



TheWay

A Discipleship Pathway

Abide in Christ

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Followers of the Way: A Discipleship Pathway

Why “The Way?”

“You lost your way.” Have you ever struggled to pinpoint your location, even if helped by GPS? Then you’ve lost your way. Or have you ever reached a place of severe overwhelm, or had this deep sense that ultimate fulfillment is unreachable? Then you’ve lost your way.

Perhaps you can admit, even reluctantly, that what you’re anchored to is not quite as steady as you hope or think. This illusion of stability could be seriously threatened with any series of battering waves or a massive tsunami of a job being threatened, serious illness, or the loss of a loved one. To add further difficulty to your life, there is a very real enemy of humanity who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. Have you experienced his attacks of darkness? You’ll learn more about his nasty work in the future.

Even those who are followers of Jesus can quickly, or over time, begin to wonder – where is the *abundant, overflowing life* that he spoke of? Churches have many disillusioned or disgruntled people, just surviving rather than thriving. Not surprising, many onlookers become skeptical of beginning the journey to follow Jesus. Then there is the call to be fruitful, for Jesus! Can it be said that the pruning is done in your life, that you are bearing the fruit that Jesus created you to bear?

Into this “less than” life you hear an invitation into something different – what the Bible calls the Way. This Way contains adventure and its own blueprints; after all, Jesus wants to build something majestic in your life. Since the Way centers around him, an infinitely loving, incredibly alive person, it offers something that doesn’t have to waste away or grow dull. It is also meant to be a vibrant, corporate experience and oh, how you need community!

The full title of this journey is: **Followers of The Way: A Discipleship Pathway**. Disciples are people who stick to a way of life, particular lens for the world or specific person’s teaching. Do not be intimidated by this, as everyone follows something, intentionally or not. How much better to instead explore and engage with the One who made you and knows how you thrive. Such a pathway is full of purpose and it is for those who are either exploring it for the first time, or brand new followers, or experienced travelers.

Finally, this pathway has been “field tested” by thousands of believers around the world and has been found completely trustworthy. Since it’s the Way of Jesus, who was involved in our creation, it will work everywhere.

“The Way” in the Bible



1. God absolutely loves showing people the way! He is a good father! Again, he wants us to thrive.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

2. Even those sent to oppose Jesus had this to say about him:

*So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." **Luke 20:21 (NIV)***

3. This is what Jesus said about himself. It is an absolute claim and he is the only one worthy to make it:

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

4. It is a Way that saves you in a very holistic way (as you will learn!). Emotions, the mind, your body, and your soul will be touched:

*This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." **Acts 16:17 (NIV)***

5. The Way is so life-altering and exhilarating that you're to share it with others:

*He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. **Acts 18:26 (NIV)***

6. Not everyone will love the Way of Jesus. But it is still worth it – like a treasure!:

*But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. **Acts 19:9 (NIV)***

7. The Way can impact every part of your life. This is a beautiful thing:

*For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. **1 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)***

8. The journey you're invited on points you to Jesus, over and over again. It is about him:

*I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. **1 Corinthians 7:35 (NIV)***

Further Encouragement

Are you busy? Do you wonder about the value of specific materials, such as these? Let us encourage you! As was just noted, it's all about Jesus! So indeed, it's not all about materials. However, being mentored through a pathway can lead a person directly to the feet of Jesus, WHERE they find life. That is, the life is not found in the pathway, but in encountering the One of who it was said, **John 1:4 (NIV)** *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.* The pathway simply gets us there again and again, carving out a trail in the midst of the distractions and challenges of life.

This discipleship pathway was developed through prayer, much study of the Bible and experience. It has been forged through much practice and thousands of hours of mentoring and discipleship, of both pastors and non-pastors around the globe.

It's like a blueprint. When you build a house or high-rise building, you need a blueprint to follow. You can't just start anywhere, like with the roof. You start by digging a foundation and then carefully building on that. This discipleship pathway has been designed with an order in mind. The first manual is Abide. The second manual is Grow Character. And there are more after that (i.e. Prayer & Fasting, Lead Well, the Grand Story)!

These first two, Abide and Grow Character, address the most common reasons why followers of the Way struggle. First, they forget that true life is found in being in a regular relationship with Jesus, through abiding in him – not through mere religious activity. Second, they don't understand how vital godly character is, and how they can partner with God to become more mature.

In the Abide lessons, we address things such as hearing God, journaling, quieting yourself before God, repentance, confession, our desperate need for the Bible and so on. These are the means by which you can abide or remain in Christ. In the Grow Character lessons, you'll learn that there are specific steps to take for character growth, and what God's role is in helping you become more like Jesus.

Will this all take time? Of course! However, it will both save time here on earth and increase your rewards for the place you will spend the most time BY FAR – eternity! As you become more fruitful and mature, you'll find it less time-consuming to navigate the challenges of life. Yes, you'll still have trouble! Jesus promised this (see **John 16:33**)! But you'll have less troubles from your own character flaws and have greater access to the wisdom and power of God. Wow! And as you increasingly honor God with your life, you'll be "storing up treasures in heaven" (see **Matthew 6:20**).

Getting Your Heart Ready

History and present experience have taught us that a certain *kind* of heart is ready to grow to become more like Jesus. The right "heart condition" is also prepared to be increasingly fruitful for his kingdom. We encourage you to invite God to get your heart ready for this pathway by praying for these qualities:

- 1) Humility – humility means being teachable. It means asking – "how can I engage with and grow from what I'm reading" – rather than focusing on what you might disagree with or how "advanced" you might be already. Humility isn't critical or quarrelsome.

What happens when you disagree? Hold your opinion loosely and allow the Holy Spirit to give you further discernment. Consider that you may be mistaken – is that possible? And if you're still convinced you're right, ask – is this worth missing out on further growth, through being distracted by and focused on disagreements? Humility also puts others' interests first. We strongly encourage you to work through this with others. A critical or prideful spirit can hinder the growth of others. This is a serious matter.

- 2) Desperation & Hunger - we're told in the Bible, **Romans 12:11 (NIV)** *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* Can we admit that we all could grow in this kind of zeal and service to the Lord. Are you personally hungry for this?
- 3) Perseverance & Discipline – anything that is worthwhile takes perseverance and discipline. Are you prepared to persevere in your walk with Jesus, giving it as much attention as anything else you've had to sacrifice for? Jesus said, **Luke 9:23 (NIV)** ... *whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*
- 4) Faith & Fear of the Lord – do you trust Jesus that he means what he says – that abundant life is found in him alone? Will you trust him and lean not on your own understanding? (see **Proverbs 3:5-6**) Will you trust also in his great love for you, and incredible grace? And will you respect the One who created you and is your Lord, by living the life he made you for? This life goes far beyond your own maturity, and includes the good deeds he created you for, which includes *actively discipling others.*

The apostle Paul provides us with powerful words, through the Holy Spirit. He says, **Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* So again, will we trust his grace and his plan for us, his handiwork? And will we honor him (which is a part of fearing the Lord), by doing the good works that he prepared long ago for us to do?

The Different Sections Explained

As you work through the different days, you'll notice that they're all structured the same way. The first part is always, "Renewing The Mind." You can be encouraged by the promise of Paul in Romans 12:2 that you'll be able to "test and approve what God's will is" when you are "transformed by the renewing of your mind." This section will really help you think well! And we always seek to base it on the Bible.

The second part is called, "For Your Journal." This is broken into three sections. "Reflecting and Reviewing" ensures that we don't simply rush on, but obey the command of Paul to Timothy in, **2 Timothy 2:7 (NIV)** *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all of this.* "Life Application" helps us take seriously the words of James, **James 1:22 (NIV)** **Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** This should be goal, as the Bible highlights that true love for God leads to obeying his commands. Finally, Bible reading helps us keep engaging with the Bible for ourselves, not just verses scattered through a book or lesson. Personal Bible reading and reading/hearing teaching on the Bible are BOTH important! Do not skip the Bible reading!

Abide 1 – Establish Time to Abide in Christ

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

A personal journey as disciples is completely dependent on something the Bible calls, “abiding.” Jesus said, **John 15:5-6 (NIV2011)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers ...*

Friend, Jesus desires that you really thrive! In this, you’re presented with a clear and intriguing choice – to bear much fruit or to be thrown away and wither.

Abiding in Jesus is the best way to get necessary “spiritual nutrients.” Do you want to be healthy inside, at peace and tasting joy? Though bodies will still break down at some point, getting healthy on the inside can also have benefits for one’s physical health.

What is the impact of abiding with Jesus?

Impact of Abiding in Jesus

First: we have a growing, close relationship with Jesus

Did you know that a central theme of the Bible is that God made you to be in a close, lively relationship with Jesus? Listen to this promise! **1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)** *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

Have you ever noticed that followers of Jesus use the word “fellowship?” This means to be in a profound relationship with Jesus. Sadly, many followers limit their fellowship to one another! Why not fellowship with Jesus, who is perfect in love, justice, mercy, etc.? Why not indeed!

God didn’t simply make people, place them in the universe he had just created, and then wind it up to spin on its own. No! That’s something called “deism.” Instead, here’s what happened:

- God was in fellowship with Adam and Eve, the first people (Genesis 3:8)
- Something called, “sin” (e.g. lying, disobedience, greed, sex outside of God’s boundaries) broke that fellowship, separating people from God (Genesis 3:9; Isaiah 59:2). Everyone can feel the impact today! For example, many never feel fully at rest!
- God then lovingly initiated a plan (Jesus!) by which people, including you, could once again come near for fellowship
- First, he drew near, introducing a sacrificial system which gave them limited access to him, as he lived among them from a distance in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:8)
- Second, God promised to draw near through a Son born to a virgin, who would name him Immanuel, meaning “God with us!” (Isaiah 7:14)
- Third, Jesus, the Word, became flesh and lived (tabernacled) among people (John 1:14)
- Fourth, when Jesus left he promised to send another helper to be with us (John 14:16-18)

- Fifth, Jesus promised that he would return to take us to be with him (John 14:1-3). The last book of the Bible, Revelation, gives us a picture of the final goal, **Revelation 21:3 (NIV)** *Now the dwelling of God is with human beings, and he will live with them. They will be his people and he will be with them and be their God.*

This is why God calls you and others into fellowship with him! As Paul said, **1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)** *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* John said the same, **1 John 1:3 (NIV)** *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.*

Consider this verse: **Ephesians 2:13 (NIV)** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.* You can be near God! You can have fellowship with him! How? Like any relationship (i.e. marriage, parenting) - by means of communicating (prayer and listening prayer), while you're reading your Bibles, and while you go about the activities of your day! This is what you'll learn to do from lesson to lesson, either for the first time, or to deepen what you already have.

Second: we won't wither

The Bible says: **Psalms 19:7 (NIV)** *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.* It has always been God's goal for you to have life and to be revived regularly. Wow! When you're revived, you can endure under the most trying circumstances. On the other hand, if you don't feed on the Word you'll find yourself consumed by overwhelming stresses.

You can be sustained by Jesus' words to you: both his written Word (the Bible) as well as his ongoing words to you, often whispered to your soul. Here is a weighty verse – think about it carefully! **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)** *The Son (Jesus) is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining ALL THINGS by his powerful WORD.* Did you catch it? "All things" include you and I!

We're also told in the book of John by Jesus, **John 15:5-6 (NIV2011)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

Since we're free-willed humans, rather than robots, it's up to us to remain connected, as Jesus claimed above.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 2 ways that you can be impacted from abiding in Jesus?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. God invites you to fellowship with him! Take some time to reflect on this question – is your fellowship with Jesus increasing or decreasing? In your journal write down why or why not.
2. Can you think of a time in your life when you withered under pressure? Write it down.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 1.
2. Normally you will be asked to write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you. This can be difficult to do with Matthew 1! Please also read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in preparation for the Bible reading that you will be doing each day.
3. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 what is the Bible useful for?

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day 1 you considered two exciting impacts of abiding in Jesus: 1) a growing, close relationship with him 2) you won't wither. Today, you'll look at three more impacts!

God is so *rich* in blessings. He is good to those who follow his Way! In fact, some of the deepest longings that you've had in your life are "echoes" of your longings for what God offers.

Third: we have victory over temptation to sin

Wouldn't it be great to get victory over the habitual sins that you struggle with, day after day, month after month, and year after year? The Bible vividly describes what happens in your life, **James 1:14-15 (NIV2011)** ... *but each one is tempted when, by his own evil DESIRE, he is dragged away and enticed.* It is your desires that cause you to get dragged away. That is, the devil didn't make you do it! So how do you counter this? Is it even possible?

It's important to understand that the flesh in us desires sinful things. We're told, **2 Peter 2:10 (NIV2011)** *This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.* The flesh and its desires are always tugging and if you give in, sin will reign. HOWEVER, the fact that we have this flesh is no excuse before God because he has given us his Spirit, by whom we can overcome all tugs and temptations.

As Paul said, **Romans 6:14 (NIV)** *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.* You see, under grace, we have been given God's Spirit living right in us, by which we can put to death the misdeeds of the body, influenced by the desires of the flesh. Peter really expanded on this when he said, **2 Peter 1:3 (NIV)** *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

Did you pick up on where the power comes from? From knowing God. Another way of saying this is – we need to abide in Jesus! When you abide in Jesus, his Spirit starts taking control. It may sound mysterious, but this is how it happens. It's one of the ways that God proves his existence. Listen to how Paul describes it: **Galatians 5:16 (NIV2011)** *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.* Wow! You do not have to be angry, impatient, addicted, in slavery to anxiety, greedy, etc.

Therefore, Paul could say, **1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV2011)** ... *but when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* A way out because you abide in the Way! Praise God!

But there's more. Sinning can also give a foothold to demonic influence in our lives. Therefore, Paul could say, **Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)** *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* Perhaps in this case the devil attacks people through their emotions or by increasing the wrongful anger they're already feeling against others. Similarly, Paul mentioned "the breastplate of righteousness" (**Ephesians 6:14**). If we have areas of continuing sin in our lives, then we'll have gaps in our armor where we'll be vulnerable to demonic attack.

Again, the solution to this is to abide in Christ. We cannot defeat the enemy on our own, but with God's help, we can do all things consistent with godly living.

Fourth: we can grow in godly character

You are also invited in the Bible to not only avoid sin, but to become a totally new kind of person! Imagine being everything that God planned for you! In Colossians you can read, **Colossians 3:9-10 (NIV)** *Do not lie to each other, since you have put off your old self with its practice and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* It refers to an "old self," which is full of brokenness/problems. You're likely aware of this major issue inside of you.

But it doesn't stop there! You're called boldly forward to develop a, "new self." You're to be more like Jesus, or as Colossians puts it, in the image of your Creator. What a vision for your life! You're to be like the greatest person who has ever lived!

No one is like Jesus yet; so this applies to everyone. Here is an important question – *will even those who are "experts" as followers of the Way humbly admit this?* As you abide, you too grow in character.

Paul was also able to say this, **1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)** *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* It really helps to have people in your life who can show you what this looks like. This is why isolation from a church family can be so damaging!

Fifth: we become successful in our lives

The book of Proverbs is a part of what people often call the "wisdom literature" of the Bible. And do you ever need wisdom! It helps you be successful and isn't it amazing that God wants you to succeed? Listen to what one of its verses states, **Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)** *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.*

At least ten times in Ecclesiastes, another book of wisdom, the author Solomon introduced his thoughts with, "I saw (observed) such and such, and this is how it works." He made observations about:

- laziness vs. diligence; adultery vs. faithfulness; generosity vs. greed; integrity vs. dishonesty; harsh vs. gentle words; pride vs. humility; good vs. bad leaders; enemies vs. friends, rich vs. poor, present vs. eternity, youthfulness vs. aging, righteousness vs. wickedness, etc. What a list!

King Solomon said that though wisdom beckons people to take heed, it is often rejected, resulting in disaster, **Proverbs 1:26-27 (NIV)** *I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you-- when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.* However, those who welcome wisdom and understanding are saved from the results of reckless behaviour.

Therefore, a person who abides in Jesus and his words will be very wise and successful! Or as Proverbs also notes, **Proverbs 2:11-12 (NIV)** *Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse ...*

We're encouraged to be people desperate for wisdom and INTENTIONAL in gaining it. We're not to drift through life, hoping for good outcomes. Drifting will never lead you there. Never. Drifting ALWAYS takes you in the opposite direction. And you cannot depend solely on one Sunday sermon per week to do all this for you! You must also train yourself to abide. Once again, Solomon has wisdom on this matter, saying, **Proverbs 2:3-4 (NIV)** *If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure ...*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Write down 3 additional ways that a person is impacted by abiding in Jesus?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. When you abide with Christ your character will grow. Write in your journal where you have grown in the past couple years.
2. Record 1 or 2 specific temptations and sins that you struggle with regularly. Write out a prayer, confessing to God your struggle, while also asking him to help you walk with him in victory!
3. Memorize John 15:5-6. Memorizing can really impact your heart! You can do it!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Followers of Jesus & Devotions

There's a word that many followers of Jesus use – *devotions*. Devotions is giving time to Jesus, doing exactly what Days 1 and 2 encouraged – abiding in him. This is an actual relationship! And remember the five impacts of abiding in him. This will benefit you greatly!

How often should you spend time in devotions? Should you be focused during that time? Well, think of a marriage relationship! Should you talk and listen to each other daily? Would focus be important? Of course!

It's no different when you abide in Jesus. If you read the biographies of ordinary people who accomplished the significant things that God had in mind for them, they had this daily practice. Even some of them did so in prison! (often drawing on their memory)

Daily Devotions

Joshua 1:8 (ESV) *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* To “meditate” means to chew on. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the Hebrew word behind it is, “ruminate.” It’s what cows do when they chew their food. They actually swallow it, “bring it back up,” and then chew it some more – multiple times! This may sound gross, but it ensures they get maximum nutrients out of their food.

May you be a spiritual cow! Okay, maybe not the best image – but why not maximize your spiritual nutrients with daily devotions? Joshua said, “day and night.” If you read **Psalms 1:2** it says the same thing.

The Jewish people of the Old Testament were encouraged to engage in this activity as they went about their days, **Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NIV)** *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up ...* Notice that it says, “talk about them” – as it encouraged memorizing, rather than reading. And this talking happened all the time – at home, on a journey, in bed, and in the morning! We also know that Daniel and those like him prayed three times a day (see **Daniel 6:10**).

Do you need daily food for your body? For sure! You need it for your spirit and soul too! While physical fasting comes with benefits for your body, spiritual fasting DOES NOT bring benefits for your soul. You’ll notice (or should I say, those around you will notice!) that if you fast spiritually you will become irritable and cranky. And you’ll feel dull and empty. These are sure signs of fasting from Jesus!

Everyone needs a daily time when they get quiet to hear from Jesus – his words are life for a soul and spirit! They’ll strengthen you for the day much more than any protein drink or energy bar! How long should you spend?

If you’re starting at 15 minutes a day, a snack is better than nothing! But soon it will be time to move it on to 30 minutes, and so on. Some may reject this daily habit as “legalistic” or “too structured.” You will hear the word “legalism” used a lot to make excuses to avoid good things. So, what is the definition of legalism?

Legalism is when you rely on moral commands or wise guidelines to be made right with God, to be saved and go to heaven. The gospel, or good news, clearly teaches that no amount of moral goodness or wise living can save us. Perfection would be required, a perfection that no one but Jesus has. Therefore, daily devotions do not save a person! *Instead*, they help intentionally develop believers into the kind of follower of Jesus that the Bible calls one to become. Encouraging devotions then is wise, as long as we remember that we begin with a foundation of salvation by grace.

Put another way, is it legalism when a doctor says that his patient needs to change their lifestyle; or to take certain medications; or take some tests? Of course not! It’s to help you be as healthy and well as possible. It is the same with daily devotions.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do you need devotions every day (time abiding with Jesus)? Is this encouraged in the Bible?
3. Is having a daily devotional time legalistic? Write in your journal why or why not.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you do not already have a plan for daily devotions, please write one out:
 - a. Set a regular time to have your devotions
 - b. Set the amount of time to have your devotions
 - c. Set the location for your devotions
2. You looked at 5 ways that abiding in Christ impacts people. Find someone that you can share this with this week (they are found in Day 1 and 2). Put it in your schedule. It is important that you disciple others as you are being disciplined.
3. Review your memory verse from yesterday – John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:13-18.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Wisdom for Developing Daily Devotions

If you were to create a great and tasty meal, you would need to have good ingredients, effective preparation, the right mindset, and proper kitchen appliances and utensils. Isn't it true that those who rush through meal preparation and creation usually make a mess of it?

Great devotional times are no different. They require preparation, the right mindset, and some useful tools. Yes, it can take time to develop beneficial habits, but it's worth any effort we make. **2 Peter 1:5 (NIV)** *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to your goodness, knowledge ...* The Bible talks about all kinds of effort! Some have called such habits "doorways to transformation." They are not powerful by themselves, but create room for you to encounter the Powerful one!

What are some ingredients for establishing a DAILY devotional life?

- A good Bible for reading and memorization. Find something that is readable for you! The NLT translation is quite simple. The next best option is the NIV. Finally, the ESV is a bit tougher, but still understood by most. You can ask someone who is discipling you for ideas
- A notebook or journal to jot things down. This can be on paper or through using electronic devices (be cautious about using devices that distract you)
- A personal prayer list – this is a record of things that you can pray for. Some will have this prayer list divided into different categories
- A quiet place in your home or elsewhere if needed (i.e. a local prayer room, or church). As family units, be willing to work with each other to create the space and time for devotions

- A specific time during the day
- An expectant spirit. You can even ask – is my heart open to tell Jesus all that is on my heart? Is my heart open to hear what he wants to say? Am I only trying to rush through this?

A Suggested Tool: SMORP

What is SMORP? It is an acronym that can give you guidance on what to do in your daily devotional time. Many have found it helpful, including experienced followers of Jesus such as pastors and seniors! Here's what it stands for:

Scripture – Refers to reading and memorizing **The Bible** (this word literally means “writings.” It is another word for the Bible)

Message – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you – the **Message** for the day (you will learn more about hearing God's voice)

Obedience – Refers to **Obeying** what God instructs you to do

Repentance – Refers to any sin that the Spirit prompts you to confess and **Repent** of (to repent means to turn from)

Prayer – Refers to your **Prayers** to God. This should always include praise!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What does SMORP stand for?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. What is the best meal that you have ever made? (or if not a cook – something else you created) Write down the preparation required, the “tools” you needed, and the steps you needed to take.
2. Have you ever prepared to really dig into the Bible? If yes, please explain what you did. If not, write out a prayer asking Jesus to help you on this journey.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:19-23.
2. In your journal, practice using SMORP with this passage. Don't rush it! If you can, invite someone (or multiple people) to do this with you – then compare what you received.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Setting Aside Other Times to Abide in Christ

First: establish daily time-outs

A disciple of Jesus is ready at all times to be LOVED by him, ENCOURAGED by him, RECEIVE HIS POWER, and to HEAR HIS VOICE. Again, all exciting relationships are like this! Daily devotions provide an incredible foundation for each and every day. However, as you seek to abide, it can be essential to stop in the middle of a day, moving into a time of prayer. Jesus will be ready!

It can become almost automatic. You might not even realize that you're doing it – like breathing. Of course, it can take years to develop this “beautiful rhythm.” You're learning to “pray continually,” as it says in **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. But it starts by trying, even this very week. As many have discovered, when you stop to listen, God may not say anything to you immediately. However, you'll experience his presence! And that's just as good!

These can also be times to get your attention off of the things of earth and to intentionally think about Christ or heaven. Sometimes all that is needed is to become still and listen.

Other times these daily time-outs are for thanking Jesus or praising him. Even “baby” followers of Jesus can do this well! You'll be pleasantly surprised how life-giving this all can be.

Second: establish a weekly sabbath

Did you know that God established the Sabbath (Saturday) for the nation of Israel, as a one day per week “holiday?” In Deuteronomy you see, **Deuteronomy 5:12-14 (NIV)** *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work ...* Sabbath keeping was one of the ten commandments and the Bible has much to say about it. Particularly, it had two key parts:

- First, stopping from all labor – even for animals. It was a time of *physical rest*
- Second, it was a time to remember what God had done for them. It was a *spiritual rest*

The spirits of the Israelites and all current followers of the Way require “food” such as joy, peace, hope, and love from their Creator. The Sabbath was to be something that would benefit people; this was a gift to all. Jesus emphasized this: **Mark 2:27 (NIV)** *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

Clearly, the Sabbath was not intended to be some legalistic ritual and hardship, or a commandment that brought death, such as Paul refers to, **Romans 7:10-11 (NIV)** *I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.* This is why after the resurrection of Jesus, followers of the Way began shifting their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, to match with the day of the week that Jesus rose.

From this, it's important to know that the Sabbath (Saturday) law is not a requirement for believers today. Here's what Paul stated, **Colossians 2:16 (NIV)** *Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.* Of course, this doesn't suddenly mean that God has changed his mind about how human beings function. It is still very wise!

In fact, it can be argued that in an increasingly stressed out world, where cities brag that they never go to sleep, we need this more than ever! Little wonder that many cultures are experiencing such spikes

in mental and emotional issues. We're becoming emotionally and mentally weak because we're on a complete spirit-ual fast.

Therefore, may we step aside from our work and feed on the riches that are found in Jesus!

What can you do when you take a Sabbath?

