* about spiritual disciplines and *practice* them together. You can use this guide in whatever way works best for your group, but here are some suggestions.¹

Before Meeting Together

- Read the Introduction. There is a short devotional to introduce the discipline for the week and why it matters.
- Read the Summary Statements. These bullet point lists help summarize each discipline based on what the Bible says about them. References are often provided for those who want to investigate further.

While Meeting Together

- Bible Study. Each week provides a few relevant texts to the discipline being highlighted. Read through these verses together and discuss the questions that are most applicable to your group.
- Practice Together. Since the goal isn't simply learning about these disciplines, each week there's a suggestion for how to practice the discipline together as a group.

After Meeting Together

- Read Ways to Practice. We all need practical ideas for cultivating disciplines based on our own interests, personality, stage of life, maturity, etc. Read through the list and find 1-2 ways you can practice each rhythm of grace in the following week and moving forward.
- Scripture Meditation. There are five passages listed each week as a starting place for Bible Meditation, prayer, and other disciplines. If you are already using a Bible reading plan or have another rhythm for being in God's Word, you can skip this section.

¹ Note that the week one format is slightly different because it's an overview of all the disciplines.

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WEEK 1 | RHYTHMS OF GRACE

"Our sanctification—the process of becoming holy and Christ-like—is more like a Weight Watchers program than listening to a book on tape. If sanctification is tantamount to closing the gap between what I know and what I do...it means changing what I want. And that requires submitting ourselves to disciplines and regimens that reach down into our deepest habits. The Spirit of God meets us in that space—in that gap—not with lightning bolts of magic but with the concrete practices of the body of Christ that conscript bodily habits." James K.A. Smith

When my wife and I wanted to run a 5K, we did a "couch to 5K" program. It felt like a daunting task for people who find it easier to turn on the TV or open a book, so we needed a training program to change our habits and get us ready for the race. A training program for the average person, not a die-hard runner. The Couch to 5K Program starts you at level "couch potato" and helps you build up your endurance until you can run 3.1 miles. Day 1 is a breeze—I think we walked for five minutes. Each day you add minutes of running. First one minute, then two, then five, and before long you're running miles at a time.

The effectiveness of this kind of program that you build muscle and endurance while simultaneously creating a habit. Early on, running was boring, time-consuming, and something we had to force each other to stay committed to. But, over time we could run faster for longer and our lungs didn't burn (as much). We started *enjoying* running, and leaving the house to run felt less like a chore. Establishing a new routine proved to be harder than running long distances or fighting low levels of discomfort, but the fought-for routine was essential for longevity.

The same is true for changing your diet, learning a new skill, or establishing spiritual disciplines. There's a gap between our intentions and our actions and often we assume that having good intentions brings about the change we're looking for. I might *intend* to stop eating so much dessert and add a few salads into my diet, but as weeks and then months turn into a year, I see no change. Why? I had a genuine desire to eat better, but my habits never changed. If my routines include drinking Dr. Pepper daily, finding dessert after every meal, and caving in to grab fast food when making dinner sounds cumbersome, these habits shape how I live.

I might *want* to spend more time in the Bible or go deeper in prayer, but if my habit is to skip these things and turn my attention elsewhere, my bad habits will determine what I do. Not the good intentions. Picking up the phone or tablet, checking something on social media, surfing the internet, or turning on the TV is easier and more instinctive. Unless I refocus life around new habits I'll keep practicing old ones.

We have to purposefully establish new patterns or our intentions never become realities, at least not beyond a short burst. We are creatures of habit and habits aren't neutral. They form us by training us to act a certain way and they point our hearts in a specific direction.

Cultivating spiritual disciplines isn't about getting more knowledge—it's about practicing them until they become Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered habits. In his book, *You Are What You Love*, James Smith says:

"The Lord knows that we are creatures of habit; he created us this way. God knows that we are animated by hungers we aren't always aware of, that our wants and cravings are inscribed in us by habit-forming practices that teach us to want. If you are a creature of habit whose loves have been deformed by disordered secular liturgies, then the best gift God could give you is Spirit-infused practices that will reform and retrain your loves. And so he meets us where we are, with counterformative practices, with hunger-shaping rituals and love-shaping liturgies. He gives us Spirit-empowered practices as the gifts of God for the people of God."²

Unless we replace old habits with new habits, and exert energy and effort into growing, it won't happen. Learning about **and** practicing spiritual disciplines is a necessary for Christian maturity. However, we need to reiterate that these spiritual disciplines are a means to an end, not the end themselves. They're only helpful and important if they lead us in humility—not out of pride or self-righteousness—to see and know Christ more. The focus, goal, and priority aren't the disciplines themselves, but how they put us in the path of Jesus. They are useful if they set our minds and hearts on Him, refocus our attention and worship to Him, and help us abide in Him.

This study is about knowing, loving, abiding in, and worshipping Jesus above all things. We can't approach this study as a transaction with God ("If I do "X" I will automatically grow") because there are lots of factors involved in our spiritual growth. Disciplines don't guarantee results any more than putting a sailboat in water guarantees it will move. But, sitting back, do nothing and waiting for God to zap us with maturity or new desires will never result in growth either. A farmer tills his soil, but waits on rain. A sailor raises the sails even while he waits for the wind to move the boat. Likewise, a disciple does what they can to set their heart on Jesus even as he or she waits on the Spirit to breathe life into their efforts.

We cultivate and practice right habits, but we wait for God, by His grace and through His Spirit, to bring growth. This work of God in us is an act of grace. While we work, we do not earn it, demand it, pay for it, or get it because of our performance. We pursue spiritual disciplines because we know our heart will not naturally gravitate towards the things of God, but we are careful in our pursuit that the disciplines do not replace Jesus as the focus.

The fact that you're picking up this guide is a good thing. It means your intention is to grow in Christ and you're ready to act. Let's learn these disciplines and practice them so they become our own habits (of grace), while remembering that the aim is knowing, worshipping, and reflecting Jesus.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Examples of Spiritual Disciplines

- Bible Study & Meditation
- Prayer
- Confession & Repentance
- Thanksgiving
- Resting
- Remembering, Recalling,

² James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 65, 68.

- Testifying, Witnessing
- Evangelism
- Stewarding
- Singing, Worship
- Fellowship, Community,
- Catechizing
- Giving
- Serving, Compassion, Mercy
- Fasting
- Silence & Solitude

Spiritual Disciplines are practices done in dependence on God's Spirit to know God and help others know God. Don Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as, *"those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God's people since biblical times."*

Warnings, Dangers, and Misuses of Spiritual Disciplines

- Attempting to get God on my side, in my debt, or earn something from Him.
- Focusing solely on the *what* of disciplines and not the *why* or *who*.
- Becoming too ascetic, rigid, rules-oriented, or structured as if it must be painful.
- Adding disciplines not taught in Scripture, or emphasizing ones that are less essential.
- Neglecting the corporate means of grace and being too individualistic.
- Thinking they automatically result in a specific outcome. "I did X so why isn't Y happening?" or, "I did X so God owes me Y."
- Practicing them out of pride or to show off, seem holy, or impress others.
- Over-complicating things or trying to do too much at once.
- Giving up or not doing them at all.
- Putting all the attention and emphasis on what I do; or neglecting our role.

BIBLE STUDY

In subsequent weeks, we'll focus on a specific discipline or rhythm from the Bible, but this week is an overview, focused on the goal of spiritual disciplines.

Read the following passages: 1 Tim. 4:6-10, 15; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 2:15; Phil. 4:9; Heb. 5:14.

1. How does the Bible talk about the value of discipline, training, and practices?
2. We have a role in our growth and God has a role in our growth. How would you explain each role?
3. Why is it important for spiritual discipline to be habits in your life? Why are habits so formative and shaping?
4. Share from experience how regular practice of these rhythms of grace have drawn you close to God and enabled you to pour into others better. Conversely, have you noticed a connection between a lack of spiritual discipline and dry seasons in your life?

The aim of spiritual disciplines is knowing God, which leads to greater joy, growth, and love for others. Read Ps. 16:11; 21:6; 34:8; 119:15-19; John 15:7-11; Phil. 3:8-10; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:3; 2:20; 1 John 1:1-4.

1. How can you know God better through spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and meditation, prayer, thanksgiving, rest, etc.?
2. How does seeing, knowing, and communing with Jesus—in part through spiritual disciplines—help you fight sin? How does it promote growth? How does it enable you to love and serve others?
3. How is knowing God related to joy (Ps. 16:11; 21:6; 34:8)? How can you practice spiritual disciplines while pursuing joy in God?
4. What things shrink your desire to know God or distract you from pursuing God?
5. How can you specifically seek to know God better this week? How can you maximize what you learn and practice in this study to know God better through spiritual disciplines?