A. Physical rest for a day

- Be careful not to become overly strict about this – there will be times when you face big challenges that require attention. There are seasons in life!
- Remember that recreation implies activity that: i) refreshes your body, ii) restores your mental state, and iii) renews your spiritual liveliness. Whatever drains these three would not be considered re-creational
- You need to be aware that much of today's modern entertainment/leisure does not re-create body, mind, or soul
- Even a simple change in pace or visiting someone or blessing someone can all be regarded as refreshing and good. Jesus demonstrated this by healing the sick and so on, during the Sabbath

B. Spiritual rest

- This is where you connect with Jesus, spending EXTRA time with him
- For couples it can be a great time to listen in prayer together about something and discuss it. If you simply cannot have a Sabbath together, then find another time when you can share what God has been showing each of you
- Can you pray about your job on a Sabbath? It's a personal choice, but the extended times can be very refreshing times. God can use these times to take job-related burdens from one's shoulders
- Caution: it's possible for you to draw boundaries so tightly around your Sabbaths that you ignore the genuine need of those in your circles of influence. Jesus counters this ... **Matthew 12:12 (NIV)** *Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath*

Third: establish an annual spiritual retreat

Life can be so busy even if you take time for daily devotions, daily time outs, and Sabbath. At times you may feel like you can never get ahead on developing your faith fully or on praying into your life and future. Or perhaps you're getting behind!

Why not build in annual retreat times to spend time with Jesus, hear from him, and to get his strategies for your life? Many people will spend incredible numbers of hours planning a vacation to be entertained, but few hours to take care of their soul, plan for building Jesus' kingdom, etc. It doesn't have to be weeks or even a week. How about three days? Or perhaps a couple three-day retreats per year – alone.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 other times that you can abide with Jesus – other than daily devotions in the morning? Write down what you can do during these times.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take a look at your normal schedule and routines. Can you see opportunities to take daily time outs? Perhaps schedule one during a workday to try it out.
2. Either alone, or with your spouse if married, reflect on this question in prayer – do you get enough physical rest and spiritual rest? Journal and pray about any adjustments that need to be made.
3. Review John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 3.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. You may be very experienced with prayer or brand new. It can be very powerful to write out a prayer! Write out a prayer to Jesus, expressing your heart to him – any problems, things you're grateful for, dreams, struggles, etc.
2. Try SMORP again using the well-known Psalm 23.

Abide 2 – Does God Speak Today?

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In Abide 1, Day 4, you briefly took a peek at a tool that many have found helpful in their daily devotions - the SMORP acronym. Today you'll focus on the "Message" piece of SMORP: hearing what God may be saying to you.

First, there's a really big word that needs to be introduced: *cessationism*. Don't skip this! May you be a *learner* – loving God with your mind. He is pleased by this! Think about that ... isn't this incredibly motivating, know that you are pleasing God as you discover new things and deepen your understanding on all truths? So read on.

Cessationism is the theory that God spoke only in the Bible and does not talk to his children directly anymore. Some cessationists (a name for people who hold this belief) also deny that there are still miracles today or certain gifts from God. This is a very sad and unfortunate belief. After all, how could anyone have a real relationship with their Father in heaven if they could only interact with him when they're reading their Bible? Would that be a good Father?

Cessationists regularly talk about the sufficiency of Scripture, by which they mean that God doesn't speak to his children additionally. But are they not then claiming to have the ability to always interpret Scripture correctly (infallibly) without the aid of the Spirit? This position has led them to believe that the best interpreters of God's revelation are the ones who have the best interpretive methods, most knowledge in the original biblical languages, and the historical backgrounds of the biblical period – the ones most intelligent and disciplined.

Imagine if a wife wrote her husband a letter and said, "well honey, that's all you will hear from me. When you need to make decisions, the letter won't cover everything. You'll just have to guess. You'll have to completely figure out the meaning of everything on your own. But the letter also tells you that I love you, so yeah, there's that!" That would be ridiculous! Would this be a lively, vibrant relationship?

Praise God that it's not this way at all. He still speaks TODAY. The Way of Jesus is one full of his powerful, yet gentle voice!

We Need to Hear God to Understand the Bible

It is silly that some still argue that God only speaks to people in the Bible, because the Bible itself teaches that God will speak directly to people through his Holy Spirit. As it states in John, **John 14:26 (NIV2011)** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* You may not grasp this completely, but what an incredible reality that God gives you his Spirit to teach you what you need to know! And this includes helping you understand the Bible!

Many cultures worship intelligence and education. This is why some of the most “intelligent” people deny that God speaks to people today. Here is a profound reality – God hides his truth from those who have no intent on obeying him in the first place. Listen to what John said, **John 7:17 (NIV)** *If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*

Do you want to know what God is saying? Be ready to obey! Think about this

Jesus, the Son, actually praised the Father for deliberately hiding knowledge from stubborn and prideful people. He said, **Luke 10:21 (NIV)** *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.* It pleases God to do it this way!

You need to become like a little child to hear the voice of God. This does not mean being immature. It means having a soft, trusting heart, ready to obey. Children love to ask questions, but they are also trusting of their parents early on. Will you be like this as well?

Then, consider what Jesus said to the religious scholars of his day, **John 5:39-40 (ESV)** *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* Where is life found? In the Bible? No, in Jesus! They were very smart and knowledgeable – but they were missing the life of Jesus!

Of course, you must avoid some possible misunderstandings. First, very intelligent people, scholars, “experts” – they too can hear God’s voice. Jesus greatly desires to generously favour everyone with the blessing of hearing his voice! However, the guidelines will be the same for them as anyone else – they will need to humble themselves and be ready to submit to Jesus, who is king. All stand equal before him.

Second, in future days you will see that this does not minimize the importance of the Bible in any way. Instead, what’s being established is that of course God speaks today – since one cannot even understand the Bible itself without the Holy Spirit’s help!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Can you fully understand the Bible simply through formal training and personal study? Write down what kind of heart and attitude you need to have instead.
3. What is cessationism? Write out a definition.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you have made the decision to follow Jesus, what happened in you that made you think or feel that you needed to do that? Journal what was going on in your heart and mind. (this was God speaking!)
2. Has there been a time when a Bible verse you read seemed to be directed at a particular situation or circumstance you were going through? Or a verse seemed to pop out at you? (this was God speaking!)

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:1-11.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

The Bible Itself Says That God Is Still Speaking

Today you'll dig into a specific passage a bit. Do not be afraid to dig! You can do it. It will bear beautiful fruit in your life. Consider 1 Corinthians, **1 Corinthians 13:8-10 (NIV)** *But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.* When this passage mentions prophecy, tongues and knowledge, it is referring to ways that God speaks to his people (some call them the speaking gifts – say that out loud; it helps with memory).

Cessationists use 1 Corinthians 13 to support their claim that God doesn't speak apart from the Bible anymore. Yet this passage actually says the very opposite! It does say that these speaking gifts will cease. But when? When perfection comes! Cessationists say the "perfection" is Scripture being completed or the coming of Jesus. They also argue that the gifts of the Spirit authenticated the apostles' teaching until the Scriptures were done. Therefore, after that, they weren't needed. But this is a weak argument because Paul then goes on to tell the church – not just apostles – how to use these very gifts. If they were just for the apostles, why would one of the primary apostles give them many instructions on how to use them!

You may not have noticed, but things aren't perfect yet! If you meditate on all of 1 Corinthians and draw on the rest of the New Testament, the idea of perfection is something still to come upon the return of Jesus. Even a couple verses later, Paul said, **1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)** *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.* When will you see God "face to face?" At his second coming! Therefore, these gifts are still here today. God is still speaking.

Paul also says, **1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)** *Now I know in part; then I shall know fully ...* Do you understand everything fully today just because you have the Bible? No. Do you understand why a dear couple lost a teenage daughter and then six months later a teenage son? No! And you won't until Jesus returns. You only see dimly now!

If speaking gifts like prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge remain until Jesus returns, then obviously they are here for the purpose of God speaking to people! Further, the Bible even describes what such communications are like:

- UNDERSTANDING from God: **Ephesians 1:17 (NIV)** *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation ...*
- MESSAGE from God: **1 Corinthians 14:26 (NIV)** *When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation*
- DIRECTION from God: **Galatians 2:1-2 (NIV)** *Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. ² I went in response to a revelation*

These additional messages from God will NOT compromise or contradict the Bible, for they're a very different type of message! Do not forget this. The Way of Jesus relies a lot on the Bible! The Bible fixes the boundaries of what God will say to his people. This is a great blessing from God! Thankfully, knowledge of the Bible acts as a filter through which the events of your daily life must pass before you can discern if God is truly speaking in these events.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How does 1 Corinthians 13 support that God is *still* speaking to his children? Journal the answer.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Have you ever heard a sermon that really seemed to be directed right at you? If you have, journal what happened. (This is God speaking!)
2. Have you ever felt a prompting or urgency to do something good, or to not do something bad? (This too may have been God speaking!)
3. Write a prayer out to God, thanking him for speaking to you in the past (even if you haven't heard him – "signals" can be missed) and thanking him in faith for how you will hear him in the future.
4. Memorize Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:12-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Some Really Good News!

Imagine someone doesn't hear God. It happens. Yet this isn't proof that God doesn't speak to people today. This is an objection rooted in lack of experience. It's simply an admission that *they* can't hear God! Have you personally heard the sound of every animal on earth? No. This doesn't mean they don't make sounds!

Does God still speak today? The Bible answers with a resounding "Yes!" And here's the good news – God absolutely delights to speak to two kinds of people.

First, he speaks to people who think they're too simple. **John 10:27 (ESV)** *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* Jesus said his sheep would hear his voice; not the highly educated; not geniuses - his SHEEP! Sheep are dumb! So when Jesus said that his sheep would hear his voice, he was setting the bar very low. In places where hearing the voice of God is taught and practiced, adults, children, those who are hurting and broken – they all begin to hear his voice.

It all starts with the willingness to be like children and a desire to be dependent on God. Again, he is a good father!

Second, God speaks to people who think they're too bad. In **John 4**, Jesus talked to a woman who had five previous husbands and was living with another! Jesus was accused of speaking with gluttons, drunkards, and sinners! No matter how simple you may think you are (it may be to your advantage!), or how bad you've been, Jesus longs to speak to you. In fact, he is already speaking to you. He loves you that much.

Maybe you simply have not recognized his voice yet – that's what happened to Samuel. He had just laid down for the night, **1 Samuel 3:3-5 (NIV)** *Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down. So, he went and lay down."*

After the third time Eli figured that it was God calling out to the boy, **1 Samuel 3:8-10 (NIV)** *Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

What a powerful story and lesson! You too can hear God like this, learning to discern as you grow and mature. Seeking his voice, but being patient as you (and others) learn.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What kind of people does God delight to speak to?
3. Can you learn more about hearing God's voice? What is the biblical example that was used in this lesson, where one of God's servants had to learn to recognize God's voice?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt inadequate, dumb, or hopeless about pulling something off? This can be in the past or present (about anything, not just spiritual matters). Write this down.
2. Ask God to speak to you about HIS perspective on this time in your life. Record what you receive (if you're still learning to hear God, don't stress if you seem to get nothing). Don't overanalyze what you get. Just write it down.
3. Text or call someone that you know who follows God. Ask them to share with you a time in their life where they heard God.
4. Review Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:18-25.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Story Time!

Throughout the Abide lessons, you will consider some inspirational stories. Stories can motivate, teach, and bless! Of course, it's even better to walk through these lessons with someone, sharing what Jesus is doing. New examples of the abundant, overflowing life that Jesus brings you is like tasting the freshest bread or fruit day after day!

The New Testament is full of cases in which the early church ordered their lives by what they heard God say to them apart from the Bible. For example, do you ever need direction on what God wants you to do with your life? **Acts 13:2 (NIV)** *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* You see that they were directed *specifically* by God. This happened a lot! And it happens today as well, if you'll listen.

Then, there are many illustrations outside of the Bible of people who received God's specific direction. For example, A.W. Tozer said, "the voice of God is a Friendly Voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it." Here are some other names of those who heard God (don't worry if you don't recognize them!):

Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Mueller, Andrew Murray, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, A.W. Tozer, James Dobson, Elizabeth Elliott, Dallas Willard, Jack Deere, Richard Foster, Francis Schaeffer, John Ortberg, Francis Chan, Rick Warren, etc.

Many others from history expected God to lead them through his voice. Consider the titles of some of the old songs of faith: "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us," "All the Way, My Savior Leads Me," "Lead on, Oh King Eternal," "Where He Leads Me," "Holy Spirit, Faithful Guide," "Jesus Savior Pilot Me," "Guide Me, O Great Jehovah," etc.!

This is not a new idea at all! In fact, the idea that God stopped speaking is a very recent invention. To believe that God speaks is to be in the "camp of historical Christianity." Put another way, you're normal if you seek his voice.

Here is a very personal story from Pastors Ray and Fran Duerksen, founders of Church Renewal – the ministry that has produced these Abide lessons. Please take the time to read this longer story.

George Mueller & Driving School

"I had been taught that God doesn't speak to people like he did in the Bible. Then one night I was reading the autobiography of George Mueller. The people of England didn't believe in God, so he prayed that God would show him how he could demonstrate God to the people – God gave him the idea of an orphanage. He would start and run the orphanage entirely by faith, asking no one for anything.

During his lifetime he did just that, caring for over 10,000 orphans, and never asking for money! He had secured a location to start, but the night before the first children arrived, he realized that he had none of the usual household items and food. He was distraught and had no modern means of communication to call for help. As he prayerfully read the Bible, God spoke to him: **Psalms 81:10** *Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* The next day carriages arrived with everything Mueller had asked God for the night before.

I saw something for the first time! If God spoke to Mueller in the 19th century, then God was still speaking today! I wept and wept in my bed as the Spirit revealed these things to me - I didn't realize it then, but he was already speaking to me - he had used an autobiography to do it! The next morning, I excitedly told Fran: God still speaks! I then determined to see if he would speak to me about a huge need in our lives right then! You see, in 1982 interest rates had skyrocketed and many industries were closing their doors. McGee Industries, where I worked while going to school, had also laid everyone off. I had spent \$1000 to get my driver instructor's license to get a job, but then the job evaporated. Someone I knew owned 2 driving schools in Kitchener and offered to sell one of them for \$5000. Only problem - I didn't have one nickel, never mind \$5000! On June 29, 1982 I got up very early, and sat down with a little green notebook and Bible.

I wondered how I would know if God had spoken or not. What would this look like? Then I wrote the following words: 'Lord, I have never done something like this before – if you really speak and guide people you have to make it plain.' With that, I began to read in John, where I had left off in my previous devotions. When I came to John 16:13 and 25 it said (forgive the older language), '... whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will **shew you things to come ... but I shall shew you plainly of the Father**.' I don't know how to explain it, but when I read that, the words came right off the page and buried themselves right in my heart!

My heart was racing and again I wept! I couldn't believe it! The very words I had just prayed, I then read in the Bible, and when I did, something incredibly powerful happened inside of me - I KNEW God had just spoken to me! And I couldn't get over it! It was worth more than silver or gold! I could talk with the God of heaven. WOW!

But I wasn't done - I still didn't know how I would buy this business with no money. So I continued my Old Testament reading in Psalm 37. When I reached the 21st verse my heart was again stirred. It read... Psalm 37:21 (KJV) 'The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.' It happened again when I read a few verses later ... Psalm 37:26 (KJV) 'He [the righteous] is ever merciful, and lendeth.' Both times the Spirit spoke a word into my heart - but it was confusing: giveth or lendeth?

We made a trip to Steinbach about a week later for a family wedding. On Saturday morning at 8 am, Fran's dad came down the stairs, dressed in his wedding attire. I was sitting on a couch, already dressed for the wedding, reading the Bible. He asked if he could interrupt. Then he told me that God had woken him in the middle of the night and prompted him to phone someone about the money we needed to buy the business.

The woman said, 'Go to the credit union and I'll co-sign a loan for Ray and Fran.' So Dad and I went to the bank and secured the loan to buy the business. After the wedding we flew back to Kitchener and bought the business. The statement came every month and we paid it. But on the fourth month, the statement came, and the balance said, '\$0!' We knew that was impossible. Fran called the credit union to straighten everything out. But they informed her twice that it had truly been paid off, though Fran insisted we hadn't.

As we thought about it, we thought about this woman - had she paid it off? She hadn't told us. Finally, I got up the nerve to write her a letter and ask. The following week we received a letter back telling us that she had, but not to tell anyone. As we stood in the living room, suddenly the two phrases exploded inside me: 'the righteous lendeth; the righteous giveth!' WOW!!! With such precise accuracy, the Lord had done exactly what he had spoken to me about!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you have a specific story of how God has spoken to you, write it out in full. When done, pray about 3 people that you can send it to – those who are following Jesus or not (be wise about your choices). Being a disciple includes sharing your story with others!
2. Review verses Romans 12:2 and John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 5:1-12. Practice using SMORP with this passage in your journal (see Abide 1: Day 4 for reminder of what SMORP is). Don't rush it! Significant conversations should never be rushed.

Day 5

For this day, you can go straight to the Life Application section. It's time to practice! The Way of Jesus is one of obedience.

Life Application (James 1:22)

At times the words, "listening prayer" will be used. It's another way to speak about hearing God. Some well-meaning people object – "the Bible does not use the words 'listening prayer.'" They are correct! But it does speak about listening to God and prayer. 'Listening prayer' is just a term that captures a practice many have ignored.

1. A "Simple Question" (Listening Prayer)

- a. Are you excited for Jesus to speak to you? If this feels uncomfortable or odd, do not give up. You will learn. If this is something you are experienced with, why not seek his voice more?
- b. **First:** thanksgiving & praise
 - A great way to enter God's presence is through praise. **Psalm 100:4 (ESV)** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you something he wants you to be grateful for and why
 - Then begin to praise and thank him from a heart of deep gratefulness
 - Write it out (journal it)
- c. **Second:** ask a question
 - "What do you like about me? Why?" Or ...
 - "What do you see when you look at me?"
- d. **Third:** write down an IMPRESSION, thought, 'word' or picture that comes to you
 - Write "G:" (for God)
 - Then put your pen on the paper and write the 1st thing that comes to your mind
 - Do not wrestle with the impressions or thoughts – just write them down
 - Do NOT reject positive things he may want to say to you. Accept them by FAITH!

- Keep writing as long as you get thoughts - don't stop!
- e. **Fourth: respond** (journal it)
- Next, print your first initial on the next line and write out your response to God
 - It could be a question you have or you may simply wish to make a comment. There is no right or wrong thing here
 - It's just part of normal conversation, only this time the conversation is with God!
 - Why write these impressions, 'words,' thoughts or pictures down? In order to focus one's thoughts, so that minds don't wander
 - Next, listen attentively, for another response from God – and write it down again
 - It will likely be a logical and rational response, one that makes sense for the context of your question or comment. Again, place a "G" before it
 - Then respond again and keep the conversation going!
 - The conversation will look something like this:
 G: Begin by writing down an impression, thought, 'word' or picture you get
 R: Begin with a question
 G: Be quiet (listen) and write down the thoughts
 R: Respond to the thoughts you receive, addressing them to the Lord
 G: Be quiet (listen) and write down further thoughts that come to you

2. Begin a Devotional Journal. Each day:

- a. Write down the date.
- b. Next, begin your time by thanking God for something, such as what he did for you the day before.
- c. Then follow your praise portion with a prayer conversation.
- d. Of course, you may also wish to note other things in your journal as well, such as what he taught you, or what he did for you or any other thing that may be noteworthy to you.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:13-16.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6 and Romans 12:2
2. Try using SMORP again using only 1 verse. You can choose your own verse – i.e. from a sermon you heard this week. Or you can use **Philippians 4:13**. God bless you as you continue to abide in Jesus!

Abide 3 – Quiet Ourselves to Hear God’s Voice

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

If The Weeds Are Gone, The Harvest Increases

Perhaps you have noticed a resurgence in the past decade, among all ages, of exploring the joy (and difficulty) of planting one’s own gardens. Fresh, vibrant vegetables have become greatly valued, as has the process of “rediscovering the land.” Of course, lessons are swiftly learned regarding what does and does not lead to a significant and tasty harvest. What is one such lesson? Get rid of the weeds!

Weeds choke out the development and steady growth of plants. Gardeners acquire this knowledge early on, likely paired with frustration. However, if you want a good harvest ... start pulling!

This also relates to hearing God’s voice. There are “weeds” to intentionally remove from your life so that you can hear what God is saying. This shouldn’t surprise you, as *any* engaging conversation requires that you get rid of distractions, deal with unforgiveness, learn to listen, etc.

So, what are the weeds that you need to pull out?

Eight Weeds

1. Unwillingness to Hear God

Did you know that Jesus told stories called “parables,” so that those who did not want to hear truth could avoid it? **Matthew 13:12-13 (NIV)** *Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”* God does not force his way into the lives of anyone who is stubborn or wants to go their “own way.” He is *that* committed to maintaining your free will, so that genuine love is possible (you cannot have genuine love if it is forced, can you?)

2. Unwillingness To Surrender Until We Know the “Cost”

Some do not believe that Jesus has their best interests in mind – that he wants good things for them. Therefore, they desire to know what he wants and what it may cost them - before they seek his voice. But Paul declares, **Romans 8:28 (NIV)** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* You can trust this truth!

Related, some will fear what God might ask of them. But perfect love casts out fear. You can come into his presence and say “Here I am, Lord.” Let him initiate with love and still your fears.

3. Unconfessed Sin

When a husband and wife have something between them, a tension and isolation can result in their relationship. Those are not fun times! God made us to want to get beyond this! The same is true in a relationship with God. The psalmist described it well, **Psalms 66:18 (NIV)** *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

4. Lack of Knowledge on How to Hear God's Voice

Sometimes people simply haven't been taught how to hear God. Ignorance is not bliss! As it says in the Old Testament, **Job 33:14 (NIV)** *For God does speak--now one way, now another-- though no one perceives it.* We also see in the life of Samuel that he needed Eli's help to learn to recognize God's voice (see **1 Samuel 3**).

5. Unbelief

It says that Jesus couldn't do miracles in Nazareth because of unbelief (Matthew 13:58). If you do not believe that Jesus speaks or that you personally can hear him, the "harvest of hearing God's voice" will be limited.

6. Fear of Chaos in the Church

Some churches discourage people from hearing God's voice, worried about potential chaos or people claiming to have heard bizarre things from God. Sadly, people do misuse God's voice! Yet some also mishandle the Bible – and you don't stop using that, do you?

Instead, you need to use the gifts that God has given you, BUT with love, wisdom, boundaries, etc. Or as Paul said when he faced some chaos in the Corinthian church, **1 Corinthians 14:40 (NKJV)** *Let all things be done decently and in order.* Put another way, Paul's response to the misuse of God's gifts wasn't, "well then, just put them away and quit using them!" Instead, he provided wise instruction.

Many areas of life would be chaotic if careful rules weren't laid down: flight, health care, financial institutions, driving, etc. We don't get rid of airplanes, doctors, money, and vehicles, do we? No, we regulate them. Why would we have a different standard for hearing God's voice and the use of gifts?

7. Not Desiring a Friendship with God

Some people only want to relate to God when they need him to get them out of trouble. This would be disrespectful to anyone and it is to God. You should not expect to hear God regularly and clearly if that is your attitude. May we meditate on this wonderful truth, **Psalms 25:14 (NIV)** *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.*

8. Too Busy to Spend Time Listening to God

Some peoples' lives are filled with a lot of things that do not matter for eternity. To hear God's voice, you need to create space to listen to him. If you look in **Luke 10:38-42**, you see that Martha is an example of someone who was too busy (even with good things!) to listen to Jesus, while Mary was ready to hear. It's even possible to be too busy with one's own plans for how to serve God.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 8 weeds that can hinder you from hearing God's voice?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Do any of the first 8 weeds mentioned apply to you? If so, journal which one(s).
2. Review your verses from Abide 1 and Abide 2 – John 15:5-6 and Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:17-20.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On the previous day, we looked at eight weeds that can make it hard for us to hear God's voice. Today six more will be noted!

Does it seem counterproductive to work from the "negative?" As long as you remember that the ultimate goal is to draw closer to a God who really loves you, this can be very useful. Keep at it and you'll see so much fruit in your life.

Six More Weeds

9. Talking Instead of Listening

Does God want to hear what's going on in your heart? The intense emotions, questions, pain, and dreams? Of course! However, when you go to prayer, you can't just pour out all your complaints and concerns to him in a steady stream, without stopping to listen to what he has to say. The Spirit of God challenges us, **Psalm 46:10 (NIV)** *Be still and know that I am God.*

10. Impatience and Rushing Ahead

How long are you willing to wait to hear from your good Father and King of all that exists? A minute? Five minutes? Would you ever wait in silence for 15 minutes or even more? Moses waited 6 days before God spoke! **Exodus 24:15-16 (NIV)** *When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.*

11. Fear of People, Rather Than Fear of God

If you're afraid of or controlled by what other people (even other followers of the Way) think about you, you introduce another weed into the midst of your desire to hear God's voice. Read what a simple verse highlights, **Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)** *Fear of man will prove to be a snare.* You're trapped and in chains when you are a people-pleaser!

This is in contrast to what you're told in another passage, **Proverbs 14:26-27 (NIV)** *Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress and for their children it will be a refuge. For the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.*

12. Satan Tries to Keep Us from Hearing

It's fascinating that people are very good at listening to the devil's voice, when he says things such as: "You're not beautiful;" "You're not smart;" "Nobody likes you." Or when he sows seeds of doubt in one's mind: "Yeah, but . . ." "What if?" "That wouldn't be possible." We don't want to be people who, when God says something positive to us, we believe the opposite!

In one parable Jesus explains that Satan will attempt to snatch the seed (God's Word) out of hearts as quickly as it is sown (Mark 4:14-15). Have you experienced this? The devil is a liar and the source of many lies. Why would one choose to listen to him rather than to God?

13. Asking The Wrong Questions

Sometimes you may frantically ask God a question, and hear no response. If you quiet yourself however, he might show you that you're asking the wrong question! E.g. you might ask – how can my business prosper? Maybe you should instead be asking – “should I be in business at all?” or an open ended question such as “what do you want to say about my business?”

What you want to be listening for is the, “God-agenda” which is not just a good agenda, but the BEST!

14. Fear of Confusing Our Thoughts with God's Thoughts

God promised that you'll be able to know and recognize his voice. **John 10:4-5 (NIV)** *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.*

The Bible also promises that if you're seeking the Lord, you WILL find him. It says in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 4:29 (NIV)** *But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.* And in the New Testament, **James 1:5 (NIV)** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

Humans learn from experience alone how to distinguish colors; musicians learn by experience to distinguish a minor from a major key simply by listening. In the same way, you learn to hear God's voice in your spirit through the experience of intentionally listening.

Will you make mistakes? Of course! If you can mistake a friend's voice, you should expect to slip up on hearing God's voice from time to time. Learning to follow God can be messy (because people are messy!), and you'll make blunders along the way! No person on earth will be 100% accurate – not until heaven! This is why the most necessary characteristic you need for learning to hear God's voice is humility! It will allow you to laugh at yourself when you make a mistake and admit it to others. The other necessary characteristic you'll need is to keep choosing faith over unbelief.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 weeds were shared today, things that can hinder you from hearing God's voice? Write them down.
3. Will you make mistakes in hearing God's voice? What characteristic do you need to help you handle your mistakes?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Do any of the 6 weeds mentioned today apply to you? Journal which one(s).

2. Look at your answer from Life Application question 1 from both Day 1 and Day 2. In your journal spend some time walking through a. to c. below. Do not rush – this is how you experience the growth you’ve always been looking for! You want to pull out some weeds! Being a disciple in the Way can feel like you’re spinning tires in one spot UNLESS you develop these beautiful habits of abiding.
 - a. Thanksgiving: for revealing to you the incredible gift of hearing God’s voice; for being able to have true fellowship with him through conversation; for being able to receive real instruction, direction, comfort, and encouragement from him through hearing him.
 - b. Confession: for whatever weeds apply to you. Ask God for his response. Record what you sense him saying to you.
 - c. Surrender: commit to do whatever you hear.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:21-37.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Can you believe it? You’ve already examined 14 possible weeds that get in the way of the, “harvest of hearing God’s voice!” Today you’ll finish up with two more. It is amazing to learn together, whether brand-new to this or an experienced follower of the Way.

15. Listening for a Loud Voice, Rather Than a Quiet Voice

While all the weeds discussed in the previous days will not apply to every person listening for God’s voice, this one does! Many are mistaken – they think that God is GOD, so he must be loud all the time.

Consider the amazing experience of the prophet, Elijah. He was hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb when God told him to stand on the mountain because he was about to pass by. Wow! Now carefully read what happens!

1 Kings 19:11-13 (NIV) ... then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’

God seldom raises his voice! Though the world makes a lot of noise, God does not generally make himself heard by speaking over the chaos. Rather, he often speaks in a whisper and only those who are willing to become still can start to hear him clearly. This can be hard for us to accept especially when storms are crashing around us. But again, we’re called to be still, **Psalms 37:7 (NIV)** *Be still before*

the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

You can also reflect on these two verses from the Psalms, **Psalm 131:2 (NIV)** *But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.* **Psalm 62:1 (ESV)** *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*

16. The Weeds of Fear and Anxiety

A big challenge you will face in life is FEAR! You can also add anxiety to a list of hinderances. Is it natural to feel fear and normal to feel anxious? Yes, at times. However, they become a huge problem when they begin to direct and steer a life.

It's important that you live your life by FAITH as followers of the Way and not FEAR of what can happen. Faith isn't the complete absence of fear. Instead, it is the resolve and choice to follow the leading of Jesus in your life despite any fear and lack of understanding.

The key to doing this is learning to stay connected to God's peace. There truly is a peace that passes understanding. What exciting news! Many followers of the Way have discovered this reality. As it says in Philippians, **Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)** *So do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Here you see Paul encouraging the believers (including you) to not be anxious about anything (afraid, fearful) but instead to turn to thanksgiving and prayer. Then you can let your requests be made known to God and his peace will guard your heart and mind. This is brilliant!

Too many times people go into a prayer time overwhelmed or anxious and then feel like their devotions are very dry. They then leave with the same feeling they had before. This is NOT the way your walk with Jesus was supposed to be! Paul is giving very practical advice. He is saying "change your focus" and you'll have an easier time experiencing, yes *experiencing*, the peace of God.

Remember that this peace doesn't come through the absence of conflict or the presence of great circumstances. That's the world's peace – dependent on circumstances. Why aim for something so temporary and that can be easily threatened? For Day 4 and 5, you'll look at a tool that will help you quiet yourself and re-focus when confronted with fear and anxiety.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Read the Bible verses noted in this day. Try reading them very slowly, 2 times each.
3. What emotions often overwhelm, hindering one's ability to hear God's voice? Write this down.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Reflect on your life a bit – are you able to be quiet before God? Write down why or why not.
2. In your journal write a list of fears and anxieties that you have. Let them surface. God can handle them! You will use this list on future days.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:38-48.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today a tool will be introduced that helps address the weeds of fear and anxiety. The tool is called, S.T.A.R. Tools such as these do not bring a person the abundant life found as followers of the Way. However, they do provide ideas on how to *create space and connection* – so that you can abide in Jesus.

The “S” in S.T.A.R. STOP - Don’t Fix the Problem, Person, or Situation

This suggested step isn’t a surprise when we examine our lives and see that poor choices, sin, emotional outbursts, and isolation are often preceded by tiredness or overwhelm. Science shows that when a person is tired or overwhelmed, their ability to use their *cingulate* and *prefrontal cortex* is greatly diminished. These may be big words, but what does this look like practically? Among other things - your ability to make good choices, think creatively, connect relationally with others (God included), empathize, and make wise choices – are all severely limited. Have you ever experienced a time like this?

Of course, when you’re utterly exhausted, you may simply need to sleep! But for the rest of the time you have great instruction in the Bible regarding practices that help one overcome weaknesses and stay abiding (there is that wonderful word again!) in the peace of God.

The first step is to STOP. Many need to learn that not everything has to be fixed right now nor can they usually fix it. When people insist on fixing problems or people, they almost certainly end up trying to control the person/situation. The same is true if they run from the problems and people that are causing the stress. There is a different option than, “fight or flight.”

You don’t want to miss out on whatever God is trying to do in the situation. Remember, he has an abundant life planned for followers of the Way. **Psalm 37:7 (ESV)** *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

Can you commit to pausing in your life? Can you commit to releasing control? The second step will help you even further.

The “T” in S.T.A.R. TAKE – A Breather & Calm Down

If you were to go to the gym and lift 15lb weights, they wouldn’t feel heavy. It would likely feel like you could lift them forever. But what would happen if you strapped them to your hands? Eventually those 15lb weights would feel like 30lbs, 50lbs or more. Your arms would get so tired from being under constant strain that not only would you not be getting stronger, but you would lose the strength you previously had.

Too many followers of the Way do just this. They keep themselves so busy that they miss out on times of quiet and stillness before the Lord. They wonder why they feel so burnt out!

In Western culture, being still and quiet is not something practiced regularly. In fact, many people feel shame when they aren't busy ALL the time. You may think that being constantly busy is a sign of your value. Sadly, this causes many people to burn out, even leaders who are supposed to model the power of being quiet and hearing God's voice.

You were NOT made to go without a continuous power source! You are like rechargeable batteries and need to rest. God rested on the seventh day and commanded his people to rest. Our bodies are made to thrive if we operate this way! For example, quieting allows our cortisol levels to subside, serotonin to increase (you'll feel more peaceful and content) and minds to slow down. You may not be interested in science, but can you humble yourself before God's masterful design?

But aren't followers of the Way intended to work hard in building his kingdom? Yes! Isn't this urgent? Yes! Yet you still need to rest. You just need to pick the right kind of rest. This is something we can all grow in, likely! Listen to what Isaiah said, **Isaiah 30:15 (ESV)** *For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." But you were unwilling ...* It says that in rest, quietness, and trust you will find your strength! Do you believe this? Do your choices reflect this reality? Or are you unwilling?

In moments of anxiety, whether in a stressful situation, dealing with a conflict or feeling overwhelmed, you can practice stillness by exercising self-control over your body and breathing. Simply taking a few minutes to be still, relaxing your body, and breathing deeply is often enough to calm your nervous system. This isn't weird at all, *it's how God made you!*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the name given to the tool that can be used to help quiet yourself?
3. What are the first 2 steps of the quieting tool? Explain them simply if you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down 2 or 3 examples of when you've tried to take control of a situation or "run away." Try to pick examples that are most recent, if you can.
2. Spend some time in confession. Confess to your good Father that you sometimes, in pride or fear (or both), try to control your life or others.
3. Take one of the examples that you wrote down and make it your goal to share it with someone at work today or a family member or someone from your church. This sharing can start you on the road of discipling someone else in the Way (something all believers are called to do).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 6:1-18.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.

3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today you will look at the final two steps of S.T.A.R. The first two were: STOP – don't fix the problem, person, or situation; and TAKE – a breather and calm down. It is amazing what happens in a life when people give time to such exercises. It may not seem natural at first, but like physical exercise, you learn as you go along.

The "A" in S.T.A.R. APPRECIATE and Connect to Jesus

The Bible says, **James 1:17 (ESV)** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* We can stay overwhelmed and say we are thankful for a few things and feel just as dry as we did when we started. But, when we STOP, calm down and begin focusing on Jesus and what he done for us and provided for us, we will notice a shift. Especially as you focus on why the things you are thankful for are meaningful to you.

You'll find that your overwhelm begins to go away, your heart begins to warm up, thoughts are clearer and from these places, prayer and hearing God seem to flow much easier. That is, once we have entered God's presence through praise, we are better able to hear from him and receive direction for our current situations. Or as God's Word declares, **Psalms 100:4 (ESV)** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

How do you enter his gates? This is another way of saying, "how do you experience him?"

When you focus on Jesus and the things that he has done for you, you find that your heart begins to transform. Or as one child put it, "my heart is feeling bigger!" Of course, it's important to recognize that *quickly* saying you are thankful for a couple of things is VERY different than actually *feeling* appreciation.

You need to take time to appreciate. And remember, science has shown that being tired and overwhelmed can cause the cortex levels of your brain to diminish in their capacity to function. Interestingly enough, science has also found that focusing on what you are thankful for causes these same areas of the brain to begin functioning again! Basically, you will function better in ALL areas of life.

The "R" In S.T.A.R. Respond – In Faith & Love, In Obedience

Once you've reconnected to the God of peace, you can receive his heart and direction for the situation(s) you're facing. If you are to live as a follower of the Way and not be controlled by your fears, it also means you must be living the life of the obedient servant. You expand in faith, in love, and in obedience!

In some situations, this may mean forgiving and letting go; in other circumstances you may have to confront; in your prayer times, you may have to choose to trust in the Lord, etc.

Whatever direction you receive from Jesus, you now have peace and respond in faith by obeying and responding with a loving heart. This ensures that you represent Jesus in all your actions and deeds. This is actually a life full of adventure and goes far beyond a religion! This is the Way and it is a great journey.

In responding, you show that you're looking for Jesus to not only be Saviour, but also Lord. He becomes your leader, something everyone needs. This is so important and it is an expected response because of ALL that he has done for you – which you'll look at in the next two lessons.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 4 steps of the quietness tool, S.T.A.R.? Explain them simply if you can.
3. On the internet, go to biblegateway.com. Do a search by typing this in – thank*. How many times is this word or a variation of it used in the Bible? Read some of the verses out loud.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Is there something that is making you very busy/stressed out? Where can you make a change?
2. If you live with your family, perhaps have a family discussion and ask a similar question – is there something in your lives making you all very busy or stressed out, that you can change?

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 6:19-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Go back to Day 3, Life Application (James 1:22), Question 2. You wrote down a list of fears and anxieties. Pick one of these.
2. Using this fear or anxiety go through the following exercise:

Stop – Do not fix the problem, person, or situation

- Write down the fear or anxiety that you are currently facing

Take – A breather & calm down

- Take a few moments to be still, relax your shoulders, neck, hands, face, etc. Take some deep breaths and focus your heart and mind on Jesus
- Any anxious or distracted thoughts you have, or tasks that need to get done... prayerfully surrender them to Jesus

Appreciate & Connect to Jesus

- **James 1:17 (NIV)** *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*
- Think of something you are thankful for: _____

- Briefly write down a time where you experienced what you were thankful for
- Connect to Jesus. Ask Jesus to show you where he was in the memory and what he wants you to know. Write down any thoughts that come to mind

Respond – In faith & love & in obedience

- Ask Jesus how he sees the fear or anxiety you are facing. Write it down
- Ask Jesus how he wants you to respond in the situation. Write it down

Abide 4 – The Importance of Journaling

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

In Abide 3, you saw that there are 16 weeds which hinder one's ability to hear God's voice. You were also introduced to a very useful tool called S.T.A.R., which helps people quiet themselves to hear God. In Abide 4, the practice of journaling will be addressed. Even if this seems like something that would be hard for you, are you willing to consider the benefits? Many people have learned to journal, and have fallen in love with it!

Where does the idea of journaling, as followers of the Way, come from? What is it good for? How do you do it?

The idea of journaling really comes from the Bible. God didn't just write out or dictate to someone one big Bible. Instead, one way that the stories, commands and prophecies were shared from one generation to another was orally – they had to carefully memorize them and pass them along.

Eventually these stories, commands, and prophecies, etc. were gathered and committed to writing, like the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) and the Gospels (first four books of the New Testament). In other cases, prophets wrote down prophecies that they received over the years, and then they were collected into a book, often named after the prophet who received and ' journaled ' them. You can even see that prayer conversations were also written down (journaled)!

Now, this is not to suggest that your journaling has the same level of authority as the Bible – of course not! The point is simply to say that journaling is not a new thing – it has been practiced for thousands of years!

Different Kinds of Journaling

1. Devotional Journal

What is a devotional journal and how can you use it?

- First, this can be your daily journal, to record things the Lord is primarily saying to you through his Word and through listening to him in prayer
- Second, you can use it to record what was received in prayer as you prayed with a spouse, or with others in the body of Christ

- Third, you can use it to record prophetic words sent to you from family, prayer partners, friends, or others in the church. Or if you sense that the Lord has given you a dream, you can record the dream in your journal
- Fourth, you can also track answers to prayer in this journal. This can be a real faith builder and motivation to pray!

Of course, you do not have to record everything that you ever receive in prayer, or from others. You must be selective. Otherwise, you'll just write for the rest of your life! God is THAT generous in leading his people!

2. Life Journal

This is where you record significant events in your life, marriage, family, career, and ministry. This is a selective, but very significant journal, recounting stories of what God has done, including dates, names, and places.

3. Topical Journal

You may want to have a journal that has different categories where you can specifically track God's wisdom in a specific area of your life. Of course, this can be done in your devotional journal, but some people like having something separate for this activity. Possible topics include: finances, character growth, ministry inside/outside the church, evangelism, marriage and family, other relationships, etc.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 3 kinds of journals described in this lesson?
3. What are 4 ways that you can use a devotional journal?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Text or call 3 friends who are followers of the Way. Ask them if they journal and what kinds of journals they use. Also ask them to share what they have found useful about journaling.
2. Prepare to start journaling. This can be on paper or electronically. If you have no journals, start with a devotional journal. Get it ready this week! (put it in your schedule)
3. If you already have a devotional journal, you could start a Life Journal this week (again, put it in your schedule if this is a step you'll take).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Reasons for Journaling

First: so we remember what God has done for us, our family, and our church

People are prone to quickly forget what God has done for them. As a result, they may end up being ungrateful. When a person journals, it's a way of treasuring what God has graciously done for them. People treasure many other things in this life, even have a special place for them. In the same way, why wouldn't you treasure what your Saviour has done for you, putting it in a special place – your journal?

Of course, this will also generate thanksgiving, praise, and worship in your life!

Second: when we review what God has done – family (and those you disciple) will be less inclined to turn away from him

Just before Moses died, he repeatedly warned the people not to forget what the Lord had done, as forgetfulness would result in turning from God. Almost the entire book of Deuteronomy records his encouragement and warnings.

For this very reason as well, the psalmist commits to reviewing what the Lord has done with the succeeding generations. **Psalm 78:4-11 (NIV)** ... *we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done ... Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands ... The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.*

There are many extra benefits to this – e.g. Pastor Ray Duerksen, founder of Church Renewal, which generates these lessons – shares family and faith stories on many Sunday afternoons with his children and grandchildren and calls it, “Papa’s Story Time.” These stories come right from his journal. Such “remembering and declaring” is biblical. But you can’t do this without journals, as you’ll forget many things yourself.

Third: we remember approx. 70% more if we write it down

Fourth: so we don’t forget the guidance or promises he has already given us, while we are waiting on him to move

The Lord may be guiding you through a situation that will take weeks, months, or even years to navigate. Much happens in your life when you are waiting, and the promises or guidance may fade from your memory. You may be tempted to lose hope, or you may forget what he already instructed you to do. BUT if you have it journaled, you can quickly recover and review what he has already shown you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Which 4 reasons were shared today regarding why you should journal?
3. How can previous journal entries help you stay filled with hope?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done for you personally. Ask God to help you with remembering (he loves to do this).
2. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done for your family (if not married, you can include parents, even if this includes good things that happened historically).
3. Memorize Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:13-23.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Yesterday, four reasons for journaling were highlighted. Today, you'll be exposed to four more reasons. Please remember that some people take a lot of time to learn how to journal, but when it becomes a habit – wow, their faith is greatly increased! That's where you'll start today ...

Fifth: when we continually rehearse what God has done for us, it will build faith, and the faith of others - to do what he wants us to do next

As you rehearse what God has done, your own faith for next steps begins to grow. What a gift this is for a follower of the Way! And as you share your stories with others, you will begin to notice that they too want to live by faith. It can also help you cast the vision that God has given you in any area that you have influence (i.e. family, small group, work). The devotional and life journals that you develop and use will help you greatly in this regard.

Sixth: time has a way of revising history. When we record it, we will remember what God actually did

This is important in a church where a pastor has obeyed the Lord and done the difficult things God asked them to do. Some, who may have been around at that time, may wish for the history to be forgotten, or the story modified to suit their own thoughts or to receive credit. Then people forget what God actually accomplished! This reason for journaling can also be very important for families and for your own individual journeys.

Seventh: when we rehearse what God has done for us, to our family and anything we lead it will grow great trust in our discipleship and witness, which will help us in the present

Put simply, you will need God stories to effectively disciple others! Yesterday you were encouraged to memorize Matthew 28:18-20 and its command to make disciples. From the moment you become a follower of the Way, you should begin to pray about making disciples – it's to be *normal* activity for such followers. Having a record of what God has done will greatly increase your ability to be obedient to Jesus in carrying out this great and wonderful responsibility.

Eighth: to leave behind a recorded legacy for the next generations

There is no greater inheritance that parents can leave their children than a godly example! As it says in the Psalms, **Psalms 145:4 (NIV)** *One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of*

your mighty acts. If you have children, is this something that you are doing? Further, you never know who else might be inspired by your example! God works in ways beyond what we could ever imagine!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 reasons for journaling were shared today?
3. How can journaling help you in discipling or influencing others?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done in the church you currently attend or in some of the people in the church. Ask God to help you with remembering (He loves to do this).
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2 and Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:24-29.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Did you know that if you were to read the biographies of hundreds of ordinary followers of the Way, who did extraordinary things for God, that you would discover that almost 100% of them journaled? Can you humble yourself before their example?

Today, you'll be introduced to some good reasons for "prayer conversations with God." And you'll be encouraged to record some of these! Now, it may seem hard or even awkward at first, but there are four good reasons to journal your prayer conversations. And this is a shorter lesson, because you have a longer Life Application today!

Reasons for Journaling Prayer Conversations with God

First: we see A LOT of conversational prayer in the Bible

Second: when writing out the conversation with God, it moves us from being tentative about what God is saying and moves us over to faith in what he is saying

When people are learning to intentionally listen to God, they sometimes wrestle with thoughts such as: "is this God speaking, or is this my thought, or is it the devil speaking?" So instead of moving forward in a conversation with God, they get stuck with these questions running around in their heads, preventing a conversation with Jesus. When you begin writing, it keeps you from dismissing what you

are receiving. Every stroke of the pen or the keyboard is an act of faith. Very soon the person becomes comfortable with conversing with God.

Third: it will keep our mind focused, rather than thinking about what's on our to-do list for the day; or other random things that distract

Fourth: research shows that we remember more of what we wrote

When we hear that research supports something, consistent with how God made us, are we teachable and humble to respond? Are there perhaps exceptions to this research? Yes. But have we really tried for a period of time (i.e. six weeks)? Is our relationship with God important enough that we'll make adjustments to our regular habits?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 4 good reasons for recording your prayer conversations with God?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down 3-5 questions that you have for God. You will be using this list during Day 5.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 8:1-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

How to Journal Prayer Conversations with God

Thankfully, it's not at all complicated for you to journal your prayer conversations with God! After all, Jesus said that everyone would hear his voice; not just some 'elites.' If you think about how a human conversation might go, you begin to realize that it's quite simple and logical for anyone.

When you wish to begin a conversation with someone, you either state something or ask something. Then you wait and listen for the response. Conversing with God is the same. So, when you journal, you might want to do something like this . . .

- Begin by writing down your own first initial with a colon – i.e. R:
- Then write out your prayer to God – it may begin with a sentence or sentences of thanksgiving and praise for what he has done for you that day or week. Again, praise is one of the key ways that you can come into the Father's presence
- Or you might wish to write out a sentence or sentences, confessing some sin you committed that day or the day before. This is another way to enter his presence

So, it might look something like this ...

R: Lord, I just want to praise and thank you for the huge answer to prayer today! I can't tell you how grateful I feel inside. Only you could have done that. What a gift from you. I really love you! You are such a wonderful Father.

At this point you can write the letter "G:" (for God) and then listen with your pen pressed on the paper, or fingers hovering over the keyboard, for the first thought. As soon as you begin to have a thought or a picture, you just begin writing – not debating in your mind where it came from. It could look something like this ...

G: You have no idea what joy it gave me to answer this prayer for you.. I have wanted to reveal myself to you as one who delights to answer your prayers. I am so pleased that you were one of those who came back to say thank you – not everyone does.

It could be that much; it could be less, and it could be more. Who cares? It's a conversation! There's no rules for a conversation! You're just enjoying a conversation together.

Now you might ask, "What would I do next?" What do you FEEL like doing next?! There's no right or wrong here. Perhaps you have a question for the Lord – remember, you're having a conversation. Take the lead, the Lord delights in spending time with you! He is NOT too busy for you – ever!

Let's try a question ...

R: Lord, I have this big decision to make (marriage, family, work, ministry). I just don't know if it's best to do this or that?

G: Why don't you?

R: Lord, I never even thought about that! Thank you for that incredible insight.

R: And how do you think I should go about doing that? How do I convince so and so that this is what we need to do?

G: Why don't you ask so and so to listen in prayer with you? I will speak to both of you at the same time.

R: Oh Lord, you are truly amazing.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the important aspects of a conversation between people? This answer can help you understand how to have a great conversation with God!

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Go back to Day 4, Life Application Question 2. You wrote down a list of questions that you have for God. Pick 1 of them and in your journal record a conversation with God about that question.
2. Pick a second question to ask God and go through the same process. If this feels very new for you, don't give up! You'll be developing brand new habits that will eventually be automatic.
3. Review Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 8:18-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2 and Matthew 28:18-20.
2. You are now done Abide 1-4. It is a good time to do a heart check – are you approaching this with a soft heart, taking steps forward and encountering Jesus? Or are other things getting in the way, such as stubbornness or an independent spirit, or things that matter less than being close to Jesus?

Abide 5 – Why We Need To Hear God’s Voice

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In Abide 5, you’ll look at three powerful reasons that highlight why you need to hear God’s voice. Remember that this is an exciting part of your spiritual inheritance! Some people have experienced the blessing of growing up in a family full of joy, peace, and encouragement. However, when you become a child of God, the potential to receive these same things and much more is now possible!

So, why do you need to hear God’s voice?

So That Christ Can Function as Our Lord & King

God is fully establishing his kingdom on earth – a kingdom that has its own ways, plans, enemy, and weapons. This is not an exaggeration at all! Yes, you are child of God, but also a soldier (see **2 Timothy 2:4**). If you have grown up in a society that believes only in what it sees, this can be hard to grasp. But even if you think about what the world is like, what is “seen” gives you hints about what is happening in the “unseen.” There is a battle going on, including for lives!