Here are some suggestions for meditating on the passage in each's week's "Scripture Meditation" section:

- *What do you see in the text? What are key words, phrases, or themes?*
- *Ask questions like: What does this teach me about God? How does this point me to Christ, the gospel, or God's grace? Are there any promises for me to cling to? What do I need to apply most today from this? Is there anything in this passage that speaks to my life in this season? How does this help me serve or love others better?*
- *Write a 1-2 sentences a summary of what stood out to you from this passage. It could include the main point or what stood out to you?*

- *Spend 5 minutes praying over the verses—confess, praise, give thanks, and bring requests to God.*
- *Identify one thing that stood out to you and write down 2-3 ways you can continue to meditate on it throughout today.*

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Ps. 1

John 1:1-18

John 15:1-11

Phil. 3:1-16

Ps. 63

WEEK 2 | BIBLE MEDITATION

“A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost.” Thomas Watson

When you hear the word “meditation,” what comes to mind? Someone parked on the floor, eyes closed, legs crossed, with incense burning in the background? Maybe you imagine a hip new yoga studio full of people emptying their minds to the sounds of waves crashing in the distance (all while paying to do stretches).

When I think about meditation, one image that comes to mind is chocolate. And not just any piece of chocolate, but a delicious square of dark chocolate. It’s on the list of “thou shalt not” for food, as in you should never eat good chocolate in a hurry. It’s not a food to be chomped quickly and sent down your gullet. Instead, it’s meant to melt on your tongue and be rolled around your mouth so that every taste buds pick up each subtle flavor. It’s meant to be relished... thought about. “What flavors is that? A hint of vanilla, a distinct brownie flavor, or is a sprinkling of salt? Is it more bitter or sweet?” Dark chocolate is an experience to take in slowly enough to enjoy it thoroughly.

Biblical meditation looks more like savoring scrumptious chocolate than it does sitting in silence on a yoga mat. Meditation involves lingering over God’s Word so you absorb it—filling your mind with specific truths and steeping your heart in them. It’s allowing beautiful truths about God—revealed primarily in the Word but also in things like creation—to burrow themselves into your mind and affections. It’s how we set our hearts on Christ by reflecting on and considering His truth, promises, and person.

While Bible reading and study receive attention in some churches today, Bible meditation has become a neglected practice. David Mathis says, *“It is perhaps the most underserved, underappreciated, and potentially most life-changing habit for us to cultivate in our day.”*³ Did you catch that? Potentially the “most life-changing habit for us to cultivate in our day.” Is that true? If it’s that potent, why do we not hear it emphasized more and what are we missing out on?

Often our time in the Word is as rushed, hurried, and empty like the other things in our crowded schedules. When we get around to God’s Word, it’s a quick read as we breeze through a section or chapter without considering the words, much like we scan a newspaper or blog article someone sent our way. Within a span of a few minutes, we’ve picked up the Bible, put it down, and shifted our attention to what’s next.

This isn’t meant to guilt-trip you, but it is an honest look at how we often (and I’m speaking from personal experience) approach the Bible. If Bible reading is such an abrupt act before we move on, we shouldn’t be surprised when it doesn’t land in our minds with any force. Like a person who chows down the chocolate rather than cherishing it, our Bible reading becomes a duty rather than a delight.

³David Mathis. “Ten Questions for David Mathis: Part 2”, July 26, 2016. <http://biblicalspirituality.org/ten-questions-for-david-mathis-about-habits-of-grace-part-2/> Accessed June 20, 2017.

We haven't slowed down to enjoy it! We've missed out on considering how God shows Himself to us in a passage, what promises there are to anchor ourselves in, what doctrines might correct our wrong thinking, examples of how to love those around us, rays of hope shining into our pain or despair, and the gospel provision Jesus purchased to cover our sin and struggles.

In Bible meditation, we slow down to consider, reflect on, chew on, and absorb the words of Scripture. Without meditation, the truths of God's Word bounce off us as we move on to the next thing because we haven't taken the time to massage Scripture into our hearts. Neglecting meditation can make Bible reading another task in our day instead of something that carries us through the day. Failure to meditate on Scripture is like watering your plants by only pouring water on the leaves, as opposed to letting the water sink into the soil and absorb into the roots. The unhurried reflection on God's Word allows it to seep into the nooks and crannies of our heart, feeding and fueling our thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions.

Bible meditation isn't meant to be something only super-spiritual believers do or a way to bog down and complicate our time in the Word. Instead, it's meant to be part of how the Bible speaks to us. Our reading should include careful observation, thoughtful reflection, responsive prayer, asking and answering questions, and digesting what we've just fed ourselves. It doesn't take a seminary degree or a brilliant mind, but it does take intentionally slowing down our hurried selves and being present. Whether for five minutes or fifty minutes, alone or with others, as a new believer or "seasoned saint", meditation is for all believers who want to delight in God through His Word.

Even if biblical mediation is a new concept, scares you, or seems like hard work, commit to enriching your time in God's Word this week by practicing meditation. Learn about meditating, but also try it. Listen to how Jonathan Edwards described the way he treasured the Scriptures through meditation:

"Oftentimes in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet and powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence to see the wonders contained in it, and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders."⁴

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Meditation is intentionally considering and reflecting on biblical truths about God so that they burrow themselves into our minds and affections, cultivating belief and delight in God.

- Meditation engages the head and the heart, our thinking and affections.
- Meditation is like savoring a food or drink. It is to linger on, enjoy, eat slowly, to draw out every taste, to note its many fragrances and flavors, and fully take it in.
- The Bible gives descriptions of and commands for *meditation* more than it does to *read* or *study* the Word.
- Meditation allows extended times for knowing, worshipping, and communing with God.

⁴Ed. George S. Claghorn, "Personal Narrative" in *Letters and Personal Writings: The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 797.

- Meditation must be anchored in the revealed truths of God's Word, especially as it points us to God. Things beside the Bible can lead to meditation, but it's still rooted in what we know to be true from God's Word.
- Meditation can focus on passages of Scripture, promises, doctrines, God's works, attributes of God revealed, the worship of God in heaven, our eternal destiny, and the person and work of Christ (to list a few things). It can build on hearing God's Word, reading, studying, memorizing, or thinking about God's Word.
- Meditation links and overlaps with many other practices: Bible reading, prayer, confession, thanksgiving, preaching the gospel, journaling, resting, singing, etc.
- Without meditation, the Bible will never sink in, become a delight to us, and equip us as followers of Jesus.

BIBLE STUDY

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 119:11, 27, 97-99; John 15:7-11; Col. 3:1-4, 16.⁵

1. What do you learn about meditation from these verses? What sticks out to you?
2. What do these passages say are the results or effects of meditating on God's Word?
3. In addition to Scripture, there are other things you should meditate on. How does reflecting on God's past work and faithfulness encourage you (Ps. 63:7; 143:5)? How can creation help us meditate on God (Luke 12:24)? How can we let our minds and hearts dwell on, consider, or meditate on Jesus (Heb. 3:1)?
4. Why is meditation often linked with words like delight, satisfaction, joy, rest, and strength?
5. How can Bible meditation strengthen your time in the Word and in prayer? How can it help you better know and abide with God?
6. What are obstacles or challenges to meditating on Scripture in your life? How can you combat them this week?
7. What changes can you make this week to incorporate Bible meditation into your life (maybe start by practicing one or two things)?

⁵ Additional texts and resources on Bible meditation can be found in the Appendices.

PRACTICE TOGETHER

Eph. 3:14-21

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

1. Read the text slowly. What do you see or observe? What are the key words, phrases, themes, or ideas?
2. After reading and thinking about the text, write a 1-2 sentence summary of the main point and what stands out to you from this passage.
3. Ask yourself questions like: *What does this teach me about God? How does this point me to Christ, the gospel, or God's grace? Are there any promises for me to cling to? What do I need to apply most today from this? Is there anything in this passage that speaks to my current season of life?*
4. Spend a few minutes praying over these verses—confess, praise, give thanks, bring requests to God.
5. Using the summary you wrote above, write down 2-3 ways you can continue to meditate on this passage throughout today and tomorrow.

WAYS TO PRACTICE⁶

- Read a Bible passage or verse slowly, making observations about what you see.
- Look up scriptural truths related to something you're struggling with (a sin, temptation, area of unbelief, discouragement, etc.). Return to these verses often.
- Pick an attribute, blessing, provision, work, or promise of God to meditate on.
- Rewrite a text or summarize it in your own words in a sentence or two. Think about that during the day.
- Journal your thoughts, observations, applications, questions, and prayers as you read the Bible.
- Pray through God's Word, which requires slowing down and meditating on it.
- Read a few different translations (such as ESV, CSB, NASB, NIV, NLT).
- Read a song, poem, prayer, or commentary on a passage to help you understand it better.
- Let Scripture guide you to reflect on God and stir your heart to worship.
- As you drive, dwell on biblical truths. Listen to a chapter of the Bible on repeat a few times.
- Share with someone what you learn. Conversation will help you digest the truth and go deeper.