Jesus said, **Matthew 11:12 (NIV)** *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.* And Peter counsels, **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)** *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

The enemy, the devil, is looking for people to devour! And what does fighting against his attacks require? What does being an effective soldier in the kingdom involve? Much communication! (just like in any war). You will need strategies and plans – which comes from hearing God’s voice.

Consider the example of Paul and his companions. We’re told, **Acts 16:6-10 (ESV)** *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Was there anything intrinsically wrong with ministering in Asia and Bithynia? Of course not! However, the Holy Spirit had another plan which included another continent – Europe!

God has much wisdom and can see things that you can't. Are you humble enough to admit this? Here is how the prophet Isaiah described it, **Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)** *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Example: David & the Philistines

David knew these things about God, which is why he went to listen for the Lord's strategies to fight his enemies. For example, **2 Samuel 5:19 (ESV)** *And David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand."*

Eventually, the Philistines returned and David inquired again. This time the Lord gave David a different strategy, **2 Samuel 5:23 (ESV)** *And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees."* The need for direction from God was just as strong for the people of God in the New Testament, as it is for followers of the Way today. What purpose has God given you? To expand his kingdom! May you keep growing in this, as you serve the King!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. What is a battle you're facing right now? Write down a brief description of it.
2. Use conversational prayer (see Abide 4) to seek God's strategy for you in the middle of this battle. Some questions you could ask:
 - "Father, do I have anything that I need to confess about this situation?"
 - "God, what is your perspective about this situation? How do you want to be King and Lord?"
 - "Are there any steps that I need to take?"
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20.
4. Memorize 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:1-8.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

A follower of the Way needs to hear God to be able to understand the Bible. They also listen to him so that he can be their Lord and King. A second reason is so that God can be their Father in a very real way. Are you ready to think about this incredible gift?

So That God Can Be Our Father in a Very Real Way

God called these people his friends: Abraham (Isaiah 41:8); Moses (Exodus 33:11); his disciples (John 15:14-15). Yet Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer that the relationship goes even deeper - God is also called your Father!! As a believer, you are clearly God's child (**Romans 8:15**). In this light, we are wise to meditate on statements that Jesus made, such as, **Matthew 5:45 (NIV)** ... *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*

Of course, this is not meant to be something that is, "in title only." God wants to have a relationship with you as a Father. Or as John describes it, **John 17:3 (NIV)** *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Of course, without communication you cannot have a healthy, growing relationship; e.g. you cannot have a good marriage. What is the single greatest problem that many fathers have? They're distant and they don't communicate with the kids. They don't talk!

But this is the whole point – your Father who is everywhere around you, isn't distant at all! Neither is he silent! When you talk to him, he happily responds! And he also takes the initiative to speak if you'll take the time to stop and listen.

What will your Father do for you as you speak to him?

First: the good Father assures his children

This is how Paul describes it, **Romans 8:16 (NIV)** *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* Some followers of the Way can struggle with doubts such as, "do I really belong to God?" Or, "do my struggles disqualify me from being his child?"

In such situations, a person needs what is called, "assurance of salvation." They need to understand DEEP within that they are accepted by God. This kind of assurance is life-changing! And it is possible.

And how do you (or anyone) receive this assurance? It happens through hearing God's voice! Of course, God may use a Bible verse or verses to confirm that you are his child, but even here, it is still his voice speaking.

Second: the heavenly Father warns his children of danger

In a dream God warned Joseph of danger to his family, and so they fled to Egypt (**Matthew 2:13-14**). Such gracious direction from God to his kids still happens today! God does not change. Here's a story from one follower of the Way:

"We always pray for safety when we travel. One winter day, when our family was returning from a road trip after Christmas, it was snowing quite hard. On-coming traffic kicked up a lot of snow and visibility was close to zero. The family was sleeping as we had left quite early. A semi approached from the front kicking up a lot of snow. No problem. As the snow cleared another semi was following

also kicking up snow. Then I saw a 3rd semi coming and a voice clearly spoke to me: ‘Pull on to the shoulder.’ I didn’t know God would speak to me so directly, but it saved us from certain injury or death.”

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?
3. What does God as Father do for you – the 2 things shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God assured you that you belonged to him? If yes, write down how this happened. If not, spend some time praying about this!
2. Can you think of a time when God warned you about something? If yes, write it down.
3. Spend some time in prayer, asking God – “is there anything that you want to warn me about now?” If a great fear rises up, bring this to him in conversational prayer.
4. Review 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:9-26.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day Two, you learned (or were reminded) that hearing God’s voice allows for God to be your Father in a very real way. You also saw that as a Father, he can assure you and provide you with warnings. Today, two more things that God graciously does for you as your Father will be highlighted. He is so good!

Third: the heavenly Father comforts his children

There are many verses in the Bible that richly describe God’s incredible comfort. For example, in one of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, he says, **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NLT)** *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles ...* What a promise! Of course, as followers of the Way, you’ll need this kind of comfort to help you persevere! Here’s another story from someone who is on a journey with Jesus:

“My brother died in a house fire on New Years Eve, 1978, at age 18. Before the funeral my mom was sitting in a corner of the living room grieving and disheartened about the loss of her son. Suddenly she heard a clear voice to her left: “Your son is OK. He’s with me.” She turned to her left to see who had spoken, but no one was sitting there. She looked to see if anyone else had noticed the voice, but no one had. But she was so comforted that she got up and began to serve coffee and food to others. Some wondered at the change in her countenance. Later, she called a prayer partner who had sent news of the tragedy down the prayer chain. Mom told her what she had experienced, and

the woman replied: “We were praying that God would reveal to you if your son was with him. This is the answer to our prayer for you!”

Fourth: the heavenly Father gives wisdom to his children

This is also a truth that the Bible declares over and over again – God will lovingly lead his children with wisdom and counsel! **Psalm 16:7 (ESV)** *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.* Again, a story can help one understand the importance of this – this time a story from Pastor Ray Duerksen – who founded Church Renewal, the ministry that has made these lessons:

“My wife, Fran, and I differed on how to handle one of our kids, as a teenager. It was the first time that our marriage had been under such pressure. Fran’s idea was to loosen the grip and back off. I, on the other hand, felt we needed to enforce the parameters even more to get compliance. And so, we were at odds with each other over this. One day I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, ‘You and Fran are actually on the same page. You both want what’s best for your teen. You just disagree on how to get there.’ I told Fran what I had heard, and it had a big impact on our relationship. Soon after, I was driving with a young man (who was married) from Toronto to Montreal. He had gone through a very rebellious and difficult teen time. The Spirit suddenly spoke to me, ‘Ask him what would have helped him during that time: if his father relaxed the pressure or increased the pressure at that time.’ His response was mature. He said, ‘I was the problem. However, I think that it would have worked better if my father had backed off a bit right then.’ Something happened in my spirit and I knew the Lord had just spoken to me through this young man to give me the answer that would resolve the disagreement between Fran and I. As soon as I got to the hotel in Montreal, I called her and told her I knew what God wanted us to do - to back off. And that’s exactly what we did from that point on!”

Because God is so good to his children, as a Father, he also: provides, disciplines, teaches, motivates, protects, encourages, forgives, etc. This intimate Father-child relationship isn’t abstract or an unattainable dream! It is offered to you with open, waiting arms. He really wants to relate as a Father to you. But for this fellowship, you need to hear his voice.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What does God as Father do for you – the 2 things shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God comforted you? If yes, write down how this happened.
2. Can you think of a time when God gave you counsel? If yes, write it down.
3. Spend some time in prayer, asking God – “is there anything that you want to comfort me with right now?” If something arises, bring this to him in conversational prayer. May God bring you great comfort today!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:27-38.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.

3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today and tomorrow, you'll look at another powerful reason for hearing God's voice – so that he can be your life. One of the greatest cries of current times is, "I want to feel alive!" Much effort is made at significant cost to try to achieve this "dream." It's a universal desire, found in all cultures and in all places. Well, praise God, this is possible when a person abides in Jesus, which is closely connected to hearing his incredible voice.

So That He Can Be Our Life – Part 1

Jesus taught that to be truly alive, you need to be sustained by him. He said, **John 15:5 (ESV)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* As a human, you have the capacity to draw on God. You were created for this! This is like a branch that draws on the vine, in order to flourish. There are words like this - flourish, taste, be fruitful, be renewed – that are found in the Bible. These words attempt to capture your heart.

In Matthew, Jesus declared, **Matthew 4:4 (NIV)** *"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* What did Jesus mean by this? Jesus was teaching that the material side (body) feeds on "bread." (or tacos, or salad, or pizza!) But people also have an important immaterial part: the soul/spirit. This part is made up of the mind, emotions, and will. Put another way, we'll need another kind of food as well!

When you are absolutely filled with joy, hope, love, and peace, you can tackle almost any challenge! Is this not true? But when it's lacking, you become paralyzed; everyone has experienced this as well! Of course, trying to feed your soul/spirit with food meant for the body doesn't work. Many people who eat three good meals every day (or overeat) are still discouraged or in despair.

Jesus then tells his listeners what the soul/spirit is to feed on: "on every word that comes from the mouth of God!" This isn't just God's words, as written down, but every continuing word of God! Here it is helpful to understand that there are at least two ways that, "word," is used in the Bible.

First, there is the "logos" – the Greek term (the New Testament was written in Greek originally) that is often talking about the words that you read in the Bible. It's the "written down for all time" kind of word. Jesus is also called the Word – or logos – in John 1. As one who is eternal, Jesus in a very real sense is always communicating.

And as Jesus keeps communicating, he communicates SPECIFIC things. This points us to a second Greek word, or second way he would speak – "rhemas." These are often specific words that God speaks to your soul/spirit in a moment. Consider, **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)** *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* In this verse, the word "word" in Greek is "rhema." It's saying that Jesus sustains the world with his ONGOING words and activity – his "rhemas."

As humans, we use words to express thoughts, ideas, and wishes. But Jesus' words carry out his thoughts and wishes because they're living and powerful. He pointed to the power of his ongoing words when he said, **John 6:63 (NIV)** *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

In the same way, when his words (his rhemas) penetrate into your soul, they will bring not only life, but abundant life! That is, they are creative and re-create according to his will and for his glory, not for our often narrow desires. Do you need some re-creating, some transformation? Well, Jesus still speaks! This makes all the difference in the world!

Consider what else it says about God's powerful words, Isaiah **55:11 (NIV2011)** *... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* In some mysterious way Jesus abides in the very words that proceed from him so that they accomplish and achieve what is spoken! Wow!

Special Note: we want to acknowledge that biblical scholars are divided on how to interpret and translate specific Greek terms. This is true also of the distinction we're making regarding "rhema" and "logos." Discussions on this can be full of bias, confusion, etc. It often depends on what scholar you talk to. We'll continue to use the distinction of "logos" as the Bible's "all time" Word to us – including Jesus - and "rhema" as specific words which will not contradict the Bible. We also acknowledge that God will frequently use the Bible to speak a "rhema" word to us.

For those who prefer to ignore the distinction we use or disagree with it, that's totally fine! The important thing is that we acknowledge that a RELATIONSHIP with Jesus requires two-way communication, some of which is through the Bible, but at other times through other means (which will be discussed in future lessons). May disagreements on interpretation not be used as smokescreens to keep us from developing a vital relationship with Jesus! If you choose to ignore the term "rhema," we only encourage you to preserve the value of SPECIFIC words directly from the Spirit, that may or may not come from the Bible itself. Further, that Jesus himself lived by two different words – the written word and the spoken word.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the spoken word is audible. That would be very rare! Neither will we hear these specific words perfectly, as only Jesus could. That's why the Bible itself encourages us to test things! (see **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**, **1 Corinthians 14:29-30**) Testing assumes both that there are things that need to be tested – specific words – and that the hearing will be imperfect! We need to be very humble about this, not denying God's willingness to speak to his children outside of the Bible, but also recognizing the great need for testing.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?
3. Explain what the difference is between the logos and a rhema as best you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God gave you a sense of abundant life through something he said to you? If yes, write down how this happened.

2. Ask God to show you someone who is really struggling in their faith right now. Ask God to give you something to share with them – a word, picture, thought or verse. In faith, pass this “word” on to them, trusting that God will use it to bring them life eventually. (sometimes the seeds take awhile to bear fruit!) Caution: do not share a correction or give them direction on what to do.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Practice using SMORP with Psalm 19:7-11. What does this passage say that God’s Word does for someone – i.e. his laws, statutes, precepts? His “rhema” words (words spoken to you) do the same.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today, you’ll have the opportunity to think a bit more about how hearing God’s voice can bring you life.

So That He Can Be Our Life – Part 2

Remember, God’s words can be like food to you! They’re packed with himself, to give life to troubled or weary souls, whether circumstances change or not. The powerful word of God spoken to you can put *courage* into your life even if circumstances continue to rage out of control around you. This is a significant benefit of hearing God’s voice. Wow!

In the New Testament we’re told to deny ourselves and take up a cross. This includes difficult circumstances. And yet we’re also encouraged by Jesus himself, **Matthew 11:30 (NIV)** *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Is this a contradiction? A cross, yet a light burden? Well, with God’s help and life flowing in and through you, it’s not!

For example, the apostle Paul had just been arrested in Jerusalem, and in the process had almost been torn into pieces by a violent mob. Wouldn’t that put fear into you? See what Jesus does for him, **Acts 23:11 (NIV)** *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”*

Paul couldn’t turn his fears into courage. However, when Jesus stood near him in prison, and spoke a word of courage into his heart, his fears subsided! God never intended for you to work up encouragement or to find it in something else. Jesus, who speaks, wants to BE your courage, your joy, your hope, your love, your peace – by speaking his living WORD into you! It’s one of the reasons that Jesus is called, the Word, in the Bible (see **John 1:1**).

Now this is LIFE! It’s exactly what Jesus meant when he said, **John 10:10 (NIV)** *I came that they may have life and have it to the full.* The Old Testament affirmed the same thing, **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)** *... the joy of the LORD is your strength.* When the soul/spirit (inner person) is fed, it becomes strong!

Unfortunately, many through neglect fail to hear God’s voice and the result is this, **John 15:6 (NIV)** *If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers ...* May you not allow your inner life to wither. This isn’t God’s desire for you at all!

Here's one more story that illustrates the blessing of hearing God's voice, from Pastor Ray Duerksen:

"The day before Fran had one of her brain surgeries, we were both feeling some pressure, knowing that humanly speaking this was the end of the road. We also felt particularly alone...not the loneliness of human touch, but the simple need to be assured of God's love. At supper time we quietly walked to a food court building on the great Penn State campus and chose, as we so often do, pizza. In the center was a juke box (look it up! It was like a public version of Spotify, years ago) which would automatically select and play a tune every 15 minutes in order to entice paying customers to select tunes also. As we waited in line to receive our pizza the music box came to life and in that large secular setting played 'Jesus Loves Me.' And as it did, the Holy Spirit sent us what I can only describe as 'waves of liquid love.' It continued for approximately 15-20 minutes until I whispered, 'Please hold back, I can't take any more in public,' because I was so moved to quiet sobs. After I gained my composure, I finished my pizza. Then Fran and I went over to the juke box to find that song. And guess what? Though we both checked it, neither of us could find the song listed! That's because God will find ways to bring life to his kids!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

You can skip ahead to the Life Application section for today.

Life Application (James 1:22)

Step 1: Carefully and prayerfully read (reflect or meditate) Psalm 121 – take your time.

Step 2: Select a word, phrase or verse that seemed to 'draw you' to it.

- a. Other ways of saying this includes:
 - It seemed to stick out to you
 - It caught your attention
- b. You may have had an impression in the very first verse or two; perhaps in the middle or the end.
- c. Whatever the impression was, write that word, phrase or verse down in your journal.
- d. Or perhaps a thought came to you *because* of the word, phrase or verse you read.
 - A specific 'word' of encouragement for something in your life
 - A piece of wisdom you need for something in your life
 - A promise for you at this time
 - A rebuke for something
 - A warning
 - A blessing
- e. Then write this down!
- f. Why do you write these impressions, 'words,' thoughts or pictures down? In order to focus your thoughts, so that your mind doesn't wander. Once you have written down the word, phrase or verse that stood out to you, **WRITE the letter "G:" in front of it.** Remember: "G" stands for God.
- g. That impression or thought that stood out to you as you read was the whisper of God's voice! You heard it! If you had a 'word' or picture in your mind, that too was his voice. On the next line, write down the initial of your first name (E.g. J for John or R for Rachel).

- h. Next to your initial, write out a question you have about the word, phrase or verse you wrote down. You could also write a comment. You're speaking back to God about what you heard. A question or comment is part of normal conversation. There is no right or wrong in this, so ask away! Or tell God something about this!
- i. Next, wait for a response from the Lord. It will make sense for the context of your question or comment. Again, place a "G" before it. And then, placing your initial on the page, continue with another question or comment.
- j. Keep the conversation going.

Bible Reading

1. Today's Bible reading has been moved to Day 6. Enjoy! It is a powerful passage!

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Please read Matthew 10 (it's a longer section today, but it is best done in one sitting).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Abide 6 – The Bible Is the Primary Way to Hear God

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

What a joy to hear the voice of God! And rejoice that this is something that you can grow in throughout your life. It's like all aspects of prayer – no one really is an expert. The reality that God is ABOVE ALL and ETERNAL and ALL KNOWING means that there is always more to learn from him.

Or as Jeremiah declares, **Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)** *Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.* Do you have an attitude of curiosity, hunger, and a desire to keep growing? God wants to reveal his heart, his ways, and his strategies to you – not about everything, but about everything that relates to how he wants to use you. This is thrilling!

In the midst of this excitement, it's vital to embrace a key truth though, namely, that the Bible is the primary way to hear God. It is not accidental or random that those who read, meditate on, and study their Bibles hear God more frequently and with greater accuracy.

How does God speak to a person through the Bible?

God Speaks to Us Through the Bible in Two Different Ways

This will be a bit of a review from Abide 5, but is very important to fully understand.

First: he speaks through the “logos”

Three times in the New Testament, **logos** is personified and applied to Jesus. For example, in, **John 1:1, 14 (NIV)** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us....* Here it is talking about Jesus!

What you see is that God expressed himself (what a word does) through his Son, Jesus. Another passage highlights this, **Hebrews 1:1-2 (NIV)** *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*

The rest of the time **logos** simply means: “What God has said or has to say to you.” This is the word of God to **everybody**: the Bible (Genesis to Revelation); the Ten Commandments; the Sermon on the Mount; and so on.

This “logos” is the foundation and filter for the other way that God speaks through the Bible - through *rhemas*. We need to spend much time with our Bibles! Are you doing that?

Second: he can give us a “rhema” – a specific word from the Bible

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to make the Scriptures apply to our lives personally in a dynamic (living) way. In other words, he takes the **logos** and turns it into **rhema**! For centuries theologians have called this “illumination”! Again, some dispute this distinction, but Jesus himself seemed to teach this very thing.

After Jesus’ baptism he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. The devil said, **Matthew 4:3 (ESV)** *If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.* Notice how Jesus responds, **Matthew 4:4 (ESV)** *It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [rhema] that comes from the mouth of God.’*

Note that the Greek word for “word” is again “rhema.” Many assume that because Jesus was quoting the Old Testament (**Deuteronomy 8:3**) when countering the devil’s temptation, he must have been referring to the written Word when he says that man is to live “by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

But they’re likely mistaken! Nowhere in the written Word did it say that someone couldn’t turn stones into bread to eat!! You can look for a long time and you won’t find it. So if Jesus was saying that the Father wouldn’t allow it, then he couldn’t have been referring to the written Word, but to a spoken or personalized word to him from the Father. And the context supports this, for it says that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested.

The Father had evidently set up a series of tests. In order for the first temptation to be a valid test, Jesus had to engage in a lengthy fast. Jesus claimed to live his life like that – in full submission to the stated will of his Father, **John 5:19 (ESV)** ... *the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* (also: John 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10; 16:30).

Again, a **rhema** can be a specific message, given for a specific person, at a specific time. This is where you’re personally impacted by something in the Bible. That is, the Holy Spirit takes something from your Bible reading and, suddenly or over time, it begins to grab you in very powerful way.

This can be further explained through an illustration: suppose a follower of Jesus says to a group of people, “I love you.” This could be true, in a very general way. And if their spouse was sitting in that group, it would include them as well. This is a “logos” type of word. However, if that same person walks over to their spouse, leans down close and whispers, “I love you,” there will be a different reaction! Same words, but more specific.

This is what the Spirit can do when he gives you a “rhema” word in your Bible reading. As we noted earlier in Abide, if you don’t want to use the exact word “rhema” or you disagree with the interpretation of the term, that’s okay.

However, we need to concede that the clear teaching of the New Testament is that God speaks to his children through the Bible first, but also in other ways as well. Put another way, you can refer to them as specific words from the Spirit, independent but NEVER contradictory to the Bible.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. In what 2 ways does God speak to people through the Bible. Explain the difference.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Notice how Jesus takes the "logos" (Old Testament passages) and applies it to his very specific situation.
2. Can you think of a time when God used a verse or passage and applied it directly to your life personally, either immediately or over time? If yes, write this down.
3. Take your answer to the previous question and share it with someone. Being a follower of the Way includes learning to share your "God-story" with others.
4. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 11:1-19.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today, and the next few days, you'll see how receiving "rhemas" – that is, specific words - from the Bible can be incredibly valuable. In total, rhemas can be the key to six different things.

First: rhemas are a key to understanding saving faith

Paul says that, **Romans 10:17 (ESV)** ... *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*. Now it's time to discuss some grammar for a bit. Stick with it – this can really help you understand the need for rhemas. Don't worry, it will be short!

There is no definite article in the Greek, where it says, "**the** word." Instead, it should read, "**a** word" of Christ. That makes all the difference in the world, because "**the** word" would refer to the written word, meaning that faith comes from hearing the Bible. But it says "a word of Christ!" And that means it doesn't HAVE to refer to the Bible!

Second, the Greek word for "word" is again "rhema." Therefore, when you take these two grammatical points together, you see that Paul is clearly referring to something different than the written word of

God – the Bible. Put another way, rhemas can be very important for someone to give their life to Jesus! This is what is meant by, “saving faith.”

In fact, the experience of many people proves this! There are those who give their life to Jesus as they hear preaching, or someone shares Jesus with them, or they make a commitment through a dream, or vision (e.g. many Muslims today). These are through rhemas!

Second: rhemas are a key to getting the faith to act and obey

The Bible doesn’t make a massive distinction in faith for salvation, or continuing faith to obey God and walk with him! It’s quite similar! You believe what Christ is saying in your heart that he is the only way to the Father – and so you have faith – faith to be saved. And then you believe what Christ says about what he wants you to do – that is, faith to do what he asks you to do! (OF COURSE, this needs to be tested against God’s Word and using wise guidelines such as those found in Lessons 8 & 9. We should humbly admit that we won’t be perfect in hearing correctly).

For example, Noah built an ark though he had never seen a flood. Why? Because God “warned” him – he heard a word from God! **Hebrews 11:7 (ESV)** *By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.*

Another example is the story of Peter walking on water. The disciples were out on a boat at night, when Jesus comes walking on the water. Peter says, “Lord, if it’s you tell me to come to you on the water.” Then Jesus gave Peter a **rhema**, a specific word, “Come.” So Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on water! Notice, no one else was anxious to get out of the boat! Why? Because it wasn’t a specific word to everyone!

It was a word specifically for Peter, at that one specific time. The next day Peter didn’t get up and say to the guys, “Hey, let’s go fishing. And forget the boat; we’ll just walk on water and fish!” And you can’t read the story of Peter walking on water and suddenly figure you can walk across your swimming pool! That would be foolish!

God has many plans for you to serve him, to obey him and to expand his kingdom. But how do you get the confidence to take action? Again, as you read the Bible, God will highlight specific things that sparks something inside of you, giving you courage, desire, etc.

To illustrate this, an example from church history will help:

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a brilliant German theologian who left Germany due to the rise of the evil dictator, Adolf Hitler. Dietrich was planning to settle in New York. However, he stayed in New York for a very short time, heading back to Germany to serve his people and nation, eventually being executed for his resistance to Hitler. Now, how did Bonhoeffer get the courage to act? Well, God gave him two rhemas, from the Bible – personalizing two passages to guide him. On June 24, 1939 God spoke to him through **Isaiah 28:16** The one who believes doesn’t flee. And on June 26, 1939 God spoke to him again: **2 Tim 4:21** Do your best to come here before winter.*

What might God ask you to do? Whatever it is, courage will often be required and the faith to act. Receiving rhemas from the word can help you immensely!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 things might rhemas be useful for, according to today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when God gave you very clear direction, where you really had to step out in faith? What happened? Write down this story.
2. Find someone who is as experienced in the faith as you are or more experienced. Ask them Life Application Question 1. It is great to hear the faith stories of others! This is how you can, "spur one another on," as you are commanded to do in Hebrews 10:24. The more we can discuss our learning and faith journey with others, the better!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 11:20-30.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In the previous day, you saw that rhemas, which you can receive while reading the Bible, are the key to two important things. Today, two more keys will be highlighted.

Third: rhemas are a key to claiming God's promises to us

Did you know that there are over 700 different promises in the Bible? Receiving a promise from God can be a powerful and significant part of one's journey in the Way! But are all of these promises for you? Can you "claim" all of them?

Obviously, some promises are in the category of, "logos." They are for everyone, all the time. For example, the promise that God will never leave or forsake those who love him – you can take that promise for yourself, because it's an eternal promise for a general group.