⁶For additional ideas, see Justin Taylor's article that draws 17 ways to meditate from Don Whitney's book: <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2015/05/15/17-ways-to-meditate-on-scripture/>

- Try to memorize a verse, or remember a one sentence/phrase summary, and recall it throughout the day. Text or email what you read to a friend to encourage them, or to share and ask them to help you walk in it.
- Be on the lookout for ways God might be using truth, a lesson, or a promise in your life. Where does it show up? How is it lived out? Where can it be applied?
- Before bed, meditate on the truth again in some way. Ask God to seal it on your heart.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Eph. 1:3-10

Eph. 1:11-14

Eph. 2:1-10

Eph. 2:11-22

Eph. 4:17-24

WEEK 3 | PRAYING SCRIPTURE

"Look, prayer is spilling your guts. It doesn't have to be pretty. It doesn't have to be tidy. It doesn't have to be particularly eloquent or even particularly intelligent. But the Bible is how God speaks to us and prayer is how we speak to God. These two rhythms form the dynamic of our friendship with the God of the universe. You can't be good friends with someone you don't listen to, and you can't be good friends with someone you don't talk to. So we go about our personal devotions by studying the Bible to hear what God would say to us and then praying to God that he would forgive us for our hard-heartedness against his Word and empower us to understand it better and make it resonate more deeply in our hearts. Spilling our guts in prayer is how we process God's words to us. Prayer is how we interact with our friend Jesus." Jared Wilson

Few topics bring on the steady rise of low-grade Christian guilt like prayer (at least we're not talking about tithing, right?!). If prayer is supposed to be a normal part of the Christian life, why do we get that deer-in-the-headlights sensation when it's taught or talked about? Why do we automatically come up with excuses for why we can't or don't pray more?

This lesson isn't intended to be another weight on your spiritual shoulders. Don't enter this week with grandiose visions of your prayer life making a 180-degree turn overnight resulting in a new commitment to rise with the birds every morning to pray. Instead, a realistic goal might simply be to change your perspective on prayer and try a couple of "new things" to make it simpler, more natural, and more enjoyable.

Most of us aren't happy with the frequency or depth of our prayers. Prayer can feel hard, which results in neglecting it or doing just enough to feel as if we've performed our Christian duty. And yet, I would bet that many of us have also had sweet times of prayer. This is the paradox of prayer. We might have experienced God's nearness in prayer, and we know it's important. We've seen God work through it and we desire to grow in it, but it feels difficult. We're unsure how to move forward and we settle for tacking it on to our routines.

Why is there such a gulf between our experience of prayer and what we want for our prayer life? While we may not entirely bridge the divide, the goal of this study is to help you inch forward in your prayer life. This will happen less by *learning* about prayer and more by *actually praying*, but learning about prayer can motivate us to get started.

A simple way I think we can grow in prayer is to pray Scripture. This one thing can revive our prayer life and transform what's become mundane into something meaningful. Praying Scripture doesn't just mean closing your eyes and reciting Scripture word for word as your prayer (though it could). Instead, praying Scripture can help structure, guide, inform, and motivate your praying. Consider the following benefits of praying Scripture:

- takes away the pressure of figuring out what to pray about.
- prevents your prayers from being repetitive or monotonous.
- helps you pray God's will instead of trying to twist His arm.
- helps your prayers be God-centered rather than self-centered.

- takes away uncertainty by teaching us what to pray for.
- seals Bible reading and meditation in our hearts.
- disarms fears about using right or wrong words.
- allows you to pray through various emotions and circumstances of life, because the Bible includes a spectrum of emotions and responses (lament, joy, grief, indignation at sin, hopefulness, need, etc.).

We're not moving past biblical meditation as we learn about prayer—we need to connect the two. Meditation and prayer are inseparable. As you slow down and read the Bible with “unhurried delight” you allow God to speak to you, and then you can talk back and commune with Him by responding in prayer. Tim Keller says, “*Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace.*”⁷ To meditate on God’s Word but not pray in response mutes the phone from our end. On the other hand, praying without meditating is a one-way conversation that silences God’s voice. Prayer without meditation sounds less like a conversation and more like venting.

As we learn about and practice prayer, decide now that guilt, legalism, and frustration that may come up will not cause you to run away this time. Make your goal to take one baby-step in praying Scripture. I’m not trying to throw you in the deep-end and say, “Swim!” I’m standing in the shallow end inviting you to start by dipping your toe in the water.

Practice praying this week! Don’t just read and talk about it. Even now, remember the amazing privilege you have in prayer and let it change your posture from dread to delight.

- The Father bends His ear toward us, delighting as His children open their hearts up to Him.
- The Holy Spirit comes alongside you and takes your weak prayers—even when you can only groan and grope for words—and intercedes for you.
- Jesus Christ, our sympathetic High Priest, knows and understands your struggles because He’s walked in our shoes (Heb. 4:14). He invites us to pray and approach the Father through Him.

Rather than letting weakness and weariness discourage you from praying, go to God and open your soul to Him. You may find that going to God in prayer when you feel weak, empty, alone, in pain, or worn-out end up being the most powerful moments of knitting your heart to Him. Listen to God in the Word and talk to God in prayer. It’s as simple as that.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

What the Bible Says About Prayer

- Prayer takes on many forms, including: Confession (1 John 1:9); Lament (Lam. 3); Supplication (Phil. 4:6); Thanksgiving (Ps. 95:2-3); Adoration (1 Chr. 29:11-12); Intercession (1 Tim. 2:1).
- Prayer involved multiple postures in the Bible, including: Sitting (2 Sam. 7:18); Kneeling (Acts 7:60); Standing (Mark 11:25); Hands Lifted (1 Tim. 2:8); and Face Down or On the Ground (Mark 14:35).
- Prayer takes place alone (Luke 6:12), in the local church (Acts 2:42-47), among believers (James 5:16), and as a family (Deut 6:7; 1 Chr. 29:19).
- God hears our prayers. We have God’s ear as his children (Ps. 17:6).
- God delights in our prayers (Prov. 15:8; Rev. 5:8; Ps 147:11).

⁷ Tim Keller, *Prayer* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 48.

- God knows how to give us good gifts and delights to do so (Matt 6:32; 7:11).
- We are to pray according to God's will, seen in the Word (1 John 5:14; Matt 26:39)
- We pray in the name of Jesus—through his merits, authority, and mediation (John 14:13; 15:16)
- We are to pray at all times and without giving up (1 Thess. 5:17; Luke 18:1).
- We are to watch in anticipation of God's working (Col. 4:2).
- We are to pray when troubled, burdened, or needing something (Phil. 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7; James 5:13).
- We are to pray in faith and belief (Mark 11:24).
- We are to pray when tempted (Matt. 26:41).
- The Spirit and Jesus help us and intercede with us as we pray (Rom. 8:26; Heb. 4:14).
- Unrepentant sin can affect our prayers (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 15:29; 28:9; 1 Peter 3:7).
- God invites us to ask for things we desire and trust him to know if we need it (Matt. 7:6; James 4:3).
- God does not promise to answer yes to every prayer (2 Cor. 12: 12:7-10; Matt. 26:39)
- Selfish prayers aren't promised prayers (James 4:3; 1 John 5:14).
- Prayers are normally directed to the Father in the Son's name through the Spirit (Matt. 6:9; John 15:16).
- Jesus models heartfelt, emotional, and submissive prayer to his Father (Matt. 6:9; 26:39; John 17)

BIBLE STUDY

Let's look at 5 ways to pray. Read through a couple verses under each heading before answering the questions below.

Adoration, Praise, or Worship (Wow) | Matt. 6:9; Ps. 95:3-5; 99:1-5; Rev. 5:9-13.

Confession (I'm Sorry) | Psalm 51:1-11; 32:5; 2 Samuel 24:10; Isaiah 6:5; Matt 6:12; James 5:16.

Thanksgiving (Thank You) | Ps. 95:2-3; 100:4; 107:8-9; 138; Eph. 1:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:16-18.

Supplication or Requests (Help) | Psalm 4:1; 79:9; Ephesians 3:14-19; 6:18; Matthew 6:13; Colossians 1:9-11.

Lament (How Long) | Gen. 50:10; 102:1-2; Jer. 31:15; Acts 8:2.

1. If your prayer life was a pie-chart, what percentage of the pie do you give each kind of prayer?
2. What's the difference between adoration and thanksgiving? Why are both essential to God-centered prayers?
3. Why is confession something we shouldn't neglect? What are benefits of confession?
4. How do we ask God for things while also trusting Him and submitting to His will?
5. What does it look like to lament more in your prayer life? Why is this a struggle?
6. Which type of prayer do you need to incorporate more? Why? How can you tether your prayer life to reading and meditating on the Bible?

PRACTICE TOGETHER

The goal in this lesson isn't only to learn about prayer but to pray. Choose one of the following options to practice praying the Bible.

1. Pray it back. Take each phrase or verse of Paul's prayer below and pray it back to God in your own words. For example, take verse 17 and pray into what it means to receive wisdom and the knowledge of God.
2. Pray with the ACTS model. Begin by praising God for what this prayer tells you about God. Then, spend time confessing your sins and where you need God's mercy and cleansing. Thank God for any blessings, gifts, promises, or acts of God for us seen in this passage. Finally, bring your requests to God in the light of what Paul prayed in Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

WAYS TO PRACTICE⁸

- Pray the Bible back to God, whether prayers in the Bible or any portion of the Bible.
- Pray into an attribute, promise, or work of God.
- Pray for specific needs of yourself and others.
- Pray according to a system like ACTS (Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication).
- Pray short prayers as things come up throughout the day.
- Pray with others, whether in a church gathering, Small Group, as a family, or with friends.
- Use someone's written prayer or a Christian hymn or song to pray through.
- Have specific people, groups, and ministries you pray for regularly.
- Take a prayer walk at a park or in a secluded area. You can pray out loud or silently. Or, do a prayer walk around your neighborhood or city, praying for the people in these areas.

⁸ See John Piper's sermon "Devoted to Prayer" for additional ideas: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-devoted-to-prayer>

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Eph. 1:15-23

Eph. 3:14-21

Eph. 4:12-16

Eph. 4:17-24

Eph. 6:10-20

WEEK 4 | GIVING THANKS

"It must be an odd feeling to be thankful to nobody in particular. Christians in public institutions often see this odd thing happening on Thanksgiving Day. Everyone in the institution seems to be thankful 'in general.' It's very strange. It's a little like being married in general." Cornelius Plantinga

In our day and age of more-more-more, where Thanksgiving only represents the waiting season between Halloween and Christmas, gratitude often takes a back seat. We might extend a polite thank you for a gift or taking a day each year to acknowledge God as the ultimate source of our health, family, and church, but thanksgiving is meant to be so much more. As David Pao says, *"Thanksgiving...is an act of worship. It is not focused primarily on the benefits received or the blessed condition of a person; instead, God is the center of thanksgiving."*⁹

Giving thanks should take us beyond *acknowledging* God and into *enjoying* God. As we give thanks to God, we not only confess that we have nothing good apart from Him—which is true and right—but we also consider who He is. Thanksgiving in the Bible is a response to more than God's gifts and acts. It's a response to what we perceive to be true about Him through those gifts and acts. In thanksgiving, *"...we are not asked simply to be courteous in response to a gift. We are called to build up a relationship with our God to whom we owe all that we have...The goal of a life of thanksgiving is then to bridge the separation between the giver and the recipients who are believers in Christ."*¹⁰

I'm suggesting more than considering the Giver as more important than the gifts—I'm suggesting that as we give thanks for the gifts (which we can truly and deeply enjoy) we should also look *through* the gift to learn more about the One who gave it. In doing so we will enjoy and love the Giver even more. Giving thanks should make us pause and ask questions like: "What does the nature of this gift tell me about the Giver? What does it tell me about what they want for me or how they are seeking my good? How does what someone did for me or what they gave me provide insight into their heart, character, intentions, and attributes?"

For example, if my wife gave me a gift card, I wouldn't complain because gift cards can be useful. In the possible scenarios of presents to receive, I'd take a gift card any day of the week over a bad gift or an unusable gift. But as much as I appreciate a gift card, if my wife—the person who should know my wants, things I enjoy, what I need, what I'm looking for better than someone else—gave me a gift card, rather than conveying a sense of love, thoughtfulness, and care it might suggest a lack of it. But, if she purchased me that book I wanted, or gave me a card to a specific restaurant I wanted to try but was unwilling to spend the money on, I would be more thankful because she would have thoughtfully picked out something I really wanted. She would have shown her love for me by getting me what she knew I'd enjoy. She would have sacrificed her own time to come up with the right gift. In this scenario (hint, hint about the books if my wife ever reads this), I'm thankful for the gift itself but the gift also revealed, showed, and reminded me of specific things about my wife. As I recognize this and thank her for it—the gift and what it says—expressing thanks becomes a unifying relational act.

⁹David Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 28.

¹⁰Pao, *Thanksgiving*, 117.

In the Bible, when people give thanks to God they do so with one eye on the gift they're grateful to receive and the other eye on the Giver they're grateful to receive from and know through the gift. This kind of God-centered, worship-filled thanksgiving shows up throughout the Psalms (Ps. 9, 30, 100, 103, and 138).

In Psalm 103, David begins by blessing God for His specific actions on behalf of His people (verses 1-5). As he continues, the actions of God reveal both His attributes and His heart toward His people. David thanks God for His actions but also worships God in thanksgiving as those actions reveal a God who is righteous and just (vs. 6), merciful and gracious (vs. 8), unswerving in love (vs. 8), a compassionate father (vs. 10), and understanding of our weaknesses (vs. 14).

Consider the story of Jesus healing ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19. One of the ten not only "praises God with a loud voice" (17:15) but he falls "on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks" (17:16). The healed Samaritan doesn't just appreciate Jesus as a person who did something for him. He literally falls at Jesus' feet in thanksgiving because he sees Jesus as Healer, Deliverer, and Savior. Again, we see that true thanksgiving responds to the person behind the giving. The leper's joy isn't only in what he received from Jesus, but also in what he discovered about Jesus.

The gifts, works, and actions of God that call for thanks are windows to show us new things about who God is and who He is for us. Having a theology of thanksgiving is a conduit of communion with God. Or, to say it another way, gratitude for what God has done produces worship because of who God is.

As we seek to grow in gratitude, we might think of it as a two-part process. First, we recognize God as the source of what we are grateful for. This requires noticing what God provides to give heartfelt thanks. Ann Voskamp explains, "*The art of deep seeing makes gratitude possible. And it is the art of gratitude that makes joy possible.*"¹¹ But the second step—often neglected—is that we pause and think about what these gifts tell us about God Himself. True thanksgiving moves from *recognition* of what God has done to *revering* Him as a God who would do such things.

It's good to give thanks to God for a blessing He have given you. It's even better to recognize in that blessing a God with a generous heart towards His children. It's good to give thanks to God for a spiritual blessing, such as your adoption in Christ, but it's even better to let that thanks lead to worship as you delight in a God who clears your charges *and* embraces you into His loving arms.

As you learn about thanksgiving, ask God to open your eyes to all He's given to you and done for you, and for eyes to see all that these gifts tell you about Him. Cultivate the habit of looking into the Word and looking around to notice God at work, God speaking, God protecting and providing, God helping and sustaining you, and God showering you with gifts. When you spot these gifts, don't wait! Immediately thanks Him. Write it down so you can remember His kindness. Tell others so they can share in the joy or appreciate God as a good and generous Father. Take time to consider what the gift tells you about the Giver, what He wants you to receive with the gift, and what He wants you to know about Him through it. As you study giving thanks and build this rhythm into your life, you'll grow in giving thanks and grow closer to the God you're thanking.

¹¹ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 118.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

What the Bible Says About Thanksgiving

- It's commanded (1 Chr. 16:8; Psalm 100:4; Jer. 33:11; 1 Thess. 5:18), celebrated (Ps. 28:7; Jn. 11:41; Col. 1:12; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 11:17), and modeled by Jesus (Mt. 11:25; 26:27; Jn 6:11; 11:41; Mk 8:6; 14:23; Luke 10:21).
- Giving thanks can be expressed through sacrificial offerings (2 Chr. 29:31; Ps. 50:14; Amos 4:5), praying (Ps. 118:21; Jn. 6:11; Col. 1:3), singing (Ezra 3:11; Ps. 28:7; Col. 3:15-17), or telling others what God has done (1 Chr. 16:8; Ps. 107:1, 21; Luke 2:38).
- A failure to give thanks, ingratitude, is a root-level sin. In Rom. 1:21 people are condemned because they neither glorified God nor *gave thanks* to him. In 2 Tim. 3:2, being ungrateful is a characteristic of ungodliness. One of the most common sins of the Israel was ungrateful grumbling (Ex. 15:24; Dt. 8:18-19).
- Thanksgiving is a God-centered act of worship and a means of building intimacy with him. Giving thanks moves us past merely enjoying the gift to delighting in and drawing near to the Giver.
- Thanksgiving has many other good, biblical by-products, including joy, contentment, affirmation of others, testifying, humility, and rest (Ps. 95:2; 147:7; 107:22; Phil. 4:4-7; Deut. 8). Thanksgiving is a key way of fighting the sins of ingratitude and idolatry at the roots. Thanksgiving is the greater yes (put on) when we want to say no to (put off) complaining, grumbling, gossip, pride, and discontentment.
- We are to give thanks in all things, which means we can give thanks in every season, scenario, struggle, sin, and situation (Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:4; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3).
- Thanksgiving is often associated with or part of telling about the deeds of God (Ps. 107:1, 21; Luke 2:38; Luke 17:11-19). It can be a source therefore of encouraging God's people and evangelism of the lost.

BIBLE STUDY

Look up these verses. 1 Chr. 16:34-35; Ps. 9:1; 18:46-50; 28:7; 95:2; Is. 12:1-4; Matt. 15:36; Luke 22:17-19; Rom. 6:17; Rev. 4:9-11.

1. What stands out about giving thanks from these texts?
2. What are some reasons God is thanked?
3. What does the expression of thanks look like?
4. How is God glorified in thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving in Trials. Read Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18; 2 Thess. 1:3.

1. What are ways we can give thanks in pain or hard circumstances even when we might not want to?

Thanksgiving and Prayer. Read Ps. 107:13-15; 118:21; Dan. 2:23; 6:10; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 1:16; Col. 4:2.

1. How can thanksgiving be part of your prayer? How can you include more of it in your prayer life?
2. When you ask God to do things, do you look for Him to answer? Do you give thanks to God when He does answer? How can you grow in being "watchful" for God at work through prayer and returning thanks for what He does?