There are also precise instructions and promises that were meant for a specific person at the time. You can see this in the story of Abraham and Sarah. When Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was 99, he announced that they were going to have a baby! God had promised this to them. This is definitely not a promise for everyone!

Then there are promises that God speaks into your spirit as you read the Bible, that are meant only for you! Here's a story that illustrates this, from a follower of the Way:

"When I went through a season of terrible anxiety, I had a stretch of weeks where I only slept for a few hours a night. I began to call my bed a, 'bed of suffering' – it was so bad. One particular Saturday I felt like I couldn't take it anymore. I cried, and I cried out to God. Then he directed me to Psalm 127

and the verse that says, ‘and he grants sleep to those he loves.’ Then the Holy Spirit spoke into me and said, ‘tonight, that promise is for you!’ I slept 10 hours that night and even though I struggled for a few more weeks, that specific promise and night gave me so much hope, hope that I had previously lost.”

When God speaks to you personally, it’s for you and you can act on it. But NOT when it’s his specific word for someone else. Nor is this personal word to be imposed on others.

Fourth: rhemas are a key for understanding answered prayers

Here’s a remarkable statement from Jesus, **John 15:7 (NIV)** *If you remain in me and my words [rhema] remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* Many treat prayer like throwing darts randomly at a dartboard – hoping something sticks! This is SO discouraging, because then you’ll rarely recognize God’s work in your life! Some even get mad at God or confused when this happens. So sad.

People read that God healed someone or did something for someone in the Bible. So they pray, pray, pray! Yet in spite of tremendous faith, nothing happens. Then they get mad at God in their hearts, saying, “God! Why didn’t you hear my prayers?” But God didn’t promise that all our prayer would be answered in the way we want.

There’s a much better way! When you abide in Jesus, which includes reading the Bible, he will suddenly apply something you read to your actual life and circumstances. Then you start to pray based on what he said to you, which is his rhema TO YOU. And because it is from him directly, the prayer WILL get answered! And then you will have joy in your relationship with Jesus. This is such an incredible way to live!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What 2 things might rhemas be useful for, according to today’s reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Read Psalm 23 today. Ask God – “are there any promises for my life specifically, from this passage?” Do not force anything. If God gives you a promise, great! If not, that’s totally okay!
2. Spend some time in praise – thank God for any promises that he just gave you. Either way, praise him for his willingness to speak to you!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 12:1-14.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In the previous two days, it was noted that rhemas received while reading the Bible are the key to four important things. Today, two more keys will be emphasized. Through this, may you marvel at God's goodness to his children!

Fifth: rhemas are a key to receiving guidance from God

Stories of God's direct work in your life can be very encouraging and life-giving as you face new challenges. They are like fresh air *and* they inspire others. We desperately need to share such stories. Today, a longer story from Pastor Ray Duerksen is shared, as it powerfully illustrates the impacts of rhemas, and of course, has encouraged many to persevere in their own journeys of learning to hear God's voice. Enjoy!

Story of move to Woodstock, Ontario (1984)

We had started a church in Woodstock on March 18, 1984. At the same time, I was finishing up Bible College in Kitchener, Ontario, where we were also living. In May I was praying, asking the Lord if/when we should move to Woodstock. Immediately I received a clear rhema word in my spirit: "**Do it!**" I got up, walked over to the landlord next door, and gave notice to vacate by the end of June.

Within 24 hours the landlord had already signed a lease with the next renter for July 1st. Only problem – we didn't have a place in Woodstock yet because the vacancy rate was zero! An agent showed us a house that could be rented from Rev. and Mrs. Allen, who were being reassigned to a church in Windsor, but who wanted to keep their house for future retirement. The Allens agreed to rent the house to us, but we couldn't have the house until Sept 1st! **Problem:** A family of 6, out of a house on July 1st, with no house to move into until Sept 1st! Still, we were confident that God had led us to move and so we weren't worried at that point.

The days went by, and all the while God was encouraging Fran and I in our devotions. In fact, on June 20th with only 10 days to go (*and nowhere to go!*), Fran got an amazing rhema: **Jeremiah 10:17-18 (KJV)** *Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitants of the fortress. For thus saith the Lord, 'Behold I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once.'* Fran and I danced in the kitchen because we were certain it meant God would move the Allens out of their home in the next 10 days, a full two months earlier than what they had said! On my Sunday-morning prayer walk in Kitchener, with only 7 days left, the Spirit told me that I was to share with our little church what I believed he had promised us. I finally agreed. On Monday the little church fasted and prayed. And every day we waited for the Allens to call.

Finally, Saturday, June 30th (moving day) came. Everything was packed and ready to go. We waited for the call from the Allens to tell us they were moving out, but they didn't call. Finally, I called them, and he cheerfully told me they were going on vacation. When they returned, they planned to slowly pack up so we could move in on Sept 1st! I couldn't believe it! I hung up the phone in disbelief! *Had God failed us? Had we misread his voice?* What about his reputation and ours? So many people knew what we were doing now!

But that wasn't our only problem that day. The truck that was supposed to move us hadn't arrived, and now a moving van had pulled up with the possessions of the people moving in. The people were very angry that we weren't moved out. We despaired and sank to our knees, crying out to God. Then we got up and I began to call around to find out where our crew of movers were. They were in Pickering, on the other side of Toronto, moving his in-laws instead. It was now Saturday afternoon of the long weekend - the busiest moving day in Canada! And all the trucks were rented out long before. What would we do? At 5 pm Fran called one of the truck rental companies in

desperation. A man answered her enquiry: “Lady you’re in luck. I don’t think the person who was going to rent the truck has the money. But you have to come and get it immediately because we’re closing for the long weekend.” We were SO excited to have a truck ...

Only problem: we had no one to help us load; we had nowhere to go; and it was almost supper time by now. And I was supposed to preach the next day in Woodstock. So, I backed up and began to load the truck by myself - Fran had 4 kids to look after, 5 and under. I hadn’t been loading long when the neighbor noticed and came out with his brother-in-law who had been a professional mover at one time. They offered to help. Then a few other people, prompted by the Spirit, came by and we had all the help we needed. At 5:30 pm we began loading and by 7:30 pm we were loaded.

I will never forget Fran standing on the truck step looking at me and with her eyes asking: “What do we do next?” I looked at her and said, “All we own is in the 22 feet behind us. We can’t go back because they’re moving in. So, the only way we can go is forward.” And so, we set off for Woodstock, me driving the truck; Fran and the kids in our little Honda Civic following behind; with no idea where we’d stay for the night. For two nights we rented a motel room at \$65 per night, and then I’d pick up a big bag of day-old donuts in the morning for breakfast. For noon and supper, we were asked out. Sunday evening a friend said, “Check out the place next to me. I think the lady moved out.”

So what, I thought? With a 0% vacancy rate, surely someone had already signed a lease earlier. But my friend called the landlord, who was just leaving for a fishing trip and was in a hurry. The landlord explained that the woman who had been living there for four years had suddenly moved out on Saturday, without any notice! So, he was happy to rent it out to us for two months, giving him time to get other renters. When we arrived with the truck, the former tenant had returned to clean the rental. I asked her why she had moved. She had lived there for 4 years with her son and was getting remarried in one month. You’d think she would simply stay one more month and then move in with her new husband. But no. She said, “Last Tuesday (remember, we fasted on Monday) I suddenly had an idea to move in with my girlfriend for one month until the wedding, and then move in with my husband.” Now why would anyone do such a thing?! It makes no sense! Until the Holy Spirit powerfully reminded me of the verse: “Gather up your wares, for I will fling the inhabitants out of the land!” I stood there stunned!

Now you can’t just pack up your house, get into a moving truck, drive into any city you like, and expect that God will provide a house for you, a job and money to survive, based on those verses! And come to think of it, neither can I! That was one personalized word for Fran and I at ONE specific time for ONE specific purpose! Jesus promised such guidance: **John 16:13 (NIV)** *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears...*

Sixth: rhemas are a key to biblical meditation

God told Joshua that his future success was not found in his leadership skills or in his discipline. Instead, God said that his success as a leader would come IF he would meditate on Scripture day and night! **Joshua 1:8 (NIV)** *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

At first this doesn’t make sense because Joshua already knew the Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy!) better than almost anyone else. He had spent forty years serving Moses and studying the words of God! But

the issue here wasn't general Bible knowledge (**logos**). Joshua would need a personal direction to be able to successfully lead such a vast nation! Yes, we too need general Bible knowledge so we can recognize truth from error - when Satan tempts! But like Joshua, we also need to intentionally listen to God through meditation on his Word.

When we ponder, prayerfully think about, listen to, or "chew" on Scripture it's called meditation! As we do this the Word will come alive in us. It takes on personal meaning and application. It becomes dynamic and exciting! Some describe it like this: "The Scripture jumped off the page;" or "it grabbed me." You feel and know that you are being personally addressed.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What two things are rhemas useful for, according to today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. What is a really big answer to prayer that you would like to receive? Ask God to speak to you about his will on this matter. Write it down in your journal and make this a consistent prayer request now!
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 12:15-21.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

You can skip ahead to the Life Application section for today.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

You can skip ahead to the Life Application section for today.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you have not memorized what each letter of **SMORP** means, take some time to do so today. You can find it in Abide 1, Day 4.
2. Read Psalm 103:2-4
 - a. Let God speak to you through the Bible, about anything he wishes.
 - b. Read these three verses carefully (reflect and meditate). Ask the Lord in prayer to reveal something out of the Message and Obedience parts of **SMORP**.
 - c. Remember: Anything worth doing is worth learning! It will take practice!

- d. You didn't learn to walk, talk, ride a bike, swim, read or drive a car on your first try!
- e. It took much practice! And so will this!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 12:22-50.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Here are a few attributes of God – he is a Rock, Faithful, Compassionate, and Almighty. Spend some time in prayer, asking him how these specifically apply to your life right now.

Abide 7 – Ways in Which God Speaks

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

There are many ways that God communicates with his valued and loved children. As one biblical author notes, **Job 33:14 (CEV)** *God speaks in different ways, and we don't always recognize his voice.* The author of Hebrews, looking back at history, also declares, **Hebrews 1:1 (NIV)** *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.*

To be a follower of the Way is to be on a path that is full of adventure, overseen by an incredible Father. In today's lesson, some of the rarer ways that God speaks are highlighted. Of course, it's important to be open to extraordinary occurrences, YET stay within biblical boundaries.

Ways That God Speaks - Audible Voice

In the Old Testament, Samuel (**1 Samuel 3**) hears an audible voice from God - "Samuel. Samuel." He eventually responds – "speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

In the New Testament, Paul, previously known as Saul, hears a loud voice on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9**), which sounds like thunder to others – "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Do people still experience the audible voice of God? Yes, though it seems to be very rare. However, rare does not mean never! Here is a story about a Christian author, Francis Schaeffer, during the 20th century:

"He and his young family needed temporary housing during a transition time but had little money. They needed a "minor miracle" from the Lord. In prayer Schaeffer asked God, "Where can we live, Lord? Please show us." Immediately he heard an audible voice - not a voice in his mind or from another human, for he was alone. The voice simply said, "Uncle Harrison's house." Though perfectly clear, the answer made no sense. His uncle was living in the house. It was very unlikely he would offer his house for them to live in. Yet the voice was so direct he felt he had to obey it. He wrote his uncle, asking him what he planned to do with his house for the next year. He was astonished when his uncle replied that he planned to live with his brother for the next year and would like to offer his house free of rent to Schaeffer and his family for that year."

Ways That God Speaks - Angels

In the Old Testament, there are many examples! (perhaps look up one or two of them). Abraham (Genesis 18-19); Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15); Balaam (Numbers 22:22-35); Gideon (Judges 6:11-24); Samson's parents (Judges 13); Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6-13); Daniel (Daniel 9:20-27).

Angels are much more active than many followers of Jesus realize! As Hebrews says, **Hebrews 1:14 (NIV)** *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* Of course, angels will not speak to people very often, but it has happened – maybe more often than is reported.

You can read of the activity of some angels in the New Testament as well – e.g. they gave specific directions to Philip (**Acts 8:4-14, 26**) and Cornelius (**Acts 10:4-6**).

Here is a more recent testimony of the ministry of angels:

“My aunt told me this story of being out for a drive, and suddenly losing control of the vehicle. As the vehicle vaulted up some concrete, two large hands suddenly appeared and stopped the vehicle. Then she heard the audible words, “Turn off the engine.” Also, my mother-in-law, had angelic experiences when she was so weak and frail and couldn't dress herself – they spoke to her and encouraged her; one even helped her get dressed one morning.”

Other Ways

As you read your Bible, you will also see other ways that God communicates – e.g. through a burning bush (Moses); through a donkey (Balaam); via literal writing on a wall (Belshazzar and Daniel); by using a physical object, a fleece (Gideon).

God refuses to limit himself to only one way of communicating. He can use any means he wishes! And we will continue to emphasize this. All “words” should be tested and that even includes the preaching we hear in a service, even when the Bible is being used. Of course, “testing” doesn't mean being skeptical and rejecting everything. This can be an excuse for disobedience to God. Just as we test what we hear, our hearts and motives need to be tested as hearers.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. God speaks to his people in many ways – what ways are mentioned today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Have you ever experienced God speaking to you in these ways? If yes, write down what happened.
2. Spend some time praising God for the desire to reveal his will to those who follow him, or will follow him.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8.
4. Memorize John 10:27.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 13:1-23.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.

3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On the previous day, you looked at some rare ways that God speaks to his children. Today, you'll see how he uses dreams and visions. It's important for a person to eagerly desire to hear God's voice (and obey it), AND at the same time avoid the trap of comparing with others' experiences. It's true that family members sometimes get competitive, isn't it? This can happen in the family of God as well.

Ways That God Speaks - Dreams & Visions

Dreams are ways that God can speak to his followers while they sleep. Visions occur while someone is awake.

Are all dreams from God? No. They can also come from your own "flesh" (you ate too much pizza late at night!), or even from Satan. In Abide 9, you will learn how to be wise about figuring out the source of a dream or vision. Also, this is important to teach others! (remember, you're to pass on what you learn)

What are some examples from the Old Testament? First, Joseph learned what his future would be through two dreams. E.g. the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed to him, representing his parents and brothers. Second, God appeared to Abraham in a vision confirming his promise to grant him a son (see **Genesis 15**).

In the New Testament, the magi were warned in a dream not to return to Jerusalem (**Matthew 2:12**). And the apostle Paul received multiple visions, while Peter experienced a powerful vision that transformed his attitude towards the Gentiles (see **Acts 10:9-17** – Gentiles are those who are not Jewish).

You can find examples throughout church history as well. The man known as Saint Augustine (from the 4th century) heard an audible voice that led to his commitment to be a follower of the Way. His decision was also impacted by reading the Bible. But before that, his mother Monica had received a prophetic dream (this is a dream that looks ahead at what will happen). From this, you see that in the 4th century God was still speaking through dreams, his audible voice, and the words of the Bible!

God can give dreams and visions to unbelievers as well, as he loves them and will seek to draw them into relationship, or to warn them. E.g. Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus, and warned her husband that Jesus was innocent, and that he shouldn't condemn him (**Matthew 27:19**). Even the pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, had a vision from God concerning his future (**Daniel 4**).

God said through Peter that dreams, visions, and other prophetic experiences would become commonplace. **Acts 2:17-18 (NLT)** *In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike'*

Of course, many Muslims today are seeing Jesus in their dreams and then making decisions to follow him! God longs for people to commit to him, and to guide those who already follow him. He will speak! This is why it's unwise to ignore any possible way that God may speak to you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. God speaks to his people in many ways – what is discussed today? Give some biblical examples.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Have you ever experienced God speaking to you through dreams and visions? If yes, write down what happened.
2. Contact 3 people that you know who are mature followers of Jesus. Ask them if God has ever spoken to them through dreams or visions. Rejoice with them, as your enthusiasm can encourage them to keep seeking God's voice.
3. Review John 10:27.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 13:24-35.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Ways That God Speaks - Through Other People

A very common way that God uses to speak to his people is through others. This is why the Holy Spirit has given so many gifts to the Church that can be called, "speaking gifts."

First: preaching and teaching

God used preachers and teachers such as Peter, Paul, and Apollos to share the truth about God and his ways (**Romans 10:14-15**). It is no different today – preaching and teaching are still essential for people to hear God's Word. Listen to what Paul commanded, **1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NIV)** ... *when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God ...*

Of course, this teaching can come in the form of writing and books as well. Many have experienced huge breakthroughs as the Holy Spirit used something that has been shared in written form.

Second: prophesying

Prophecy is listed as one of the New Testament gifts of the Spirit (**Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10; Ephesians 4:11**). In Acts chapter 11, a person named Agabus prophesied that a famine would sweep the known world. In 2004, Pastor Ray Duersken, received a prophecy about one day ministering in other countries, and that his wife Fran would receive a strong prophetic gift – to help him in his ministry. Both of these seemed highly unlikely at the time, but they both happened. God is good!

Third: words of knowledge and words of wisdom (**1 Corinthians 12:8**)

God can give another person a word of knowledge about you – information that you have never told them. Or they might receive a word of wisdom, which is Holy Spirit-inspired guidance about something you are facing.

Fourth: interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5)

The gift of tongues is a gift from God where someone speaks in a language unknown to them – either a human language or an angelic language. At times that same person, or another person, will receive an interpretation of this into a language that is known.

Some would like to reject these gifts from God; however, is this a grateful response to something that the Father can use for good in one's life? Of course, a person needs to learn HOW to use the gift, and use it wisely. Nevertheless, this is true about ALL gifts!

It's important to be thankful that God will speak to you through others (and to others through you!) This is why he calls the church a, "body." There are many parts and each part needs the others! Here is another story of God speaking through others:

"One pastor has always tried to seek God on his primary calling, sorting through the many good things he could be doing. Over a sixteen-year period, through his team of prayer partners, and via many prophetic times at church, others have received 32 different 'words' for him using the same picture – of him traveling up a mountain, leading others, while calling out to them. It relates to his calling to blamelessness, and to call others to this as they walk with Jesus. Some of these words even came from believers in other countries, on mission trips. It is only after the 32nd word that he started sharing this pattern with others."

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. God speaks to his people through others – what are the examples discussed today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Have you ever experienced God speaking to you through others? If yes, write down 1 or 2 examples.
2. Quickly scan through 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Write down all of the gifts listed in this passage and then circle those that require hearing the voice of God.
3. What is something that you are currently needing to hear God's will on? Today, ask 1 or 2 people to listen in prayer for you on this matter – even if this is only done through a text or email (in person is always better, but not always possible).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 13:36-58.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Ways That God Speaks – A Still, Small Voice – Part 1

This is THE most common way in which God speaks to people. It's what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced when they said, **Luke 24:32 (NIV)** *Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?* And in speaking to the impact of Stephen's charges against the religious leaders for resisting the Holy Spirit, Luke writes, **Acts 7:54 (NKJV)** *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*

Both of the passages above are referring to the same "inner voice." Elijah also heard this still, small voice:

1 Kings 19:11-12 (RSV) *And he [the Lord] said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake;¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

Job referred to the voice of God as a whisper! **Job 26:14 (ESV)** *Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?* (also **Job 4:12**). This inner voice so often takes the form of thoughts that are embedded in your own thoughts, though actually not from you! Nehemiah described it as God putting it into his heart, **Nehemiah 7:5 (NIV)** *So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families.*

One of the ways that you can know that these are the Holy Spirit's (God's) thoughts is if you receive them after you have asked God for wisdom about a particular matter. When you receive thoughts after such prayer requests, you shouldn't doubt that they came from him. Listen to what James said, **James 1:5-6 (ESV)** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*

These Holy Spirit thoughts MAY (not always) be accompanied by feelings, as the Holy Spirit operates with a word upon your heart. This is particularly true if God is trying to call someone into ministry, or when his Spirit calls people to salvation, or when he is bringing healing to wounds in your heart.

If you're meditating on the Bible and require wisdom or guidance, something may stick out in a quiet, yet obvious way. This is a rhema, which was discussed in previous lessons. Of course, if you're still learning to hear his voice, you may not be as certain in discerning between your thoughts and his thoughts. That's ok! That's where most people start – uncertain.

Today people also refer to this way of God speaking as: a conviction or prompting or impression. In speaking of the impact of Stephen's charges against the religious leaders for resisting the Holy Spirit, Luke writes, **Acts 7:54 (NKJV)** *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*

Domesticated animals and pets learn to accurately recognize the voice of their master by experience! Similarly, as a human, you learn from experience alone how to distinguish colors or musical notes. No psychologist or philosopher can even begin to give an explanation for this!

And learning to distinguish God's voice is no different – you learn to recognize it through experience. Further, no philosophical explanation can be given for how a person distinguishes light from darkness – you just can!

In the same way you can't explain how you distinguish between your thoughts and the Spirit's thoughts – you just can! And what a blessing from God this is!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the MOST common way that God speaks to a person? Explain this in your own words as you write down your answer.
3. Is discerning God's voice something that you learn over time?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time praying about and reflecting on this question – are there certain distractions in your life that keep you from hearing the still, small voice of God? Write them down.
2. If you received anything in the previous question, spend some time in confession. Then write out a prayer of commitment to God – to make a very real change.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 14:1-21.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Ways That God Speaks – A Still, Small Voice – Part 2

Today, you'll learn a bit more about hearing the still, small voice of your Father in heaven! This is something every follower of the Way can keep growing in. And the impact of hearing him – wow! His voice, even when firm and clear or addressing sin, can bring peace, confidence, joy, and a desire to change.

There are times when God will be giving big commands or vision for the future, but because it's his voice, it will be accompanied by a gentle pull in your spirit. Listen to how James describes the wisdom from heaven, **James 3:17 (NIV)** *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.* If the internal voice that you hear creates confusion or agitation, it's likely not him speaking.

First: we naturally do NOT have access to God's thoughts and mind (see **Isaiah 40:13**), but because of Jesus, we now have the potential to access his thoughts and mind!

The apostle Paul was amazed by this blessing and described it this way, **1 Corinthians 2:16 (NIV)** *"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.* What an incredible spiritual birthright to have access to the mind of God, whose thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours (**Isaiah 55:8-9**)!

And your access is through the Spirit of God, who is given to every follower. Or as Paul again says it, **1 Corinthians 2:11 (NIV)** *... in the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* We should often thank God for his Spirit. He is a Helper in many ways!

Second: God's thoughts are communicated to us in our human spirit

The human spirit is the place of self-awareness. The Bible describes it this way, **1 Corinthians 2:11 (NIV)** *For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?* And it's in or upon your spirit where the Holy Spirit communicates God's thoughts to you, as one passage notes, **Romans 8:16 (NIV)** *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

Put another way, your spirit is where your thoughts and God's thoughts mix together, so that they come out as your own thoughts!

But here's a caution: this gentle word, which bypasses physical senses to go directly to your spirit, may be easily disregarded by some who think that only the more extraordinary, outward, or obvious communications are the real thing.

However, all messages from God must pass through the spirit of a person, whether they're communicated through their physical senses (primarily seeing and hearing) to their spirits, or communicated directly from God to their spirits (therefore, called the STILL, SMALL voice).

What this does is it elevates the still, small voice to the same level of importance! It's a wonderful blessing from God to hear in this way! In fact, it takes a MORE mature person to recognize/receive the still small voice, than the 'loud' and spectacular voice.

Third: the still, small voice is best suited for a relationship with **free** intelligent beings

Heaven will NOT be populated by people who were forced to believe in and follow Jesus. That wouldn't be a place of enjoyment! Instead, it will be made up of people who freely love and desire him. And so God partially hides himself; not so that you can't find him, but so that those who don't want to discover him won't find him.

Neither the careless nor the willfully blind will hear his voice. Rather, those with humble hearts and a desire to draw near to God WILL hear his voice. Or as the prophet affirms, **Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)** *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

Fourth: if God is always speaking to us at a 'loud' level, he won't be able to alert us

If God was ALWAYS loud, it would be natural to tune him out among all the noise. No person can handle constant noise. Therefore, by speaking in a still, small voice, it can cause you to be "on the alert" for God's gracious directions, encouragement, and warnings.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 points are made today about God speaking in a still, small voice? Try to explain them in your own words, if you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Meditate on John 1 today. Don't rush it. God wants to speak to you! And journal your conversation with God using the **SMORP** tool. You need to practice the things that you're learning. And if you're experienced in hearing God's voice and abiding, why not receive more from your good Father? He is very generous!

Bible Reading

1. Already covered today in the Life Application section.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Please read Matthew 14:22-36.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Abide 8 – Listening for God’s Guidance

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

One of the great joys of hearing God is that you receive specific guidance from him. In the book of Ephesians it says, **Ephesians 5:10 (NIV)** ... *and find out what pleases the Lord*. How desperately a person needs to hear God’s voice and specific guidance to walk in a relationship that honors him! That’s what this lesson, Abide 8, covers. Enjoy!

God Gives Specific Direction to His People

God desires to address the needs and issues in your life; he wants to give you direction. As the Psalmist says, **Psalm 32:8 (NLT)** *The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”* When you read this, do you allow it to impact you? Do you believe this? In fact, there are no valid reasons to hesitate in following God and his ways with your whole heart and life!