Thanksgiving and God. Read 1 Chr. 29:10-13; Ps. 75:1; 107:8; 2 Cor. 4:15.

1. How does thanking God for His gifts, acts, or promises create greater intimacy, worship, and love for God? How does the act of giving thanks move us past the gifts to the heart of the Giver?
2. How can you grow in both giving thanks and in knowing God better as you do?
3. Throughout the Old Testament, giving thanks is tied to making God's name and deeds known. How might regularly giving thanks to God encourage believers and be a testimony to unbelievers?

Additional Questions

1. How do you think gratitude and giving thanks also helps to cultivate joy, contentment, trust in God, and humility? (If needed, see Phil. 4:6; Ps. 28:7; 107:22; Is. 51:3; 1 Cor. 4:7; Col. 3:15)
2. What are some things God has done for you that you can give thanks for?
3. In view of what we've seen in the Bible about thanksgiving, what can you apply to your life, your family, or your Small Group or discipleship relationships?

PRACTICE TOGETHER

Use Psalm 145 (a psalm of thanksgiving) to give thanks to God together.

1. Read the passage and circle any of the following words: extol, bless, praise, thank,
2. Put a box around ways the psalmist gives thanks: commend, declare, meditate, speak, sing, tell, make known.
3. Underline reasons why David gives thanks or praise to God. For example, in verse 3, because "Great is the LORD," He is to be praised.

¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
² Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be
praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.
⁴ One generation shall commend your works
to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will
meditate.
⁶ They shall speak of the might of your
awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.
⁷ They shall pour forth the fame of your
abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your
righteousness.
⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love.
⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has
made.
¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O
LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!
¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your
kingdom

and tell of your power,
¹² to make known to the children of man your
mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your
kingdom.
¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout
all generations.
[The LORD is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.]
¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.
¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due
season.
¹⁶ You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living
thing.
¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.
¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.
²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the
LORD,
and let all flesh bless his holy name
forever and ever.

4. Look at the reasons David gives thanks and praise. Put a 1 next to the ones that highlight an attribute of God and a 2 by those that emphasize a work of God.

5. Do any of these resonate with something specific God has done in your life? For example, in verse 8, God is gracious and merciful—is there a specific instance that comes to mind for you personally that you can thank Him for?
6. Offer a pray of thanksgiving to God using this Psalm. Pray things in the text back to God in thanksgiving. Focus on things mentioned in the text about God as well as how that reality has been true in your own life.

WAYS TO PRACTICE

- Keep a thanksgiving journal where you list reasons you're thankful to God.
- Build thanksgiving into your prayer life by thanking God for specific things.
- Walk through your house, church, office, or any other familiar and personal space and let the things you see be opportunities to give thanks. Give thanks to God for the things you see and even more for His kindness and faithfulness in the memories, stories, experiences, and relationships tied to what you see.
- Read Scripture and take note of what you learn about the person and work of God. Use this list to thank Him.
- Cultivate a habit of gratitude by thanking at least one person each day for something you notice them doing.
- Start the habit of testifying to God's goodness by sharing with at least one person each day something God has done. Sometimes, ask others this question: "What's one thing today or this week you can thank God for?"
- When eating a meal with friends or family, before beginning or while eating ask everyone if they would be willing to share one thing they are thankful for.
- Help children in your life develop gratitude to God by noticing things they can thank God for.
- Write down personal or group prayer requests and record ways God answers your prayers. Give thanks when He answers, referring to the request you originally wrote down.
- Record on your calendar—digital or print—things God gives, does, or helps you with that are especially needed or helpful. Refer to the calendar each year at some point to remember and celebrate again God's goodness and worth as you give thanks.
- Go for a walk and give thanks to God for the things you see in nature or your neighborhood.
- Commit to fighting against complaining, grumbling, and murmuring and instead practice giving thanks. Ask a friend or those around you to help you live this out, and even call you out if you start to grumble.
- Take a "thanksgiving challenge" or "gratitude challenge."
- Find songs or written prayers of thanksgiving by others and sing or read through them for yourself.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

1 Chr. 29:10-13

Ps. 103

Ps. 145

Eph. 1:3-14

Col. 1:9-14

WEEK 5 | CONFESSION

“Repentance is not just the gateway into relationship with the triune God; it is the pathway for that continuing relationships...The Christian life involves a lifelong relationship, and as long as we are in this fallen world repentance will be an enduring part of our lives.” Mark J. Boda

The image that comes to mind when I think about confession is a windshield wiper. You know, the kind on your car that, when working well, does you a great service by keeping downpours of rain, heavy snow, and a peppering of smashed bugs off your window. It might seem like a weird association with confession, and I'll admit this image isn't taken from the Bible, but stick with me for a moment.

Have you ever been in a bad rainstorm, already anxious as you try to stay behind the blurry trail of brake lights, only to have a semi-truck fly by and slosh water that totally covers your windshield? Your anxiety shifts into panic (and maybe anger?) because you can no longer see the dotted lines on the road or potentially slow-moving vehicles ahead, and you have a new appreciation for whoever invented fast-moving windshield wipers. As you sing Carrie Underwood's "Jesus Take the Wheel" under your breath, it's the wipers that push everything out of the way and allow you to regain your sight. You take a deep breath and lean back into your seat, finding comfort in once again knowing where your lane is, where the cars around you are, and where you're headed. What's important in those moments is what's in front of you—the road you want to keep your eyes on—not the windshield or the wipers. But, without the wipers, you're hosed (pun intended). The wipers are a tool for unobstructed vision.

What do windshield wipers do? When they remove unwanted water or debris your view of the road is no longer blocked. You can see what's ahead and around, and you can enjoy the drive instead of having it ruined by a dirty window. Unconfessed sin blurs our vision so we can't see God, confession is how we get the "stuff" out of the way to see Him clearly.¹² Confession is the windshield wiper for your spiritual life that enables you to see and enjoy God.

Confession and repentance go hand in hand. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of direction—it's turning around. In the Bible, repentance refers to someone—either at conversion or as part of the ongoing life of a believer—turns *from* sin and to God. Repentance is a relational act that allows the one who caused a break in their relationship with God to return to Him.

Repentance isn't just stopping bad behaviors. It's leaving things we've given our affection and loyalty to that belong to God. In the Old Testament, we see God speak to His people through the prophets saying, "Repent," and then clarifying that this means turning away from idols and returning to Him. Hear and feel this instruction as a friend or spouse asking a loved one to come back for the sake of a restored relationship. Mark Boda writes, "*Repentance...is presented as a (re)turn to God and away from that which is contrary to God...Therefore, repentance...refers foremost to a turn or return to faithful relationship with God from a former state of estrangement.*"¹³ Repentance is coming home.

¹² To be clear, Jesus is the one who paid for our sin and provides the actual forgiveness for what alienates us from God. Confession doesn't accomplish atonement, but confession is part of how we receive and walk in the cleaning Jesus died to purchase for us.

¹³ Mark J. Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 31.

When we understand that repentance is returning to God, we also see how confession fits into it. Confession is the pivotal, outward act or expression tied to repentance. In fact, confession is tied to repentance in a similar way to how thanksgiving is tied to gratitude. According to the Bible, confession is an act where we acknowledge our sin against God to Him. To repair a damaged human relationship when one person is at fault, there has to be a verbal confession or acknowledgment of wrongdoing, often in the form of, "I'm sorry for..." When we confess to God, we do the same. We admit we've done things wrong (sins) causing damage, distance, and disruption in our relationship. We are at fault, and the estrangement is on us.

We don't hide these things, act as if they don't exist, pretend the relationship is fine when there's an elephant in the room, and we don't try to be extra nice and hope it fixes things. Instead, we humbly come clean on what we've done, admit our wrongs, and we tell God we're sorry, we need forgiveness or cleansing for our sin, we want to forsake sin so we can embrace God again, and we're seeking restoration to him.

Confession is how we remove the relational "junk" between us and God. When we confess, we claim the cleansing, restoration, and reconciliation Jesus perfectly accomplished through His death and resurrection. Confession is the windshield wiper that clears away the mess in our lives that otherwise keeps us from seeing God.

When we view confession in this light, it becomes a beautiful, joyful, and wonderful thing. Can it still be a painful, somber, stinging, and a "bitter pill"? Yes. But, when understood rightly and joined to the gospel, confession brings freedom, restoration to God, a renewed walk, and a conscience at rest. It leads to greater joy, increased intimacy, refreshment, and all kinds of reasons for thanksgiving and praise. As you think about confession as a rhythm of grace in your life, understand that it's not about beating yourself up, but about enjoying God. Confession is part of how we admit that our idols have lied to us and failed to provide the things they've promised, as we return to God to find true joy, satisfaction, and rest in Him. If this is true, why would we not want confession to be a regular rhythm in our life rather than an activity we try to avoid?