In the New Testament, Jesus modeled this pattern for you. He said that he only did what he saw or heard the Father doing. As he was teaching, for example, he said, **John 5:19 (NIV)** *I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.* (see also John 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24, 31). He also declared, **John 5:30 (NIV)** *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

This way of living did NOT begin with Jesus! It has always been God’s ideal for his servants (that’s what you are). At the moment of their creation, you see God communicating and giving direction to Adam and Eve! He told them to be fruitful and increase in number; to fill the earth and subdue it; to rule over the fish, birds, and animals.

God instructed Noah to build an ark to escape the coming judgment. And he gave Noah detailed instructions on how to build it. God spoke to and called Abraham to leave his country and go to a land that would be given to him. The place where Moses and Joshua went to hear God is called the tent of meeting (**Exodus 33:7-11**). This was simply a place for being with God.

At one point God took Moses up on a mountain where he showed him a heavenly vision of what the tabernacle was to look like – in great detail! The tabernacle was a place where the priests of Israel ministered, made sacrifices and gave offerings – until the temple was built. It was also a place where people go could and make requests of God.

God warned Moses to make the earthly tabernacle according to the pattern he saw (**Exodus 25:9, 40**). This is highlighted in the book of Acts, **Acts 7:44 (NIV)** *Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.* Put another way, Moses was following the wisdom of, “see it in heaven; enact it on earth.”

This has always been the best way to live and minister: to hear and see what God’s desire is in heaven, then copy it on earth! After all, what does the Lord’s Prayer say? “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” (**Matthew 6:9-10**)

The early church certainly lived like this. Some say, “It doesn’t matter where you’re serving God, or what you’re doing to serve God, or how you’re serving him. All that matters is THAT you’re serving him!” But the Bible reveals otherwise, and you can see this in stories such as Philip being directed to the eunuch (only 1 person), *even though* he was successfully ministering in Samaria (see **Acts 8**). Paul also made very significant, SPECIFIC decisions, through God’s leading.

For example, twice the Holy Spirit told Paul and his team not to go to places they felt they should go – the provinces of Asia and Bithynia. You can read about it in **Acts 16:6-10**. There’s also the example of how God directed an entire church as they fasted and prayed, **Acts 13:2-3 (ESV)** *While they [church at Antioch] were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

May we not minimize the power of these stories but also the expectation to receive such guidance in our own lives. In fact, Isaiah pointed to a day when the people of God would be guided by his voice, **Isaiah 30:21 (NIV)** *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*

In fact, here’s a key question – why would God change how he leads his people now? He hasn’t. And so he longs to lead you in the same way. The Way of Jesus is certainly a way with specific “trail instructions!” And sometimes the direction you receive is the direction you asked for. Other times, it’s direction you weren’t even looking for!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What are some biblical examples of God giving specific direction to his people? If you can think of some that are not in today’s reading, that would be great!

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. In the previous lesson, you saw that God can speak through others. Ask God for the name of someone who needs encouragement. Listen in prayer for them.
2. Take what you received in the previous question and send it to the person that needed encouragement. This is part of doing the work of Jesus! Make sure that you pass on the “word” with humility, remembering that it is the other person’s responsibility to pray about it. We have to steer clear of any manipulation or control as we learn to let God speak to and through us!
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27.
4. Memorize James 1:22.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 15:1-20.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today and the next three days, you'll be provided with wisdom on how to receive and obey God's guidance. It's important to not forget that learning to be a disciple of Jesus, including hearing his voice, takes time. No one is immediately an expert.

In fact, even Jesus learned how to obey! (**Hebrews 5:8**) This does not mean that he moved from a place of imperfection to perfection. He was already perfect! Instead, it refers to the reality that he had to learn the fullness of the Father's plan for him.

A key question then, is this – are YOU willing to learn? How silly it would be for a follower of the Way to say that they have, “arrived.” The one who is truly desiring to be a disciple of Jesus will eagerly search for greater accuracy in hearing the voice of their good Shepherd. The independent person, on the other hand, only goes their own way. In pride, they run their own lives, taking credit for what happens (and then often questioning God when things go poorly).

When you learn to hear God's voice, you are directly doing something that will give God glory – an important call in the life of a believer.

Six Steps for Receiving & Obeying God's Guidance

First: submit to God's will

The best way to begin is to submit to God's will, whatever it is. If you really do not want God's guidance for your life, then no matter what you may SAY, you will position yourself before God in such a way that his voice will be filtered out. Consider what James says, **James 4:3 (NIV)** *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

It's easy to understand this by looking at a funny example. E.g. A child, when he was 4 yrs. old yelled at his 3-yr. old cousin: “Jesus said, ‘Give it to me!’” In a less obvious way (at least to human eyes), those who are older can do the same thing – misuse the voice of God. The fact that so few ask God for guidance when not in trouble or needing to make a big decision, is a sign that most people don't really want God to be in control of their lives. Therefore, when they do encounter difficulty and go to God for guidance, they seldom receive it. This is because in their hearts they didn't want his guidance in the first place – they just wanted to get out of trouble.

It's possible that a person can learn this lesson when they are very “young in the faith”, or that someone who has been a Christian for many years is still trying to run their own life. Here's a brief story about this first step, from a follower of the Way:

“When I was 33 years old, I felt so confused and nothing was working out anymore. I felt absolutely stuck. I was a Christian, and had many opportunities to serve in the church, but something was missing. I realized what it was! I wasn’t being led by Jesus, or maybe I’ll say it differently – I wasn’t wanting him to lead me. I thought I knew better. One day I was reading Romans 12:1-2, and I noticed that we get to know his good and pleasing will ONLY when we first offer our bodies as living sacrifices. This was tough to do, to offer up my whole life, but since then he has spoken so clear to me. Rarely do I get mixed up. And I’m seeing so much fruit in my life because of it.”

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What is the first step in receiving and obeying God’s guidance? Is this something that people do easily or what gets in the way?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Read Romans 12:1-2 in at least three translations of the Bible (maybe NIV, ESV and NLT). What does it promise right at the end of verse 2?
2. Listen in prayer regarding this question – “God, is there a part of my life or will that is unsubmitted? Is there something I will not let you direct me in?” If he reveals something, really wrestle through submitting it. Believers often rush to spend time on less important things! This is something that impacts your ability to hear the voice of God.
3. Review James 1:22.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 15:21-39.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Six Steps for Receiving & Obeying God’s Guidance

Second: receive a personalized word (rhema) – the **WHAT**

This is the “rhema” word or specific message to YOU. This is where you ask the question: “is this what you want me to do?” Many believe that ‘open’ and ‘closed’ doors are all that is needed to figure out God’s will. This is NOT true!

That is, just because a door is open doesn’t mean that God wants you to go through it. Put another way, not every *good* thing is the exact *God* thing for you! For example, Paul and Silas remained in prison to minister, though God had broken their chains and opened the prison doors.

It’s also true that just because a door is closed doesn’t mean that God doesn’t want you to go through it! Sometimes he wants to break down the door and show his power and glory. For example, the walls and gates of Jericho were shut to the Israelites, but God brought the walls down with devastating

power. Also, when the disciples saw a huge crowd that was hungry and tired, they pleaded with Jesus to send the crowd home. Instead, he responded, “You feed them!”

It’s not enough to simply look at the circumstances of your life as you seek to understand God’s will. Or as it says in that ancient book of wisdom, **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding* Did you notice what it says? Do not lean on your OWN understanding.

Often you may receive an answer or direction as soon as you stop to intentionally listen to Jesus. These are times of great blessing! But often you must wait, and this is also a blessing – because God has big plans! Sometimes when people don’t get an answer immediately, they panic and take matters into their own hands - that’s a big mistake! This is what Saul did when Samuel didn’t show up immediately to make an offering (**1 Samuel 13:1-15**) and the consequences for this were severe.

There are times when God wants you to silence yourself and wait on him. Sometimes he is testing your heart, as he did with Saul. Other times, God may be seeking to change the desires of your heart. Or he may give you additional insight into the situation that you are praying about, either directly as you listen in prayer, or through circumstances that develop as you’re waiting on him.

As you read the Bible, which is vital to do in waiting for wisdom, he may grant you additional insight into his Word, or bring a passage of the Bible to mind that would enable you to act and pray more effectively. Or he may want to impart to you a deep assurance of what his will is. You can see that there are many reasons for God to wait in answering! The best place to get rhemas is from the Bible, but it’s not the only place.

And if you are desiring God’s will, he may speak to you as you go about your day (e.g. while reading a book) or even as you sleep. Of course, even as you ask him specific questions, it’s crucial to know that he could answer in one of four ways: i) yes ii) yes, with conditions iii) no iv) wait.

As a final encouragement to seek God’s specific direction, you will look at the example of David. At the age of seventeen David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king of Israel. The Spirit of the Lord immediately departed from Saul and came upon David. Shortly thereafter, David was invited to play music for King Saul to bring calm whenever a troubling spirit bothered him. During this time Saul was very pleased with David, who killed Goliath and went on to win many battles for Saul.

David rose to national (and international) fame and popularity with the people during this time. But Saul became jealous of his feats and began to worry about securing his throne from David. For the next seven years Saul pursued David at every turn in order to kill him and remove this perceived threat to his throne. When David had Saul at the end of his spear in one wilderness encounter, he refused to kill his enemy, though the men urged him to do it. They even told David this was in accordance with God’s will for him to be the next king. Makes sense, right? But David wouldn’t touch God’s anointed, as he put it. It wasn’t God’s specific direction for him!

And when Saul died in battle, instead of rejoicing, David wept over the tragedy. He was now 30 years of age, and with three of Saul’s sons killed in battle, and the remaining one incapable of reigning, surely it was time for him to go up to Gibeath to take up the throne which was now legitimately his! Remember, he had been anointed for exactly this calling many years earlier!

David could have assumed that it was time for him to become king over all Israel. His men surely thought so. Instead David inquired of the Lord, **2 Samuel 2:1 (NIV2011)** *In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The LORD said, “Go up.” David asked, “Where shall I go?” “To Hebron,” the LORD answered.*

Take careful note of God’s answer – NOT to Gibeah, from where Saul had ruled. Instead, God told him to go to Hebron, which meant that he would only rule over a small portion of Israel, while Ishbosheth and his commanders and advisors ruled from Gibeah. Many leaders would have assumed that upon Saul’s death, they were free to take the throne. Not David. For him, an open door never meant that it was God’s will. Instead he inquired!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What step for receiving and obeying God’s guidance was discussed today?
3. Is an open or closed door the best way to determine God’s will for you? Write down an answer to this question in your own words.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of time in your life when a door seemed closed and then God opened it? Can you also think of a time when a door seemed open and then it closed? Write down any examples.
2. Can you think of times in your life when you received an answer from God immediately and when you had to wait? Write down these examples.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 16:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Six Steps for Receiving & Obeying God’s Guidance

Third: confirm any direction that was received (rhema) – 9 tests to be used for confirmation

- a. *Test 1:* Consider if the ‘message’ received or its outcome would violate any biblical principles.

What you receive must not be acted on if it contradicts God’s written Word. It must fall within the parameters outlined by the Bible. For example, any voice that promises total freedom from all suffering is most certainly not God’s! The voice of God doesn’t come to us simply to lead us out of troubles or make life easy for us – though sometimes it does.

This requires that those who wish to hear the still, small voice of God, must spend much time in the Bible. It is also why this principle is suggested – if you’re not reading your Bible regularly, you

have good reason to question what you're receiving in prayer. Why would God speak to you directly if you ignore what he has already said?

b. *Test 2: Reflect on the "tone" of the message.*

Does what you received from God have the tone of God's voice or that of the enemy? For example, though God will point out sin, he does so with conviction, love and hope, drawing you to himself and to change. Satan too loves to point out sin, but when he does so, he does it with condemnation, hoping to discourage you to simply give up, or to feel you are not worthy to continue.

Or if the voice brings chaos, confusion or anxiety, instead of peace, then it is probably coming from the enemy. Even when God asks you to do something difficult, it comes with quiet confidence. Further, if the voice only strokes your ego, it's not from God. He encourages, but doesn't elevate us to equal with him!

c. *Test 3: Ask if the 'word' is repeated.*

A thought that repeats and is useful, is often an indicator of God speaking. For example, God called Samuel three times – on the third time, his companion Eli "got it." Then he told Samuel to respond to the voice the next time. Many just let these thoughts "blow away" and forget them – then God looks for someone else to do the work he had for you.

d. *Test 4: Ask for confirmation (a sign) as the Bible is read.*

Gideon asked for additional confirmation! You can read about this in the book of Judges. Some might argue – but isn't this testing the Lord? It all depends on your MOTIVE! Is your deep desire to do God's will, so intensely, that you want to make sure you get it right? Or are you asking for confirmation because you are hoping that you can get your own way?

There's a huge difference between these two things! Gideon had a massive challenge, and so he asked for a sign to give him confidence. It is true that the bigger the decision is, the greater the need for confirmation!

Another biblical example is Ahaz, **Isaiah 7:10-13 (NIV)** *Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? In this case God was angry that Ahaz wouldn't take him up on the offer!*

e. *Test 5: There may be a sensation or feeling as the Spirit operates upon our spirit.*

Do we need to be careful with this? Of course! Our feelings can deceive. However, this can be a part of God's way of confirming what he's saying. We simply need to make sure that there are other confirmations too!

f. *Test 6: Receive wise advice or counsel.*

God tells his children to seek advice from others. As one verse notes, **Proverbs 12:15 (NIV)** *The way of a fool seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.* When you are receiving advice and good counsel, you must always remember that what you are asking for is rooted in that person's knowledge (biblical and other), personal experience, or wisdom (gleaned from observing the way

things really work, or as a spiritual gift). There are many topics on which one should receive advice from those qualified to give it: marriage, parenting, finances, work, or career, and so on.

g. *Test 7: Receive confirmation through others.*

What this means is that another person receives something in listening prayer concerning a decision you need to make. Wise counsel is generally more reliable than confirmation, because it is based on something more solid, like knowledge, experience, and wisdom.

However, once its limitations are understood, confirmation CAN be a very valuable means of testing! For this reason, those you choose to give you confirmation should love God, be wise, and have a track record of hearing God accurately. They shouldn't be those who will simply tell you what you want to hear!

h. *Test 8: See if circumstances point in the same direction.*

It can be useful to begin to write down the pros and cons of a decision you have to make, seeing which direction the circumstances seem to point towards. Well-known abolitionist William Wilberforce used this method often. As you do this, listen for the Spirit's direction, either giving you assurance that you're to run with the most obvious decision or to focus only on the pros of the riskier decision.

i. *Test 9: If we receive something asked for even while still praying or shortly after. (e.g. wisdom)*

A final thought on these tests and confirming what you've received. Basically, the ultimate test of whether or not you heard God comes after you step out and act on what you thought was a rhema – does God's blessing follow?

In the end, nothing is perfect and nothing makes up for the experience in hearing God's voice. You will, no doubt, make a mistake from time to time – that too is good for followers of the Way! Mistakes can even help keep you in a position of humility and dependence on God! Nevertheless, the longer you listen (and obey), the better you will become at discerning his voice.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What step for receiving and obeying God's guidance was discussed today?
3. What are 9 tests to be used for confirmation?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Think of an example of a significant decision that you're about to make or have made in the past year. Write it down in detail.
2. If your example is a past decision, look through the 9 tests given on this day. Did you test this previous decision?
3. If your example is a current decision, about to be made, filter it through the 9 tests given today.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 16:13-20.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Six Steps for Receiving & Obeying God's Guidance

Fourth: ask God to reveal the process – the **HOW**

God told Gideon that he wanted him to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites. Once Gideon agreed, God revealed HOW (the process) he wanted Gideon to do this – with 300 men! Would you have obeyed God with these instructions?

It's important to recognize that the "HOW" is as important as the "WHAT." Again, because people are often in a rush, this step is frequently skipped over. In fact, many followers actually get frustrated – "God, I did WHAT you wanted me to do. Why didn't this work out?"

However, if you skip over the "HOW," you have not actually obeyed God fully. And of course, you are called to love God with your WHOLE heart, soul, mind, and strength (**Mark 12:30**). Put another way, you'll need to love God with the HOWs, WHATs, and as you'll see in a moment, the WHENs.

Fifth: wait for divine timing to act – the **WHEN**

When God tells you WHAT he wants you to do, and HOW he wants you to do it, you must still wait for the right timing – WHEN you should do it. If you rush ahead, you may destroy everything that God is working out at that time.

You need to be patient, as there are often many "moving pieces" that God is shifting around to bring glory to his name and good to your life!

Sixth: obey the personalized word (rhema)

Here's a good saying to remember: "you shouldn't doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light." This means that you need to act on what he has shown you. As James teaches ...

James 1:5-8 (NIV) *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

Teaching Listening Prayer to Children

The Bible clearly teaches that all of God's sheep can hear His voice (**John 10:27**)! But is there the possibility of having one's heart, good intentions, desires, and sinfulness get in the way of clearly hearing what God

is saying? For sure! And might this risk exist for children too? Yes! Further, the risk exists for children to become disillusioned when they “get it wrong.”

So, should we even bother teaching children how to hear God’s voice? Yes! Jesus warned us not to hinder children from coming to him! He said, **Matthew 19:13-15 (ESV)** *Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And he laid his hands on them and went away.*

Yes, their hearts, intentions, desires, and sinfulness can get in the way, but they ALSO need to meet with Jesus to transform these very things! Just like adults! The following tips are good advice for teaching listening prayer to children.

First: Learning the Bible is a priority

The more that adults AND kids familiarize ourselves with the Bible the more they will recognize the tone and language and person of the Holy Spirit, not to mention the content of the sorts of thing he might say. This is why kids need to get to know who God is through the Bible first. Since children are so young, their Bible knowledge will certainly be very limited. Therefore, the focus must be on building up this knowledge! And a chief priority with children is to help them to know the WHOLE Bible, not just certain parts! This can lead to many discussions at church or at home. There needs to be room for questions too!

Second: No Pressure

Kids by nature really want to get things right. Therefore, they can feel a lot of pressure to hear God’s voice and will even make things up so that they don’t look foolish in front of others. We should never pressure kids to hear God’s voice or wait for long periods of time for God to speak. Many kids assume that God speaks differently than he does (with a different sounding voices as opposed to thoughts, words, and pictures), so teaching kids carefully is very important.

Make sure to share times when you didn’t hear God’s voice. Normalize the experience of not always receiving something. One way to help children who are struggling to hear God’s voice is to ask, “If God were here right now, what do you think he would say to you?” The “if” and “think” words take away the pressure of having to get it right, and they side-step assumptions of how God will speak to them.

Third: Good questions to ask God

There can be less useful questions to ask as children are learning to hear God’s voice. These questions usually are “doing” questions. “Doing” questions can lead to odd outcomes such as: “God wants me to bring peace to the world!” There are several types of questions which are perfectly suited for children to ask in prayer.

First, there are ‘being’ questions, such as: “Jesus, what do you love about me?”; “Jesus, what fruit of the Spirit would you like me to grow in?” Second, there are ‘reading the Bible’ questions such as: “Jesus, what are you saying to me through these verses?” Third, there are, ‘praying’ questions: “Jesus, how do you want me to pray for so and so?”; “Jesus, what is making you sad, that I can pray about?”

Fourth: A note about the curriculum

Parents can use the Abide for Kids! version of The Way. For Middle Schoolers, there’s an equivalent version called, Abide for Middle Schoolers!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 steps for receiving and obeying God's guidance were discussed today?
3. Why is it so hard for people to wait for the time that God wants them to act? Why is it also hard for many to follow through when it's time to act?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time writing out a prayer to God, expressing your desire to: be led by him, not be rash, and to follow his will. Do not rush this – carefully reflect on each word you write, asking – “is this true in my heart? Is this the commitment of my will?”
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 16:21-28.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Exercise:

Step 1: Ask God to begin to give you direction for one or two of the following areas in your life:

- a. Assurance of salvation
- b. Your walk with God (*character, holiness, state of relationship with him*)
- c. Kids' extracurricular involvement
- d. Spiritual growth of kids (*things to pray for or actions to take as parents*)
- e. What to do on time off (*weekend, or vacation time*)
- f. Finances (*giving, saving, spending*)
- g. Fasting, exercise, and eating
- h. Inner healing
- i. Evangelism
- j. Devotional life (*Bible reading, prayer, other reading*)
- k. Ministry calling and gift development
- l. Ministry involvement (*can have separate categories for separate ministries*)
- m. Marriage
- n. Other relationships (*family, work, neighbors*)
- o. Scheduling (*amount being done, strategies for greater efficiency, and effectiveness*)
- p. Business, career, or work
- q. The Bible questions (*understanding*)

Step 2: Next, tell God that you are willing to do whatever he tells you - and mean it!

Step 3: Ask God to give you confirmation (see the 9 tests from Day 4).

Abide 9 – Balance in Listening for God’s Guidance

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

Now that you’ve been learning to hear God’s voice, you may wonder where the wisdom is concerning what you should or shouldn’t be asking God’s guidance for. For example, it would be odd to ask God if he wants you to eat meatballs or turkey for supper tonight; or if he wants you to buy a yellow shirt or a red one.

On the other hand, you likely know that it’s a good idea to ask Jesus what his plans and purposes for your life are. It just makes sense! Of course, there are other potential dangers in listening for God’s guidance. However, this is *due to human weakness*, and has nothing to do with God, his ability to communicate clearly, or the incredible value of listening to him.

Therefore, since human weakness can be an issue, Abide 9 highlights how you and others can find a balance that makes sense and is useful.

Listening for Guidance Must Not Replace BIBLE STUDY

Some who learn to hear God’s voice may not want to read their Bibles. They see “hearing God” as a shortcut. Further, it can actually be a form of laziness, or worse, a way to avoid his clear commands.

You see, God has already spoken to you in the Bible about many things. Paul described it well when he said, **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)** *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Notice that it says you will be prepared by the Bible for EVERY good work! That’s because you’ll find the GENERAL and MORAL will of God in it. And it’s really important for a follower of the Way to become familiar with this! In fact, the general will of God is FOUNDATIONAL for his specific will or guidance – the rhemas that have been discussed in previous lessons.

The Lord promises that if we follow his will and guidance already given in the Bible, we’ll discover much blessing in life and ministry. As Joshua noted, **Joshua 1:8 (NIV)** *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

We don't have to ask God on matters that he has already spoken on. For example, if someone is a parent, the Bible already tells them:

- Do not exasperate one's children (**Ephesians 6:4**)
- Train one's child up in the Lord (**Deuteronomy 6:7, Proverbs 22:6**)
- Do not neglect discipline (**Proverbs 19:18, 29:17**)

The examples above, for parents, are just a sampling of many passages in the Bible that provide a foundation for wisdom on parenting. Then the parent can build a wonderful household (literally!) on this foundation by seeking God for specific wisdom for each child, insights on chaotic difficulties, or wonderful opportunities that arise. However, a humble parent will also know that they'll face situations where specific guidance is required on how to walk out the Bible's instruction to not neglect discipline or to train their child up.

Or what about specific direction on raising up boys vs. girls or on how to handle certain personalities or special needs? God can help parents with these things! Amen! Consider this humble prayer found in the Old Testament, **Judges 13:8 (NIV)** *Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."*

One of the chief reasons God sent his Spirit was to teach us all things and he will even remind us of things he's already said. Wow! Or as Jesus affirmed, **John 14:26 (NIV2011)** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* Or God may want you to do something, but your misunderstanding of the Bible in a specific area may be holding you back. Even here the Spirit can get your attention and teach you what the Bible is really saying. This actually happened to the apostle Peter!

But it can't be emphasized enough – this specific will never contradict the general will and moral will found in the Bible. That is, if a direction, given in prayer, contradicts God's written Word, you're not hearing God's voice. Instead, you're hearing your own heart's lusts and desires (**James 1:14**), or else you're listening to the devil (**Matthew 4:1, 3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5**).

So here is a STRONG and necessary caution - a person who neglects to spend daily or consistent time reading and meditating on the Bible and who stops exposing themselves to the regular teaching of God's Word – that person will open themselves up to deception. Therefore, don't ignore the systematic and regular reading, meditation on, and memorizing of the Bible, along with listening to weekly sermons.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Believers are to stay balanced in hearing God. What is the guideline shared today? Try to explain it as well as you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Pick a topic that you would like more knowledge on – e.g. finances, parenting, patience, marriage, work, the Holy Spirit. Use a resource such as biblegateway.com. Read at least 12 passages that speak about this topic. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about the topic as you read. Record what he says.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 17:1-13.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Listening for Guidance Must Not Replace GOOD COUNSEL

God has designed it so that you'll have to receive some of his guidance through others! Everyone who is a follower of the Way has different gifts, strengths, and experiences. Therefore, they can all contribute to one another. Through these, God is bringing together a family, that works as a team. Is this something that you're open to? Would others describe you as a team player? In fact, you won't have enough time to make all the mistakes and figure out everything on your own AND still accomplish what God has for you.

Of course, the book of Proverbs contains a lot of thoughts about the need for wisdom from others. For example, it says, **Proverbs 11:14 (ESV)** *Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.* And one chapter later it challenges, **Proverbs 12:15 (ESV)** *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.* These are strong words. Without guidance from others, there is failure. And to think that one is always right? They are called a fool. It is vital to understand this, as some have caused significant damage by claiming to always know God's will, yet never seeking advice from others.