Confession is a daily, continual part of the Christian life, not just for when you think you've done something "really bad" or when you get caught in your sin. The reality of our indwelling and remaining sin in this life is the nagging reminder that we need to practice confession with as much regularity as we stray, stumble, and sin. Maybe that feels like bad news, but it's not. Jesus already paid for our sin and purchased cleansing and reconciliation. When we confess and repent, there's no penalty box to wait in, no warning ticket telling you you're close to using up your fair share of forgiveness, and no shaming or finger-pointing from God to keep you feeling condemned or guilty. Instead, there's limitless grace and continual renewal found at the cross. Confession brings us back to the cross not just for grace and mercy, but for grace and mercy that reconnects us to God Himself by removing every barrier between us.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Confession is acknowledging our sin, brokenness, and waywardness to God for cleansing from sin and restoration to him.

What the Bible Says About Confession

- Confession requires atonement for cleansing and forgiveness (Lev. 16:20-22; 1 John 1:9-2:2).
- Confession is primarily God-ward (Josh. 7:19-21; Ps. 51:4; James 5:16).
- Confession requires us to see sin as sin and acknowledge it before God (1 John 1:8-10; Ps. 32:3-5; 51:3-4).
- Confession is tied to humility, brokenness, dependence, and our need for God (Lev. 26:40; Ps. 51:7-12; Luke 5:8; 15:18-21; 18:13).
- The goal of confession is to acknowledge sin as we seek to turn from it, to restore fellowship with God through cleansing (Ps. 51:9-12; Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7; 1 John 1:9-2:2).
- Confession is better when specific (Joshua 7:19-21; Acts 19:18).
- Confession, when appropriate, might need to be done in the presence of others (James 5:16; Luke 15:18-21).
- God's people should practice corporate confession at times (Lev. 16:20-22; Neh. 1:4-11).
- Confession happens at conversion (Matt. 3:5; Acts 19:18), but it's also an ongoing practice for the believer (1 John 1:8-2:2). Believers are motivated to confess their sins because we know we have been forgiven and we now seek restored fellowship and a clearing of anything that would disrupt our relationship.
- God opposes the proud, self-justifying, and those who don't think they have sin to confess, but He welcomes and embraces the humble, broken, and contrite (Luke 5:29-32; 18:9-14; 1 Peter 5:5).
- It is always better to deal with our sin in confession than to try to hide it or make up for it (Gen. 3:7-13; Prov. 28:13; Jer. 3:11-14).

BIBLE STUDY

We are talking about the regular rhythm of confessing our sin to God as part of an ongoing posture and lifestyle of repentance. We confess in response to specific sins we know we've committed, but should also regularly (daily) practice confession because we know that we sin daily, turn to our own ways, and are in need of God's mercy, grace, and help.

Read Lev. 16:20-22; Ps. 32:3-5; 51:1-12; Zech. 1:3; Ezek. 14:6.

Read Matt. 4:17; Luke 15:18-21; Acts 19:18; 1 Thess. 1:9; James 5:16; 1 John 1:5-2:2.

1. What do you notice about confession and repentance in these passages?
2. Why does confession require repentance and not merely recognizing or naming our sin? For example, is saying to a friend, "I got angry and blew up at someone again this week," what the Bible means by confession? Why or why not?
3. What happens when we don't confess sin (See Ps. 32:3; Prov. 28:13-14; 1 John 1:8; Luke 18:11, 14)?
4. What are the results of confessing and repenting of sin (See 1 John 1:9; Ps. 51:2, 7-12; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)?
5. What are benefits of confessing, repenting, and fighting sin in community rather than doing it alone or hiding?
6. How does a solid grasp of the gospel allow for healthy, honest confession of sin? How does honest confession of sin lead us back to the gospel?
7. In your flesh, what is your tendency in responding to sin (For example, blame-shifting, denying it, making up for it, etc.)?
8. How can you cultivate a rhythm of confession in your life? How can you help cultivate a culture of confession with those in your family, Small Group, or local church?

PRACTICE TOGETHER

Confessing Together

When God convicts you of specific sin or gives you eyes to see how you've done things your way rather than His way, you need to confess. Confession doesn't always have to be about our sin either—though often it is—we can also confess our brokenness, dependence, and need for God in all things.

Here are a few suggestions to guide your time together:

- Pray for the Spirit's help to lead you into honesty and vulnerability, and for eyes to see your sin for what it is. The goal isn't to think through every sin you've committed or beat yourself up over sin, but to confess it to God among others (James 5:16). If you're in a group larger than 6 people, consider breaking up into smaller groups to have time and freedom to go deeper.
- Read Psalm 51:1-11 and observe David modeled confession.
- Spend time praying together in confession. If this seems new or daunting, refer to Psalm 51 and think through some of these questions to help your prayers:
 - Are there sins you've committed in word, thought, or action this week?
 - Is there any pride, lust, selfishness, apathy, anger, jealousy, or idolatry in your heart?
 - Have you pursued "me time" and your desires above God this week? When or in what ways?
 - How have you put yourself before those around you?
 - Are there any things you've kept hidden, or not treated as a big deal that aren't consistent with following Jesus? Confess these things.
 - What are things you're dependent on God for, or areas that you know you need His help in?
- After a time of confession, remind one another of the gospel and the grace you have in Christ. (Consider reading 1 John 1:8-2:2 or Rom. 8:1-4.) God's grace has the final word over us if we're in Christ. Spend a few moments thanking and praising God for forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation.

WAYS TO PRACTICE

- Begin and end your day with confession, acknowledging your need for God's grace and mercy.
- When you know that you've sinned against God, be quick to confess and repent.
- Read, sing, and write personal prayers and songs of confession.
- Be honest with believers you live life together with by confessing to them.
- Be quick to admit fault to others as a practice in humility and honesty.
- As a family, establish a pattern of confession of sin and acknowledging wrongdoing, as spouses to one another, as parents to children, and hopefully then as children to parents.
- Know your heart well enough to know the things needing confessed.
- Pair confession with thanksgiving and preaching the gospel to yourself. Remember that through Jesus, grace covers you and your identity in Christ defines you, not your sin or struggles.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Ps. 32

Ps. 38

Luke 15:11-32

Ps. 51

1 John 1:5-2:2

WEEK 6 | REST

"When we are crazy busy we put our souls at risk. The challenge is not merely to make a few bad habits go away. The challenge is not to let our spiritual lives slip away. The dangers are serious, and they are growing. And few of us are as safe as we seem." Kevin DeYoung

Have you experienced conversation along these lines on a Sunday morning after church?

"How are things going?"

"Pretty good. I'm tired though. We've been really busy. It's hard to remember what all has happened because life has felt like a whirlwind."

"I know what you mean. We keep telling ourselves this is just a season, but it seems like this season is never-ending."

"Yeah, we're looking forward to getting away for a vacation in a couple months. But usually, we end up needing a vacation to rest after our vacations."

In contemporary America, both inside and outside of the church, there's a strange social phenomenon that has us measuring how we're doing and how life is going by our schedule. "Things are busy," has become an increasingly popular sentiment, and what's interesting is that usually one of two things are being suggested in the answer. For some, it's an admission of feeling stressed, tired, rushed, and overwhelmed. Many people give this answer with the longing for things to change, though they rarely do. However, for many, "I'm super busy," is a way to suggest that their lives matter. More and more we use busyness language to cover a layer of pride, even as we complain about never-ending busyness. We think lives full to the brim mean we're living a life that *matters*. We're at a job that needs us, we're invested in our church, our kids are in thirty activities each week, we're not missing out on things, and we have places to go and people to see.

The undercurrent of this language stems from a performance-driven culture that values accomplishment and involvement. The alternative to an, "I'm busy," response would be saying that we're not busy and in our culture, may feel that this would be a shameful, embarrassing thing suggesting that we're boring people who aren't doing enough with our time, that we're not skilled enough, educated enough, energetic and passionate enough, not goal-oriented and driven enough, or not liked by people enough to fill our calendar with endless opportunities.

It could be that we're not living this way to portray a certain version of ourselves to others, but that we've absorbed cultural beliefs to validate or incriminate ourselves based on our level of busyness. A parent might think if they don't have their kids in multiple activities—like so many other kids—and drive them from place to place, then they are bad parents who are failing their children by taking options away from their future. One byproduct of living in this culture is that rest ends up being desired at a personal or family level but ultimately neglected because we value busyness on a cultural level. To tell those around us we're well rested earns a skeptical look of, "What?! You must be lazy or have no life." Few people would respond with, "That's great. I commend you for prioritizing rest over driving yourself into the ground and missing out on what matters." Many people not only pursue a fast-paced life but also go out of their way to portray their busy lives to others. Just look at our social media accounts that scream, "Look how busy, full, and awesome my life is!"

And yet, in private conversation, what people share is that they are weary, stressed, rushed, and burnt out with this speed of life. Things have lost their joy. People are caught up in a way of living that seems unhealthy but that they can't escape. More than ever, we need to let biblical teaching trump cultural norms, and that includes the area of rest.

Practicing rest is a key rhythm of grace and an important way we stay healthy and grow spiritually. In fact, rest is so important that after God created everything He modeled rest by taking a day off to enjoy His handiwork (Gen. 2:1-3). God even built rest into the 10 Commandments with the command to keep the Sabbath holy to regulate the life and worship of Israel, forcing them to rest every seven days.