This means that followers of Jesus are called to be teachable – which is another word for “humble.” Some people are NOT teachable – their hearts are NOT positioned in a posture of humility. Here are some thoughts from Pastor Ray Duerksen, on ways he has received good counsel:

- I often run my ideas by my wife – E.g. just like Manoah and his nameless wife (**Judges 13**)
- In the past, I consulted my staff leadership team; my board; marketplace leaders; other pastors and friends. I still do! They won't necessarily give me the exact steps that I need, but God will often use them to give me a “twist” in the way that I view something; or point out a caution; or give me another confirmation in what God has already showed me
- I have also received much counsel through conferences, seminars, and books
- I even listen to advice from non-Christians who have knowledge or expertise in an area, or who may say something very wise that relates to what I am doing
- Here's a healthy habit I have followed for many years: I never go to any appointment or meeting without a notepad and pen – I'm always expecting to glean or learn something!
- Young people should learn from older people (e.g. parents); but older people can often learn from younger people too! E.g. **1 Timothy 4:12**
- I also learn from ‘fools’; I consider their ways and their outcomes; and then I steer far from their mistakes
- Life is MUCH too short for you to try to learn it all by yourself

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. You need to stay balanced in hearing God. What is the guideline shared today? Try to explain the guideline in your own words.
3. What kind of person is willing to listen to others for counsel?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Read out Psalm 139:23-24. Invite God to search your heart – are you a humble and teachable person? If the answer is generally, 'no,' spend some time in confession. If the answer is generally, 'yes,' praise him for what he has done in your life and ask him for continued growth in humility.
2. Write down a list of people that you have sought advice from in the past. Also record how the advice helped you make wise decisions (or avoid foolish ones).
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 17:14-27.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Listening for Guidance Must Not Replace COMMON SENSE

What is common sense? Common sense is an understanding of how life works, often discovered through experience. For example, common sense says that poor financial management leads to poverty, or overdependence on others. Writers from the past referred to such things as God's natural or self-evident laws. It's called common sense because it's truth discovered by human beings through observation, and then understood by most.

Many such observations came early in the history of humanity and were recorded, while also being included in the Bible. And did you know that much of what is written in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs in the Bible are Solomon's observations about how life works? Or, in his words, **Proverbs 24:32 (NIV)** *I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw.*

Sometimes when people begin to hear God, they begin to think that they can ignore common sense – not so! God's Word (his general will) even comments on this, by encouraging, **Proverbs 3:21 (NIV)** *My son, PRESERVE sound judgment and discernment ...* God doesn't want us to suspend common sense! In fact, you're encouraged to learn as much about the practical ways that the world was designed to work, and live in harmony with them.

In fact, as a follower of the Way, a person should seek to love God by GROWING in common sense! That is, people who seek to honor God should be some of the most reasonable people around!

But what about some of the unique ways that God speaks to people, through rhemas, or how he works, through miracles? How do these relate to common sense? Here are two important principles to keep in mind:

First: a person may receive many rhemas through life, but each one is unique for a situation

Common sense works in MANY situations. Rhemas, on the other hand, usually apply to ONE situation, or time period. This is not something that you want to mix up! Some people make the mistake of trying to apply a rhema word to everything, while at the same time ignoring common sense. This is, by definition, being unstable!

Second: at times God chooses to suspend his natural ways in favor of non-natural ways

When God does this, it's called a miracle. And it's a miracle precisely because it is NOT common! Put another way, if God did this all the time, then it would be common, and the commonness of it would make it a law, not a miracle!

So why does God sometimes choose to suspend the natural way in which he works and do it in a non-natural way? There are at least three reasons for this:

- First, God shows that his favour is on someone or some activity. Of course, this is for the sake of his purposes! E.g. you can see this in the lives of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Paul, etc. Paul, for one, calls the miracles in his life "signs."
- Second, God provides circumstances that have the potential of increasing the faith of those called, or those following, preparing them for more difficult assignments ahead. E.g. Gideon
- Third, God may be lovingly drawing those who do not know Jesus to himself. E.g. many people that Jesus healed in the New Testament

Of course, it's God who determines when these miracles happen! Some people try to force God's hand in providing a miracle and steer clear of common sense. Even the devil tried to convince Jesus do to exactly this in Matthew 4! The devil told Jesus that he could prove to all that he was the Son of God by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple.

And do you know what Jesus called this? He did not call it faith. He called it, "testing God!" This should sober us! In the same way, we must not seek to manipulate God's hand. God is not our servant; we are his servants! If we try to test the Lord by demanding miracles, he will not dignify our foolishness by performing a "trick." Again, this isn't faith, it's presumption! It's similar to taking the Lord's name in vain.

Of course, nothing that is being said here stops a child of God from asking their Father for help, even if such help would require a miracle. Remember, James challenges God's people for not asking enough! But even in asking, sometimes the answer is "no." Can we accept this?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

2. You need to stay balanced in hearing God. What is the guideline shared today? Try to explain the guideline in your own words.
3. Why does God at times use the supernatural, as opposed to doing things in the natural way?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there's an area of your life where you're ignoring common sense. If he reveals something, spend some time in confession, and make plans for a "course correction."

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 18:1-9.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Listening For Guidance Must Not Replace HUMAN AUTHORITY

Some people get themselves and others into trouble because they believe that just because they may have heard something from Jesus, they are no longer required to submit to God's designated authorities – not so!

Listen to what Paul commands, **Romans 13:1-2 (NIV)** *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.* (see also **Titus 3:1**) No amount of listening for guidance can overturn such a direct written command of God in the Bible.

For example, if you feel that God is telling you to start a ministry at work, and your boss says "No," then you need to graciously submit to that. If God is really in it, he will already work out the details, if you'll be patient.

Most (though not all!) believers understand this. But how does it work in the church? To begin with, God has also set up authorities in the church, whom you're to obey. Or as it notes in the book of Hebrews, **Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)** *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

With that in mind, what if God shows you something about the church, which the church isn't doing that it should? Maybe you learned a new teaching somewhere, or you saw something in the Bible. Or perhaps you received a prophetic word about others in the church or the church itself. What would you do in such a case?

First, you can pray it into being! Or as one wise saint said, "if you're frustrated about something not happening, God is giving you a prayer agenda!" Simply complaining or gossiping is lazy. Prayer is when you do the best work!

Second, God may be showing you something so that you can provide your leaders with a confirmation WHEN they make the change. As it says in Psalms, **Psalm 25:14 (NIV)** *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.* God may be confiding in you! What a blessing! But you'll need to be wise and respectful with this blessing, holding on to it until the right time.

Considering the life of David is very useful as you think about this. David was called a man after God's own heart. What made him this way? Maybe the best example is that even though he was told that he would become king, he did nothing to try to force it. He simply prayed and waited for God to make it happen! What humility! Imagine how hard this would have been, when Saul was possessed by an evil spirit, and tried to kill him. Would you have waited as well, or tried to take things into your own hands?

We could also look at a negative example of Joseph. He had received a dream that he would one day have authority over his father and brothers. But foolishly, rather than making it a prayer agenda, he shared it with his brothers and father.

The results for Joseph were disastrous – jealousy, mistrust, division, bitterness, hatred. Instead, God hadn't needed him to say anything to fulfill the dream. We can learn from this! Just because God reveals something to you doesn't mean that he wants you to say something or do something about it.

Of course, the command to consider human authorities does not mean that you should disobey God in seeking to submit to them OR turn a blind eye to abusive or illegal behaviour. This would be VERY wrong! If you're trying to sort through complicated or painful matters in this regard, then be quick to seek out godly counsel.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. You need to stay balanced in hearing God. What is the guideline shared today? Try to explain the guideline in your own words.
3. Why do you not have to force things, even if God has showed you something that needs to change in the church? What can you do that is positive?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any way that you have been working against the authorities that God has placed in your life. Even think about your past jobs, church connections, interactions with government laws, and rules.
2. If anything was revealed in Question 1, confess and ask the Holy Spirit to show you any steps that you need to take in response to your confession.
3. Spend some time praying for the people that are authorities in your life – at work, church, community organizations. Even better, listen in prayer for them, for a blessing – and pass this on to them.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 18:10-20.

2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Skip directly ahead to Life Application section for this day.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

Skip directly ahead to Life Application section for this day.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. In Philippians 4:9, Paul tells the early church to make sure that they put into PRACTICE what they have been learning. And then he gives them a promise – “and the God of peace will be with you.” You have now completed Abide 1-9. Congratulations! Today, take some time to flip through each page of the first 9 lessons. Re-read the headings. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of important principles. You can even look through your journal and remind yourself of what God has been saying to you. More importantly, keep this question in mind – “am I practicing this?”

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 18:21-35.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22.
2. Practice SMORP once again, using Psalm 84.

Abide 10 – Memorization Will Help You Renew Your Life

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

As you follow Jesus, you'll face many difficulties still! This surprises many, causes major confusion, and various questions. However, Jesus did not promise his children an easy life, saying, **Matthew 7:14 (ESV)** *For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.* He was clear about what one could expect in this world; troubles (see **John 15:18-21; 16:33**).

The apostles agreed from experience! When Paul and Barnabas returned from a missionary trip, they said, **Acts 14:22 (NIV2011)** *We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.* Even as God's treasured possession, you'll wrestle with your own brokenness within, while being outwardly attacked by temptations and opposition. In fact, when we're saved, we're drafted into a fierce spiritual battle! It's a shock to many new believers when they find that living in the kingdom is really more like enlisting into an intense war.

Satan himself follows no rules of war. He opposes or attacks through others, through the enticements of the world (materialism, sexual sin, self-fulfillment), through the manipulation of circumstances, through the ingrained habits of our flesh and through footholds in our lives. There really is never a lull in fighting. It's why Paul encouraged the young disciple and leader Timothy, **2 Timothy 2:4 (NIV)** *No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer.*

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, Paul listed many hardships that he encountered. Very few people have experienced the challenges and pain of Paul. Still, he didn't use these as excuses. Instead, he expected to grow through his suffering, even declaring from prison, **Philippians 3:10 (NIV2011)** *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

No surrendering or quitting for Paul! In fact, be inspired by his resolve to keep going, **Philippians 3:12 (NIV2011)** *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* This passion is why he could effectively challenge the Philippian believers to do the same, **Philippians 2:12 (NIV2011)** *... as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

What made it possible for Paul and the Philippians to persevere in faith despite such trials and troubles?

Why it is Possible to Persevere and Grow in the Faith

First: God's Spirit is living in us

The truth is, you have more going for you than what will come against you. Consider this incredible passage, **Romans 8:31-32 (NIV2011)** *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

A massive gift that God has given to his children is the Holy Spirit, to live inside of them. This is an incredible blessing for ALL who are followers of the Way. It's a significant part of your salvation, not to be ignored. Think of what Peter preached, **Acts 2:38 (NIV2011)** *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

This blessing, the Spirit, gives you strength on the inside, helping you to keep growing in maturity. Who wouldn't want this help? Or as Paul describes it, **Ephesians 3:16 (NIV2011)** *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.* In another place he says, **Colossians 1:11 (NIV2011)** *... being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.*

The Holy Spirit is also a gift from God, freely given by a generous Father. As Jesus declared, **Luke 11:13 (NIV)** *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?* And here is some more wonderful news. Not only does God's Spirit provide you with the power, but he also grants you the desire to press forward in the first place, **Philippians 2:13 (NIV2011)** *... for it is God who works in you to will (desire) and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*

Second: we have God's Word

God's Word accomplishes exactly what it says. His Word creates, for example, speaking the world into reality. And with his Word he will re-create a new heaven and earth. His Word also crushes opposition. As Jeremiah recorded, **Jeremiah 23:29 (ESV)** *Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

As God announced through his prophet, **Isaiah 55:11 (NIV2011)** *... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* And with a word he will overthrow all his enemies in the end, **Revelation 19:15 (NIV)** *Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.*

Further, God's Word sustains all things. As the author of Hebrews puts it, **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)** *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

And who delivers these powerful words? Again, the Spirit of God! For example, the Spirit delivered God's eternally written Word, **2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)** *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* And of course, this same

Spirit delivers words to all believers. Paul calls this a sword for our battle to persevere, **Ephesians 6:17 (NIV2011)** *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

Ultimately, your words express your wishes and desires. But God's Word(s) accomplish exactly what they are sent out for. Wow! Praise God! This helps in perseverance!

Third: we have the ability to feed our spirit/souls on his specific words to us

In previous lessons, you've seen the need for "rhema" words, specific words from God to you. As the Holy Spirit speaks these into your inner being, you'll encounter life. Or as John notes, **John 6:63 (NIV)** *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

You have the ability and responsibility to spiritually EAT. God won't force you to do this. The 'word' that the Bible uses to describe such eating or feeding is "meditating." Consider what it says in Psalm 1, and the promise given to those who meditate, **Psalm 1:2-3 (NIV2011)** ... *but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

The following are additional metaphors and language the Scriptures employ to say the same thing as "meditates on his law": "eating bread" (**Matthew 4:1-4**); "abiding in the Vine" (**John 15:5-7**); and "think over" (ESV), "reflect" (NIV), or "consider" (NASB) (**2 Timothy 2:7**).

In meditation, you weigh, prayerfully think about, listen to, or 'chew' on the Bible. You'll listen to God's Word, rehearse his works and deeds, think about his laws, ponder his promises and hide his Word in your heart. As you do all this, the Spirit takes such efforts and sparks something on the inside, helping you to endure. You'll feel as if you've been personally addressed and boosted.

This is VERY different than what Eastern religions do, as here you're meditating on the actual words of the living God!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 reasons are given for why you can persevere?
3. How can the Holy Spirit help you persevere?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Listen in prayer about this question – "Holy Spirit, are there any patterns or examples of where I have given up in my life? What are they?" Write down what you receive.
2. Humbly ask someone that you live or work with – "do you feel that I am the type of person that perseveres, that approaches life with the ability to endure?"
3. Write out a prayer to God, asking him to help you grow in perseverance. Be specific if the first two questions revealed any examples or patterns of giving up.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 19:1-12.

2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Memorization is an Extension of Meditation

As you saw in Day 1, the psalmist said to meditate on God's law - day and night. The same instructions were given to Joshua, by God, **Joshua 1:8 (NIV)** *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* Now wouldn't it be foolish to ignore the advice of God, about how true success is experienced?

Of course, not allowing God's Word to depart from your mouth has much to do with meditation. In fact, the idea of every believer owning their own Bible wasn't even possible until the 15th century. In 1439 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press and for the first time in history the mass production of books was made possible. Put another way, the ability to print large numbers of books, newspapers, etc. is a relatively new creation!

So how did people receive the Bible before that? The scrolls would be in the tabernacle or temple or in someone's home, and God's Word was transmitted to people orally through memorization. That's why it says, "Don't let it depart from your MOUTH." Or as you read in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 30:14 (NIV)** *The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.*

This is why memorization is an extension of meditation. In meditation, you "chew" on the same passage carefully, over and over. In memorization, you continue this until you can repeat it from memory. Of course, this doesn't replace the need for prayer. The Bible says, "pray without ceasing," and, "meditate day and night." In fact, memorization and meditation will often lead you to prayer.

What a joy it is to have the Word so near you, in your heart, with you all the time! Then you can meditate on it when you're doing house chores, driving long distances, sitting at a red light, sitting in a waiting room, standing in a check-out lineup, waiting to board a plane, before you fall asleep, if you can't sleep, etc.

To further highlight one's need for memorization, here's a story from Pastor Ray Duerksen, about its impact in his life:

"Many years ago, I thought very negatively, and I would often mutter to myself: 'I quit.' What I didn't realize was that my thinking was self-fulfilling – I wanted to quit! I didn't actually quit, because I had gained a fear of the Lord – but I FELT like quitting! And we all know that how you FEEL often determines your responses! But over a period of time, I noticed that I didn't have those same thoughts anymore. And it has already lasted for two to three decades! I often wondered what had changed in me. Did God just do something miraculously in me, so that I was suddenly this positive

and persevering person? Well, about that same time, totally unrelated I thought, I sensed I was to memorize verses in the Bible. So I did: 750 verses or so. It wasn't until years later, while meditating and praying on my deck early in the morning, that the Holy Spirit revealed to me WHY my emotions changed! My thinking had been changed through memorization. Even a character trait that stubbornly resisted my attempts to change it, was conquered through memorization."

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the difference between meditation and memorization?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that you read the Bible quickly or that you meditate on it?
2. What is your own personal journey with memorization? Write it down. If you've never memorized, write down the reasons why.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22.
4. Memorize Psalm 1:1-2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 19:13-30.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Benefits Of Meditation and Memorization

Benefit 1: it changes our perspective, motivating us to reorder our priorities

This is the most important reason for meditation and memorization. The Bible commands followers of Jesus to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. And the key for storing up treasures in the right place is your perspective.

Jesus said, **Matthew 6:22-23 (NIV2011)** *The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!* In his lesson here, Jesus used the eye as a metaphor for perspective.

For example, you may say something like this: "They just don't see that if they don't study, they will fail." This doesn't mean that they don't see with their physical eyes, but that they simply do not have the right perspective on this. And in context, he was saying that if you store up treasures on earth, they will be destroyed or stolen, whereas if you store them up in heaven they will never be destroyed or stolen or even used up!

The best way to get this correct perspective is to think about and meditate on eternal matters. If you have an eternal perspective, it will shape your priorities – where you'll invest your time, talents, prayers, and money. Or in Paul's words, **Colossians 3:2 (NIV2011)** *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* He also said, **Romans 12:2 (NIV2011)** *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*

Of course, this proper perspective will only be more clear in your mind if you memorize verses that relate to eternity (these will be introduced in Abide 11). Here is one example, **Psalms 39:4 (NIV2011)** *Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.*

Memorizing and meditating on such passages will help you resist the temptations of the world as you'll begin to see that this world is not ultimate reality – it is, as C.S. Lewis put it, the “shadowlands” of the real thing coming. It's very possible to have the world continue to distract us with short-term enticements.

Without noticing it, you can begin to feel like the world and its values are reality. Further, you'll usually live according to what you FEEL to be reality. Therefore, some shaking up is needed in thinking, and this can happen when you penetrate your mind and heart with God's truth. Truth such as, **Romans 13:11-12 (NIV2011)** *And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*

Benefit 2: it transforms our behaviors, making us successful

So much transformation begins with one's thinking! There's a very BIG reason why people cannot change their emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and their speech! For sure, you have to PUT OFF all sinful practices and habits, but also PUT ON or CLOTHE yourself with the thoughts, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and speech that were demonstrated by Jesus. Put another way, you have to be intentional about changing your thoughts.

This is actually one of the goals for the life of a follower of Jesus, as Paul affirms, **Galatians 4:19 (NIV)** *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.* Is it work? Of course! But worthwhile work! Especially when we consider that one's eternal rewards and the impact we have on others relates to such work.

This includes adding traits such as: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, goodness, self-control, love, and so on! They're also referred to as the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**). But the question is this: “How do you PUT ON Jesus' character?” Many believers try and try, but they just can't change. Why? It's usually because they're thinking about the wrong things! Can you think of examples in your life?

Your character will be transformed by first renewing your mind. That's where the war is being waged for men, women, teens, and children. It really is a battle! Consider this longer passage and the challenge at the end, to take every thought captive, **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)** *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

And how do you take captive your thoughts? By intentionally thinking on the right things – that’s how. And this is exactly where memorization will help you immensely!

The apostle Paul knew the value of how minds are shaped, saying, **Philippians 4:8 (NIV)** *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What 2 benefits of meditation and memorization are mentioned in today’s reading?
3. How does a person start to change their character? What often has to come first?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask God to show you a time when a perspective change really helped you out. Write this down. And thank him for guiding your thoughts (or using others to help you).
2. Spend some time in prayer over this question – “Jesus, what do I worry about, or stress over, that can be impacted by thinking about eternity instead?” Write this down.
3. Review Psalm 1:1-2.
4. Memorize Psalm 1:3-4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:1-16.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day 3, two benefits of meditation/memorization were introduced. Today, you’ll look at a third one.

Benefit 3: it revives our emotions, making us emotionally whole

In some places, there is opposition to followers of the Way showing emotion. Further, for many, their faith is mainly a matter of the head and not the heart. However, there are at least three important purposes for your emotions:

Purpose 1: we are to love and worship God with our emotions

Jesus instructs you to love God like this: **Matthew 22:37 (NIV2011)** *Love the Lord your God with all your HEART and with all your SOUL and with all your MIND.* Men and women are emotional beings – it’s a major part of who you are. You can also see in the Bible that God discourages lukewarmness in one’s faith (see **Revelation 3:16**). Real worship, on the other hand, taps into and uses emotions. That’s what music, singing, praise, and rejoicing are for! If you never or seldom experience emotion in your worship, something is wrong.

Consider the words of David, **Psalm 4:7 (NIV)** *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.* And, **Psalm 28:7 (NIV)** *My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.* Or what Peter confirmed, **1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

Then there's the example of Jesus himself, which Luke describes, **Luke 10:21 (NIV)** *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."*

The problem isn't that most people use too MUCH emotion in worship – they use it too little! Already in the Old Testament, instruments were used to help express emotion! We're told, **Psalm 150:3-5 (NIV)** *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.*

Then consider the saints in heaven – look at their crying out, only possible with emotion! **Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV)** *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

Of course, just as people have varying degrees of intellectual capacity (or IQ), they also have differences in emotional capacity (or EQ). But to employ virtually no emotion in one's walk with God is an indication of needed growth.

Purpose 2: we are to receive God's love in our emotions

Just as the love of a spouse was never intended to be a purely rational experience, in the same way, God's love for you is to go beyond intellectual understanding. In fact, you were designed to EXPERIENCE God's love!

Don't sell yourself short! It's that good. Paul even prayed that others would know a love that surpasses knowledge. In his words, **Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)** *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Why would we essentially rob ourselves of receiving all that God has for us relationally? It only makes sense that One who equals love would desire for His children to enjoy that love. It is a significant part of our inheritance in Christ.

For sure, just as we all have varying degrees of intellect or what some call "intellectual quotient" so too people have different degrees of emotional quotient. Nevertheless, emotion needs to be a huge part of receiving God's love and responding in love.

Purpose 3: emotions are primarily for motivation, not for direction

But here's where many go wrong. Some use emotions for directional purposes and decision-making. They make choices based on what 'feels' right or good. That's the wrong use of emotions.

Instead, you're not to be guided by your emotions in making decisions, but by your mind as it considers God's Word. Paul makes this clear when he says, **Romans 12:2 (NIV)** ... *be transformed by the renewing of your MIND. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.* There it is!

Your mind is to be guided by the Bible and the Spirit. And once the mind has made the proper decision about something, then emotion can be very helpful as a MOTIVATOR for doing the right thing. Put another way, emotions can move you to obedient actions! For example, when the Good Samaritan saw the man at the side of the road, he FELT compassion and acted.

Jesus said, **John 14:21 (NIV)** *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.* Is Jesus saying that love equals obedience, even when the obedience is done without a willing heart or a heart that is miserable? No. This is why emotion can be vital to motivation! You are made like this. Emotion brings "color" into human existence.

It's also interesting that Paul requires us to have three healthy emotions included in his teaching about armor for spiritual battles in Ephesians 6 – peace, faith, and hope. Of course, just as you can have good emotions, you can also hold on to bad emotions or feelings, which might motivate one to do sinful things. This is why Paul warned, **Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)** *In your anger do not sin* ...

Further, emotions, even if useful for motivation, have to be subject to God's Word. Just as truth without emotion is deadness, emotion without truth is dangerous. Or as Dallas Willard said, "feelings are, with few exceptions, good servants. But they are disastrous masters."

So, what does this all have to do with meditation and memorization? Well, if you store up verses in your mind about who God is, it will help you relate to him in your emotions as he really is. You will begin to think of him like that in your own journey, and that brings great enjoyment of his person and ways.

By memorizing, you'll confront where you're emotionally broken, and healing occurs. For example, you can memorize the emotional expressions of the Bible and speak them to God and to others, until they start to transform your soul.

One such example is, **Psalms 103:1-2 (ESV)** *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* Such statements are not natural expressions for most people but to speak them to the Lord can change us. This is an important journey to go on. You will find much life in it and bonus, it will prepare you for what's going to be a very emotional heaven!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

2. What benefit of meditation and memorization is mentioned in today's reading?
3. What are 3 important purposes for your emotions?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that you love God fully with your emotions? Invite God to speak to you about your "emotional journey" with him. Write down a summary of this part of your life.
2. Review Psalm 1:1-4.
3. Memorize Psalm 1:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:17-28.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Days 3 and 4, three benefits for meditation/memorization were noted. Today, you'll learn about four more.

Benefit 4: it helps us resist temptation and the devil, making us victorious

Temptation is NOT fun! It's tough! On top of that, the devil wants to steal God's Word from you. In a parable of Matthew 13, the sower goes out to sow seed. What happened to it? We're told that birds ate some that fell along the path.

Later on, Jesus explains the meaning of this, that it's the devil who steals the seed, which is God's Word. This shows that we can even hear the Word and not let it penetrate the soil of our hearts. Jesus said, **Matthew 13:19 (NIV)** *When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.*

The primary way to counter this stealing is to store it up in our hearts! Related, we can stand against temptation in the same way. Matthew 4 records three temptations that Satan brought against Jesus, and Jesus resisted all three by reciting the Bible from memory!

Here's how the psalmist described it, **Psalm 119:11 (NIV)** *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* Some Bible translations use the word "treasured" instead of hidden. Either way, this is an important choice – to memorize!

Satan hates followers of the Way! In the future he may work through governments or others to outlaw Bibles. What can be done then? A great way to be prepared is to memorize a lot! And you can do it!