While many religious leaders have misused the Sabbath, it has always been designed as an essential way God's people connect with Him and care for themselves. In the New Testament, we see the Sabbath take on new dimensions as God's people gathered and rested on Sunday, freed from the restrictions placed on Israel in their Law-based covenant.

This emphasis on a Sabbath for God's people shows us that God values our rest more than we do. Not just physical rest, either. Your Sunday nap is great, but it shouldn't be the climax of the Lord's Day. God is serious about His people finding rest in Him when they gather for worship, prayer, hearing and teaching of the Word, and fellowship. We do need physical breaks, but the call to cease from normal labor isn't only for the sake of our health—it's also for the good of our hearts. We need dedicated time to look to God.

The Sabbath forces us to confront our idols and live out our theology. Is God enough in my life or am I driven by a need to succeed, accumulate more wealth or possessions, and get ahead? If I obey God and give up a day of work, will He provide for my needs or will I be at a loss? Is God the owner of my time and worthy of a full day of undivided attention? Am I more excited about my free time on the weekend or connecting with God and His people? Can I live within the limits of a creature who needs rest and be willing to slow down or give up work that might also need to be done? A day where we stop our normal work to let God be God and to worship Him stretches us, but it also gives us joy and strength.

As Kevin DeYoung says in his book *Crazy Busy*, "God gives us Sabbath as a gift; it's an island of get-to in a sea of have-to."¹⁴ Observing a Lord's Day isn't restrictive: "You can't do those things." Instead, it's protective and generous: "Take a day to enjoy the things that matter most." While we live most of our week caught up in and drained by the normal, necessary, mundane grind of working, living, and surviving, on the Lord's day we're given permission to turn our eyes *from* business and busyness (vocation, chores, checkbooks, schoolwork, schedules, etc.) and to God Himself. A day set apart to rehearse the gospel, to find refreshment in the living Word, to recalibrate life with God at the center, and to find joy in fellowship with the church. God offers us a day to delight in things that fill us up instead of emptying us. The Lord's day is about finding rest, satisfaction, peace, joy, and contentment

¹⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 91.

in the presence of God and in God's people. Taking a day off of work won't give your soul rest, but taking a day off to spend time abiding with Christ will.

As we learn more about a weekly rhythm of rest in God, consider how you can practice this kind of rest in various ways: regularly (daily or weekly), occasionally (monthly, quarterly), and seasonally (holidays, annually). You need time to unplug. You need to escape the distractions, voices, and busyness of the world and find time to let your heart, body, and mind breathe. As you make room for quietness and rest, you can hear God's voice. Rest isn't about the things you're not doing—it's about what you're choosing to do instead. It's about prioritizing the presence of God.

BIBLE STUDY

Rest and the Sabbath or Lord's Day¹⁵

Read Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 16:22-30; 20:8-11; 31:12-17; Deut. 5:12-15; Is. 58:13-14.

1. If God's rest in Gen. 2:1-3 had nothing to do with weariness or physical exhaustion, why do you think He rested after Creation?
2. In Ex. 16:22-30, what was Israel supposed to learn by gathering food for two days on the sixth day of the week? What temptations do you think they faced on days six and seven? What similar temptations do you face about giving up a day of work for Sabbath rest?
3. How does understanding that God created us (Ex. 20:11) and knows our needs help you think rightly about a day of rest? How does understanding that God redeemed you out of the world and to Himself (Deut. 5:15) help you think rightly about a day of rest?
4. In Ex. 31:12-17 God connects sanctifying (setting apart) the people with sanctifying the Sabbath. How did a Sabbath for Israel mark them as different from the surrounding nations? How does practicing a Lord's Day today look different from the world? What does it say about God to an unbeliever?
5. How is a Lord's Day spent pursuing our own ways different from a day pursuing God and resting in Him?

Jesus and the Sabbath

Read Mark 1:21; 2:23-28; 3:1-5; Luke 4:16; 13:10

1. Jesus never breaks the Sabbath command, but He also doesn't practice man-made rules added to the Sabbath. What does Jesus do on the Sabbath? How can this inform what our Sabbath looks like?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark. 2:28)? What does it mean that the Sabbath was made for man, instead of man being made for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27)?

Additional Questions¹⁶

1. In Scripture, Sabbath isn't primarily about not working and having more "down time," it's about setting time aside to honor, enjoy, and worship God. What should "rest" mean to us? What would make a Lord's Day truly restful for you?
2. What do you do personally, or as a family, to treat Sundays as the Lord's Day? What has led to greater worship and greater rest?
3. In addition to the Lord's Day, what activities, hobbies, or other things allow you to rest? How can you prioritize these things in your life?

¹⁵ Throughout this guide, I will use Sunday to refer to the new covenant Lord's Day or Sabbath, since in the early church that became the day the Church gathered for worship and rested (Acts 20:7). For most people, Sunday is still the normal day of rest. However, if your schedule forces Sundays to be a day of work, find another day to use as your weekly day of rest in similar ways (Rom. 14:5-6).

¹⁶ See Appendix: Ways to Rest for practical ideas for maximizing the Lord's day and finding rest in a hurried culture.

PRACTICE TOGETHER

Practicing Rest Together

This rhythm may be more difficult than others to practice together. However, in view of what we've seen in Scripture, discuss some of the following questions to plan what practicing rest well this week looks like—on the Lord's Day and beyond.

On the Lord's Day

- What are your biggest obstacles to using Sunday—or one day in seven—to especially pursue God? What do you end up spending time on?
- How can you spend time with other believers in intentional and meaningful ways that provide rest and help you point one another towards Christ?
- Think about how you use social media, your phone, internet, or the TV on Sundays. Is there a way to use them less so that you can experience deep rest, instead of just “vegging out”?
- What's one thing you want to do differently this week to practice a day of rest focused on God?

Beyond Sunday

- What are your biggest obstacles from resting throughout the week or in life? Are there any idols, fears, covetousness, pride, or insecurities tied to why you don't rest?
- What do you do to “relax” that doesn't end up providing real rest? Which of these things are habits you naturally turn to (Example: turning on the TV and watching it for a couple hours before bed) but aren't life-giving?
- What activities refresh you and give rest? How can you build them into your life?
- What things in your day steal time? If you had to free up an additional hour each day, how would you do it?
- What one thing do you want to do differently this week to build in time for rest?

Maximizing the Lord's Day¹⁷

- Get rest the night before. Don't do things on Saturday night that will leave you tired, regretful, or guilty on Sunday morning.
- Gather together with the people of God at the church you're a member of.
- Grab lunch or dinner with fellow church members or new guests at your church.
- Use the after-church drive or Sunday lunch to talk with your kids, spouse, or friends about takeaways from the morning. Did God encourage or convict you in any way? What did you learn about Him from His Word?
- Find ways to serve, encourage, help, or minister to others on this day. Remember, Jesus modeled using the Sabbath to love others in compassionate service.

WAYS TO PRACTICE

- Prepare your heart for rest on Saturday night or Sunday morning.
- Prioritize enjoying God and His gifts on your day of rest rather than primarily pursuing the things you want.
- Limit your time on your phone, social media, the computer, and with the TV.

¹⁷ See also the two blogs by Tim Challies, “Planning for the Lord's Day” and “Delight in the Lord's Day” at challies.com.

- Intentionally set aside time to read, pray, and remember or consider God. Use the day to have heart-level conversations with people around you.
- Enjoy God's good and common gifts: food, friends, creation, a hobby, sleep, and family.
- Help your children take a break from their normal work of sports, schoolwork, and chores.
- Read good books that allow you to pause from "busyness" and thinking about what needs to be done.
- Discover what things renew, rejuvenate, or are life-giving versus what activities drain you. If you discover things that are especially life-giving (a long walk, writing or painting, learning an instrument, running, reading, hanging out with people, enjoying creation, serving others, etc.) find a way to build this into your life.
- Don't make your phone or computer the last thing you look at in the evening or the first thing you pick up in the morning.
- Say no to things that are not a priority or are unnecessary. Are their commitments or activities that can be cut?
- Turn off your email after a certain time of the day, on the weekend (if possible), and during a vacation.
- Take vacation time and make sure it's restful instead of leaving you needing more rest when it's over.
- Consider attending an annual conference or retreat that helps you focus on the things of God.
- If you're married, find ways for you and your spouse to get away together and share what God is doing on your life, pray and plan for the future, have good conversation, and rest together.
- Reduce the amount of time you spend on your phone so you can see and interact with the people and environment around you.
- Be intentional about being present in the moment, in the place you are, with the people you're around.
- Do the basics: Get sleep. Eat healthier. Exercise. Take care of your body. The physical and spiritual are related, so it's rare for a person with a worn-out body and mind to have a refreshed heart.
- Fight against the idols that rob you of rest: fear of man, trust in self, needing to prove yourself, a performance-driven culture, justification by accomplishment, trying to keep up, living through our kids, constantly climbing higher in the corporate ladder, etc.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Ps. 63

Matt. 11:28-30

Luke 10:38-42

Ps. 23

Isa. 40

WEEK 7 | REMEMBERING

"Let every personal mercy be written upon your personal memory...Remember the mercies of God. Do not bury them in the grave of ingratitude." Charles Spurgeon

My wife and I love to travel. It doesn't have to be an elaborate trip or far-away journey. We enjoy day-trips around Indiana, extended weekends, trips to see family in nearby states, and vacations to new or favorite destinations. We love the shared experiences inherent in travel; the memories made (some joyful and some stressful), the food and drink tasted, sights seen, beauty taken in, pictures snapped and saved, and understanding what makes a place unique. I'm the nostalgic one between the two of us, so part of how I treasure our trips is by overspending on souvenirs, postcards, and other knickknacks. We have two traditions when it comes to souvenirs (though I usually splurge on a few additional items): we always a Christmas ornament tied to the place we visited, and we always find a travel mug. Besides being travel enthusiasts, we're coffee lovers. So each morning we drink freshly brewed, strong, hot coffee, it's almost always from one of our travel mugs.

Since we have coffee daily, drinking out of a travel mug offers me regular reminders of our trips. Souvenirs are a way we remember. Not a factual recall, "Yes, we've been there," but a savoring of shared experiences, moments, food, views and sights, smells, and memories. It's a way to reminisce and enjoy again the places we've been together and the bond we now have because of it. When guests visit our home and we serve them a cup of quality coffee (a gift all good hosts should offer), they often ask about the mug, which gives us a chance to bring more people into our remembering, maybe even compelling them to take a trip themselves. Part of why I like souvenirs and pictures is because I enjoy remembering.

Remembering in this way, even with a small, seemingly insignificant coffee mug, is not a cold, mental exercise—it engages your emotions. It's a way to bring the past into the present and see how it's part of who you are now.

In the Bible, remembering is an essential practice and rhythm for the people of God. God commands His people to intentionally store up memories—in our minds, in recorded histories, in memorials and monuments, in food and drink, and through festivals and special days. God helps His people build reminders into their life, calendar, structures, diets, and physical location. These prompts are designed to jog their memory about who God is, their redemption, His words, works, and of His faithfulness.

Unfortunately, we drift towards spiritual amnesia by default. Remembering seems like it should be easy and automatic in our spiritual walk, but we are quick to forget God. We are quick to forget the deceptiveness of our heart and the bankruptcy of our idols. We are quick to forget what God has done for us, or what God has told us and taught us.

We not only forget, but we sometimes "mis-remember" by creating a version of the past that didn't happen. Hard and trying circumstances appear rosier. Bitter temptations and sins that brought devastation don't seem so bad now. God's answers to prayer are dismissed and we grumble against Him and question His care for us.

We see this again and again in Israel throughout the Old Testament and the disciples in the Gospels. While we always think we're unlike them, we too fail to remember. We fail to let the memories and remembrances sustain, strengthen, encourage, motivate, and carry us through the trials, temptations, fears, and valleys we face today.

God knows our ongoing struggle with spiritual amnesia and He commands us to *remember*. He builds remembrances into our lives, and He encourages us to practice remembering. We don't want to be ignorant of what God has said to us and done for us time and time again.

Many of the ways we remember end up being fun and festive. Just as God used good food and holidays to help His people remember Him with great joy, so also even now many of the ways we remember are things to look forward to. Traditions, holidays, seasons, pictures, journals, souvenirs, stories, meals, art, and music are among the ways we build remembering into our lives. Remembering is a joyful, powerful, and necessary way for us to continue following God faithfully. As we explore the rhythm of remembering, you'll see that it's biblical and think about how to build it into your regular routines and special occasions.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The Value of Remembering

Remembering is the act of calling to mind something from the past and living in light of it in the present. This includes remembering who God is, how He has acted for or towards you, things He's taught you, answered prayer, and ways He has showed.

- Remembering is how we live out what's true, rather than living in light of what's false or passively living the day apart from truth.
- When we remember God, other spiritual rhythms have lasting value and remain helpful tools for our growth.
- Remembering helps us engage our affections through the memory.
- Remembering is a great help and defense in our fight against sin, including past temptations and failures.
- Remembering provides regular, repeated opportunities that take us back to truths, experiences, and stories we want to always know.
- Remembering is how we rehearse truth to ourselves—such as who we now are, how we are to live, who God is, what's true of the world, etc.—and act on it.
- Remembering glorifies God because we can worship Him bearing in mind what He's done.
- Remembering provides us with stories and truths to share with others for their good and growth.
- Remembering is a way to daily feed our faith through memory rather than having to learn it all over again.
- Remembering is part of how we pass on the faith to children, those young in faith, and those closest to us.

BIBLE STUDY

Read the following passages: Ex. 13:3; Dt. 7:17-19; 1 Chr. 16:12-18; Ps. 63:6-8; Matt. 16:9; Luke 15:17; John 15:20; Eph. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:8.

1. What situations are God's people called to remember, and how does it help them?
2. Read Ps. 77:6-15. Asaph begins the psalm in trouble and despair, and it isn't until he remembers who God is and what is true that he has hope again (cf. Jonah 12:7; Ps. 143:5; Luke 15:17). How can remembering God, His past works and faithfulness, His truth, etc. help you in an emotional valley? Why do we often forget God in good or easy seasons and only remember Him when we're in valleys?
3. Read Dt. 7:17-19 again. Rather than fearing the people they'll face as they enter the land, the people are to remember how God delivered them and defeated Pharaoh. What can we learn about using remembering God's past work as a key way to fight struggles, fears, trials, and temptations?
4. The Bible emphasizes remembering God from one generation to another. How can you pass on your faith and knowledge of God through parenting, discipleship, mentoring, serving others, and evangelism?

Forgetting and Spiritual Amnesia

Read Ex. 16:2-3; Num. 11:4-6; Dt. 4:9; 6:12; 8:11-20; Judges 8:34-35; Ps. 78:11, 42; 103:2-5; 2 Peter 1:9.

1. What does it mean to forget God? Why are we warned against forgetting so often?
2. How did Israel forget God? What were the effects of their forgetting?
3. In Ex. 16:2-3 and Num. 11:4-6 we see Israel mis-remembering. They forgot how bad the past was, their plead for deliverance, and their slavery and misery. They talk about their former slavery as if it was comfortable, full of food, and not so bad. How do we mis-remember?
4. As God's people, how can we help each other remember and keep from forgetting?

Memorials, Traditions, and Holidays

Read about remembering through memorial objects in Gen. 35:13-15 and Joshua 4:1-10, and then read about a couple of examples of special feasts and days in Ex. 12:14-20 and Acts 2:1.

1. How did memorial objects (stones, pillars, etc.), festivals, and special days help Israel remember God's works? How did they help them re-tell stories of God's faithfulness?
2. How can you capture, memorialize, record, create a tradition, or mark things like answered prayer, God working in your life, God teaching you, a growth moment, a victory, lessons learned, etc.? How can these things help you remember?

3. What in the Church calendar can help you remember God (seasons like Advent or specific days like Easter)? How can you maximize the spiritual side of these holidays to better remember, instead of getting caught up in the fun and material side of things?

PRACTICE TOGETHER

As a group, spend time remembering how God has proved good or faithful in your life, whether recent or long ago. Consider building in time to remember as a group each time you gather.

- How have you seen God answer prayer, work in your life, show up in a situation, help you grow, teach you something, speak to you through the Word, provide comfort during pain, strengthen you during a temptation or help you fight through a sin, or provide His presence? Share an example or story with others.
- Have you ever drawn from past experiences to help sustain you in the present? If so, share an example of how remembering God's work or faithfulness helped you.
- How does remembering encourage your faith?
- What are ways to record, write down, or create "memorials" to celebrate and remember later?
- How are you sharing with others the things God does in your life or teaches you?

WAYS TO PRACTICE¹⁸

- Listen to stories of God at work and His faithfulness. Share such stories with others. Be quick to brag on God.
- Remember Jesus and His work for you and in you at the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
- Learn from the history of the Church. Know God's works and faithfulness to His Church through church history, biographies, stories, and how the Church used the Church Calendar and Liturgy.
- Record things: prayer requests and answers, lessons learned, milestones, growth moments or seasons, struggles and failures, questions, conversations, etc.
- Celebrate holidays. Engage in the church calendar through seasons (Advent, Lent) and days (Easter, Pentecost, Christmas).
- Gather with God's people to remember Him in worship, prayer, song, sacrament, preaching, and testimony.
- Pass down God's truths and your experience of those truths to children.
- Practicing meditation and memorization can help you store truths to remember later.
- Use your creativity to remember through Word-art, writing music, poetry, writing out prayers, etc.
- Write things down. Keep a journal for notes to write down things you read, learn, listen to, or study.
- Create family or personal traditions to remember God's words or works to you.
- Write in your Bible. Include notes, prayers, lessons learned, sermon outlines, thoughts, experiences tied to that text, etc. As you use this Bible over the years those notes will be opportunities to remember.
- Use memorials to remember truth or God's faithfulness in your life. Is there something you can put on your desk, bathroom sink, or in your family room that would be a personal reminder to you?

¹⁸ A great resource for thinking through how to remember by creating family traditions is *Treasuring Our Traditions* by Noel Piper.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Ps. 63

Deut. 8

Luke 15

Heb. 4:14-16

Jas. 1

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