Benefit 5: it sharpens our witness and ministry, making us fruitful

As Jesus ministered, he quoted twenty-four Old Testament books almost 180 times in the New Testament. Did you know that the moment a person starts following Jesus, they receive the mission to witness to others (to share God's goodness) and to minister to others (to serve them)?

Having Bible verses stored up in your heart will only increase your impact and success! If the Bible is powerful for you, it will be powerful for many others as well. Put another way, memorization will give you something to build up other believers. As Paul noted, the Bible is to be used for precisely this reason, **1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NIV)** *Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Think of this command, given through Peter, **1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)** *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* Obeying this command is easier if you have the Bible ready in your heart and mind.

Benefit 6: it gives us spiritual understanding

There are three ways in which you can receive wisdom and understanding. First, you can receive it from others. As Proverbs asserts, **Proverbs 4:1 (NIV2011)** *Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.* Second, you can ask for wisdom as you pray. Solomon did this and James promises that God will answer.

Third, you can meditate on and memorize God's Word. In Psalm 119 the psalmist uses the word "meditate" no less than seven times. In prayer he asks God to open up his spiritual understanding as he meditates. A little later in the chapter he rejoices that he was given greater wisdom, saying, **Psalm 119:32 (NIV2011)** *I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.* And then he repeated his prayer for more understanding, **Psalm 119:34 (NIV)** *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.*

Did you realize that after the crucifixion, many disciples were confused, even scared? When Jesus encountered them, how did he give them understanding? We're told, **Luke 24:45 (NIV2011)** *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

Here's a great attitude to aim for, **Psalm 119:15-16 (NIV2011)** *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.* And here's a powerful prayer, **Psalm 119:18 (ESV)** *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

Benefit 7: it energizes our prayer life

Much of the Psalms are a collection of prayers. Some have called it the Bible's prayer book. What's fascinating, however, is that the book doesn't begin with a prayer.

Instead, it starts with a psalm on the value of meditation! This is because when you meditate on the Bible, you'll begin to understand the mind of God. And if you have the mind of God, praying becomes much more lively and powerful!

This reality can be seen in the early church. Carefully read this longer prayer:

Acts 4:24-30 (NIV) *When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the*

rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Note the two underlined portions in their prayer. The first portion is an almost word-for-word quote from Psalm 146:6, while the second is a quote taken from Psalm 2:1-2. That is, they understand how to pray because the Word had been hidden in their hearts!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 benefits of meditation and memorization are mentioned in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Some people suggest that they cannot memorize. This isn't true, as everyone has certain things that they remember very well. Confess if you have believed this lie that, "you can't."
2. Ask 2 or 3 mature believers about their journey with memorization.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 20:29-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

Steps for Memorization

Step 1: pray for a desire to memorize

You may doubt you can do this – particularly if you are older. But if you were offered \$1000 for every verse memorized in the next week, how many do you think you could do? Yet God says of his Word, **Psalm 19:10-11 (NIV)** *They (laws) are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.* If you choose against Bible memorization, you are choosing against protection and reward.

Step 2: choose the Bible verses intentionally

Don't be random in the way you choose verses to memorize – be intentional about this. Even the verses throughout the Abide lessons have been carefully chosen. Of course, many will want to

memorize passages like Psalm 23, which bring comfort and encouragement. This is both necessary and good. However, don't stay stuck in the "comfort" category.

For example, you were made for a purpose and an assignment which God has for you (**Ephesians 2:10**). And the most helpful verses for this are those that give you an eternal perspective, as mentioned previously.

Step 3: start small

Choose whatever is manageable for you. If you start out too ambitiously, you may bog down and quit. If you can only do a couple of verses for the week, that's fine. Begin with one verse and repeat it until you can say it. Then do the same with the 2nd verse, repeating it until you can say it. Next, if the verses link next to each other in the Bible, connect them as you review, so that you can say them together.

Review these throughout your day whenever you have a moment. In the days following, keep reviewing them. Over the long term, if you memorized just 1 verse per week, after one year you would have 52 verses. If you continued this for 10 years, you'd be at 520 verses! That's a lot, yet possible!

Some people are competitive by nature and may want to drive themselves to memorize more than others. But here are three dangers. First, you might ignore other important responsibilities, like obeying the Word! Second, something refreshing and useful can turn into a burden, and cause you to stop memorizing. Third, like others, you may end up quitting.

Step 4: choose a tool to help

This can include 3 x 5 index cards, or a spreadsheet, or a phone app such as "The Bible Memory" app.

Abide 11 – Jesus Expects Us to Obey

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience is the Measure of One's Love for God

There's some preaching and writing online, even from popular authors and teachers, suggesting that talking about obedience is unhelpful, or even harmful. However, the Bible is FILLED with verses on obedience – both Old and New Testament. In fact, it's not an overstatement to conclude that to be a follower of the Way is *to obey*. Put another way, you're following someone, with specific commands! This is what it means to have a kingdom mindset.

Whether you're seeking God and his will through the Bible, by getting advice from others, or by hearing personal words for you from God (rhemas), obedience is a very important issue.

Earlier in Abide, obedience was introduced in the SMORP acronym:

- Scripture** – Refers to reading and memorizing the Bible
- Message** – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you
- Obedience** – Refers to obeying what God instructs you to do
- Repentance** – Refers to sin the Holy Spirit requires you to confess and repent of
- Prayer** – Refers to your prayers to God

It can be easy to make huge announcements – “I love God so much!” But what is the real test of this? What you say with your lips, or what your actions are?

In the Bible, David is called a man after God's own heart. For example, in the New Testament, it states, **Acts 13:22 (NIV)** *After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'*

Did you observe what is highlighted about David? It says he is a man after God's own heart BECAUSE of what he was willing to do; everything God wanted him to do. This is not an impossible requirement for perfection, but a clear expectation to AIM for obedience. This is the goal; to be a person who is ready to honor God, to have enthusiasm for him and his ways!

In the New Testament, a Pharisee (a religious leader) asked Jesus which of the commandments in the Law was the greatest. Was he curious? Was he trying to trap Jesus? Either way, Jesus was clear with his answer,

Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV2011) *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*

Can a person measure this love for God? What does it mean? Jesus answered this question as well when he said, **John 14:21 (ESV)** *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.* You see that your love for Christ is measured by your obedience!

Now this is a sobering thought because many people think that loving God is about becoming emotional during a personal or corporate worship time. Of course, as was noted in Abide 10 – you ARE to worship God with your heart and soul (that’s the emotional side) and mind. HOWEVER, it is only measured to be TRUE love if it is linked to obedience!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What is a person after God’s own heart focused on?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. There are different types of people when it comes to obedience: i) those who obey, but do so reluctantly ii) those who obey joyfully iii) those who are stubborn and don’t care iv) those who want to do right, but struggle consistently to do so. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which one describes you best.
2. Write down an example of when God asked you to obey something and you followed through.
3. Write down an example of when God asked you to obey something and you disobeyed.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:1-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

True Faith Leads To Obedience

Today, you’ll look at a story from Luke 17. Jesus had instructed his disciples (another way to say, “followers”) that if a brother or sister sinned against them and then repented, they were to forgive, even if it happened seven times in one day (see Luke **17:3-4**). What is the disciples’ reaction to this incredible teaching? It’s recorded, **Luke 17:5 (NIV)** *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

In verse 6, Jesus tells them what they could do if they acted on the faith given to them. He is highlighting that faith IS powerful! However, he then goes on to explain, through a parable, a key part of faith. Don’t rush through this – it can be hard to understand, but is vital to grasp! Here it is:

Luke 17:7-10 (NIV) *Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat"? Would he not rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."'*

What's going on here? The disciples were upset at the hard things Jesus was requiring of them, such as radical forgiveness. So they demanded: "Well then, increase our faith because such forgiveness is too hard!" In other words, they were "lipping off."

Jesus' telling of the parable in response to the disciples' reaction was his way of setting the matter straight. He was saying to them that when a master tells them to do something, they don't need more faith. What they needed was to obey – to act on what he had already said! The proper response would have been not to "lip off" as the disciples had just done; but to simply say, "Yes, sir!" Jesus was saying: "One of us here is Lord; and it isn't you."

For his readers, Luke pressed the point further, sharing a story from Jesus' ministry, which illustrated what a proper response to Jesus would look like. It's found in verses 11-17. In the story, ten lepers cried out to Jesus, begging him to have mercy on them and to heal them. Jesus could have simply given a word, and they would have been healed on the spot! Instead, he tested their obedience, telling them to go and show themselves to the priest.

It's unmistakable what he was doing: if the lepers went, they would be healed; if they refused, demanding instead that he heal them instantly, they wouldn't be healed. The response of these lepers to Jesus' command stands in complete opposition to the disciples' response. The verse simply offers: "As they went, they were cleansed." That's it! They didn't bargain; nor offer alternative suggestions. Nothing! They just went!

The disciples didn't need more faith; they simply needed to obey. This is true faith! And this is a reality for all followers of the Way.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is taught about faith and obedience in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you anything that you are asking God to do in your life, YET is being held up because you have not obeyed something he has previously commanded (either through the Word or prayer).
2. Take your answer from question 1, and share it with someone else.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1.
4. Memorize Colossians 3:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:18-32.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice!

The life of King Saul provides a vivid and sad picture of what happens when a person disobeys. The prophet Samuel was sent to Saul with a very specific command, **1 Samuel 15:3 (NIV)** *Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.*

Notice that he didn't reply, "I won't do such a thing." Neither did he say, "I'll do it, but didn't do it." It's easy to conclude that both scenarios would have been disobedience. What does Saul do after Samuel leaves him?

First: he immediately gathered his army and attacked Amalek, killing everyone

EXCEPT, he spared the King of Amalek. Perhaps he was conforming to the culture? In that day, if you conquered a nation, you often took its leader alive – a trophy of sorts!

Second: Saul also slaughtered thousands of animals

BUT he spared the best of the sheep, oxen, lambs and all that was good, and gave it to his people so they could sacrifice to God! People must have thought they had a godly king – putting the Lord first! But here's God's reaction, **1 Samuel 15:11 (NIV)** *I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.*

God saw partial obedience as disobedience, calling it rebellion (verse 23). Samuel returned to meet Saul again, and when Samuel reached him, Saul gave an enthusiastic greeting, **1 Samuel 15:13 (NIV)** *The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions.*

But Saul was fooling himself; he had only obeyed the instructions to a certain point! The warning found in the book of James is relevant here, **James 1:22 (NIV)** *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Here's what Samuel states in response to Saul's excitement, **1 Samuel 15:14 (NIV)**, *"What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"* Quickly, Saul shifted the blame to the people: **1 Samuel 15:15 (NIV)** *"The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."* What a character!

Saul further tried to excuse his disobedience, saying the animals were for sacrifice. This is a caution - when you suggest that your disobedience could be an acceptable sacrifice or service to God, it's called deception! Samuel, of course, got to the heart of the matter, **1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV)** *"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice."*

A follower of the Way must not forget that obedience is the highest form of worship there is! You WILL be called to sacrifice for God, but it needs to be rooted in obedience. With such strong roots, you'll find yourself with a beautiful harvest of godly fruit in your life.

On the other hand, when we're commanded something and we don't obey, a veil of deception can start to form over our hearts. We may argue - "but I'm making sacrifices" - but that's not ultimately what God is looking for. The next time we might receive a command or conviction, we may miss it due to the hardening of our hearts. Eventually, there are no commands at all. This person has seared their conscience (see **1 Timothy 4:2**).

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why were Saul's actions considered disobedience?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. The story of Saul is very striking. Partial obedience IS disobedience. Therefore, do not rush on this next question. With a humble and soft heart, ask God - "God, reveal any area of my life where I am partially obeying you?" When God reveals something (most struggle with this), confess it.
2. Based on what was received in Question 1, ask God to show you what obedience would look like.
3. Finally, ask him for any promises that he wants to give in response to your desire to completely obey him.
4. Review Colossians 3:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 21:33-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Disobedience Can be an Open Door to Demonic Influence

Returning to the story of Saul and Samuel, consider this very serious statement, **1 Samuel 15:23 (NKJV)** *For rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.* It's important to know that the phrase, "is as," did not appear in the original text. It was added later by translators. Instead, the verse should read: "For rebellion is witchcraft."

Of course, witchcraft brings up all sorts of images of witches dressed in black, saying spells and declaring curses, etc. But this is noteworthy: the actual practice of witchcraft opens one directly to the realm of demons (which are very real!). Further, the goal in witchcraft is to control circumstances, situations, or people, often without the participant's understanding of what is happening in the spirit realm. In fact, in witchcraft, the participants are taught that the more they rebel, the more they give access to demonic powers to influence and control them. Scary!

When you consider this, it now makes sense when Samuel warns Saul about rebellion and its connection to witchcraft. And the Bible sadly reveals that not long after his rebellion, an evil, tormenting spirit did come into Saul's life to trouble him, **1 Samuel 16:14 (NIV)** *Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.*

Saul became a very different man from this point onward. He had been a modest young man, who obeyed his parents, the prophet Samuel, and God. He might have even been very shy and timid! Samuel had said to him, **1 Samuel 15:17 (NIV)** *Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.*

If you had predicted in his early years that the day would come when he would kill 85 innocent priests, their wives, and their children in a fit of rage, no one would have believed you. But the sad truth is – he did just that! (**1 Samuel 22**)

The evil spirit manipulated Saul into a life of jealousy, anger, hatred, strife, murder, and deception. At his lowest point, just before his death, Saul even consulted a witch! Of course, he could have made a change by admitting what he had done, and by turning back to a life of obedience. But he didn't.

Sadly, when demons begin to deceive someone, due to disobedience, they are moving down a pathway that can even lead to abandonment of the faith. Of course, moments of weakness do not automatically lead to this place! But caution is needed.

It's a sad journey: a person refuses to obey; they are deceived more until they cannot hear God's promptings about their sin anymore; they open themselves up to demonic influence and do things no one could have imagined they would ever do; and finally, they abandon the faith!

People like Saul can start off well – but along the way they became disobedient. And the Bible teaches that this will only increase in the end times. Paul gives this sober reminder, **1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)** *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*

It's also why Jesus warned, **Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)** *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

2. What is taught about disobedience in today's reading?
3. If a person continues to disobey, are they able to sense the Holy Spirit's conviction as easily? What begins to happen over time?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Make a list of other believers that you know – from your family, or small group, or friends. Spend some time in prayer for them. Pray that God would help them to take obedience seriously in their lives. This is not a time for judging others, but to lovingly pray for them. You can even ask the Holy Spirit to give you specific things to pray for– specific things they may struggle to obey. But this is between you and God – don't share it with them.
2. Of course, if you sense that you have opened the door to the demonic in your life through disobedience, confess and walk away from this. Because of the seriousness of this, you may want to find someone to help you.
3. Review Colossians 3:2.
4. Memorize Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 22:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Obedience Helps People Experience God's Friendship & Love

Listen to this promise, directly from Jesus, **John 15:10 (ESV)** *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.* (see also **1 John 2:4-6**) Abiding in Jesus' love – what a beautiful thing! But notice that it's conditional – IF! You can experience greater amounts of God's love IF you obey him!

Friendship with God is also connected to obedience. Jesus also said, **John 15:14 (ESV)** *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* Too many believers quickly declare their friendship with God, while living in disobedience to him. We don't determine friendship with God; he determines that!

Of course, friendship with God is worth it! Jesus describes it when he says, **John 15:15 (ESV)** *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

When you become a friend with God, it means that he will reveal things to you! This is incredible! Or as Proverbs, the primary book of wisdom affirms, **Proverbs 3:32 (NIV2011)** *For the LORD detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence.*

You can see this in the life of Abraham, who was called a friend of God (see **Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23**). For example, before God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, he told Abraham about it (**Genesis 18:17**). What a privilege!

Stories of Obedience

Story 1: the testing of Abraham

In God's eyes, it's critical for a leader and all followers of the Way to learn obedience. This learning can come through testing. This can be seen in the life of Abraham. Also, God expected him to obey even though he didn't have the full picture.

Such testing began with God's call for Abraham to follow him. You can read about it early in the Bible, **Genesis 12:1 (NIV)** *The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."* There were three things that Abraham was to leave: his country; his people; his father's household. Did Abraham do this? Not exactly.

He left his country and his people, yes, but what about his father's household? If you go back two verses, you'll see what happened, **Genesis 11:31 (NIV)** *Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.*

Evidently Terah talked Abraham into going along and they set out for Canaan. However, they never got past Haran, where they stopped and settled. Abraham's father Terah died there, and THEN Abraham continued on to Canaan. And did he go alone at this point? NO. He took along his nephew Lot and what a disaster that ended up being!

Abraham placed family before God, when God had clearly told him not to; it was an idol in his life. Therefore, it isn't surprising that he again would be tested, through this command, **Genesis 22:2 (NIV)** *Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

Thankfully, Abraham passed this test. Now God would come before family, even before his one and only son, Isaac, the son of promise! What a journey he had of learning and growing in obedience.

It is one thing to obey when the command is logical. It is quite another when obedience calls for something that doesn't make any sense. It's also vital to note that God demands even higher standards of obedience for leaders. Why? First, because they're often leading people to advance God's kingdom. Second, followers of the Way are often looking for and need examples of obedience. Or as someone once said, "people are often looking for permission to compromise or inspiration to rise up to God's purposes." Obedience should often be modeled before it is taught!

Story 2: from Pastor Ray Duerksen, doubling our giving

One day I was praying in the basement, when the Spirit spoke to me, asking me to double the amount we were giving to the church. It didn't make any sense, as I was a student at the time, and was just barely able to keep my young family fed and clothed. With EVEN less money, I didn't know how we'd be able to survive. I told Fran about it and she replied, "If that's what God is asking us to do, then we better do it." For two weeks we gave the agreed 20%. But only two weeks later the bottom dropped out. The company I was working for announced that due to the staggering interest rates of over 20%, it was shutting down its operations, and all employees would be laid off. When I got home that night, I informed Fran of what had just transpired. Her first response was: "But what about the 20% we promised to give God?" I replied, "I think God knew I would lose my job when he asked us to double our giving." It was a test!

We held to our end of the bargain. Of course, 20% of nothing, is nothing! But money and food did in fact begin to come in, without us saying one word to anyone! For the next two months, though we had no savings, no income, no support from churches or individuals, and NO money coming from the government, we lived at the same level we had before. And when I finally got another job, our giving had not dipped at all! God requires unconditional obedience. Our responsibility is to obey; God is responsible for the results.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is taught about obedience in today's reading?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time praising God for his desire to be your friend and to reveal things to you! Write down your praises.
2. If you feel like you have a story that relates to obedience, write it down, and share it with as many others as you can. Remember to keep the emphasis on God's blessing, not on you.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 22:23-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. You've now completed 11 Abide lessons! Congratulations! Spend some time considering where you are on your journey with God. Have a conversation with him. Ask him what he is pleased by in your life. Also ask him what he desires to change.
2. If you have fallen behind on the memory verses, take some time to make a plan for how you'll catch up.

Abide 12 – Repent & Confess

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

The idea of repentance was first mentioned when SMORP was introduced.

Scripture – Refers to reading and memorizing the Bible

Message – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you

Obedience – Refers to obeying what God instructs you to do

Repentance – Refers to sin the Holy Spirit requires you to confess and repent of

Prayer – Refers to your prayers to God

Are we forgiven and saved from our sins when we give our lives to Jesus? Of course! Much of the New Testament emphasizes this truth, **Romans 5:1 (ESV)** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The word “justification” is a legal declaration from God. It’s to be declared righteous. It’s in contrast to being condemned. When condemned, the opposite declaration is being made. Due to salvation, Paul can then conclude, **Romans 8:1 (NIV2011)** *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...*

What good news! This is the gospel! However, some believe and teach that once a person becomes a follower of Jesus, they no longer need to practice confession or repentance. But this isn’t what salvation includes! While those who communicate this may have good motives, in Abide 12 you’ll learn about the continuing need for what some have called, “the holy habit of repentance.”

In the pattern prayer which many call the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples (and all followers) to pray, “*forgive us our sins ...*,” among other things. Of course, this assumes repentance as well.

Saints Still Need to Repent and Confess Their Sins After Salvation

First: believers still sin after salvation

When you became a follower of the Way, one of the names you’re given is, “saint.” While many churches no longer use this name to refer to each other, it does point to your value before God. However, while valuable, saints still sin!

The New Testament, which so clearly declares that we're declared righteous through Jesus, also is obvious in its discussion of continuing sin, the call away from sin and the need to be bold. For example, Paul urges the church, **1 Thessalonians 4:1 (NIV)** *Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.* These words from Paul would make sense if we shouldn't think about or discuss repentance. How could one think about doing "more and more" of something without turning away from other things?

Elsewhere, in Ephesians 4, Paul provides a list of sins that the saints are to stay away from, stating, **Ephesians 4:30 (NIV2011)** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul actually rebuked believers for sinful actions while they met, **1 Corinthians 11:17 (NIV)** *In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good ...* In his second letter to this same church, Paul is clear that they aren't yet perfect in their behaviour, **2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)** *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

John echoed what Paul said, **1 John 1:8 (NIV)** *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* John is saying that if you claim that you have no sin, the denial itself is sinful. Sadly, many followers of the Way shrink back from this truth!

Of course, Jesus himself taught that his children still sin. For example, in his seven letters to the churches (**Revelation 1-3**), Jesus rebuked five out of the seven because he was displeased with them. To the church at Sardis, he warned, **Revelation 3:2 (NIV)** *Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.*

When we're saved, our old self or nature with its slavery to sin was crucified by God and replaced with a new nature. This is why Paul said, **Galatians 2:20 (NIV)** *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.* That is, we don't have to sin any longer, yet we can choose to do so. And because we sometimes do, repentance is still necessary.

Second: believers still need to confess and repent of these ongoing sins

Take a look at what John says in 1 John, **1 John 1:9 (NIV)** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* It mentions confession, and it's important to know that the verb, "confess," is in the present tense. This means that you're to REGULARLY confess your sins. If you were also to read the entire Lord's Prayer, you would see that God's forgiveness is dependent on your own forgiving of others – an act of repentance itself.

Further, James included the confession of sins in the middle of his instructions concerning healing prayer, **James 5:16 (NIV)** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

Finally, Jesus plainly told the churches of Revelation what to do with their sins. For example, he commanded the church at Ephesus to repent, saying, **Revelation 2:5 (NIV)** *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you*

and remove your lampstand from its place. This is a part of what Jesus is doing today! He encourages, BUT he also calls his children to confess and repent.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do you need to continue to confess and repent? What are some verses or passages that support this?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you confessed or acknowledged a sin or failure? Did you experience a, "weight lifted off of your shoulders?" Write down an example or two.
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 23:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

The Difference Between Judicial and Relational Forgiveness

The forgiveness that you'll STILL need is not the forgiveness that you receive when you first become a follower of the Way. When you receive salvation from Jesus, you're forgiven in a *judicial* sense. It's as if you had never sinned! The judge, God, has declared you innocent. Praise God! The only thing that can impact one's overall standing with God (salvation) is if a person walks completely away from Jesus through denial of him or ongoing, hardhearted, rebellion.

Instead, the forgiveness that you still can experience is *relational*. A great way to understand this is through marriage. Is it not true that the actions of a husband or wife can at times require ongoing forgiveness and reconciliation?

Suppose a husband ignores his wife and takes her for granted; perhaps he even says some unkind things to her. It gets, to use an old expression, "chilly in the room!" Now she might no longer respond to him and though they are living under the same roof, there's little or no communication. Are they still legally married? Yes. Do they still love each other? Yes. Are they communicating? No. Do they have a great relationship? No. They are relationally distant.

It's similar in your relationship with God. When you sin, are you still his legally adopted child? Yes. But when you sin, there's an issue to resolve, a disruption in the relationship. Jesus made this perfectly clear when he washed his disciples' feet (**John 13**). In a culture where people walked long distances on dusty roads in sandals, it was normal for the host to arrange for water, to wash the guests' feet.

When Peter objected to what Jesus was doing – washing his feet - Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (verse 8). To this Peter responded, “Then wash me all over” (verse 9), to which Jesus answered, **John 13:10 (NIV)** *A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you* (referring to Judas – verse 11).

What was Jesus getting at? Washing is elsewhere used to symbolize the cleansing from sin (**1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5**). Notice Jesus says that the one who has bathed doesn’t need to be washed all over, as Peter had suggested – they just need their feet washed. All his disciples, except Judas, were in good standing with him. Jesus had received them as his own, forgiving their sins, and in his words, they were clean all over.

What Jesus is teaching is that when you are forgiven of your sins you get bathed from head to toe – he washes you white as snow (**Isaiah 1:18**)! You’re clean all over! But as the washing of feet demonstrates, you’ll still need regular cleansing/forgiveness from the sin that piles up from living in this broken world!

Paul taught the same. On the one hand he told the church at Corinth, **1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)** *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* Yet in the same letter Paul challenged them to examine themselves for sin before taking the Lord’s Supper (communion).

Other verses in the Bible that instruct believers to examine their lives include: **Psalms 119:59-60; Lamentations 3:40; Matthew 7:3-5; 2 Corinthians 13:5**. Therefore, when the Spirit reminds you of a sin, you need to ask for forgiveness and deal with it in a way that he asks.

John also taught that we’re to continue walking in ongoing confession. *He said, 1 John 1:6-7 (NIV) If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. The Greek word for “purify” here is katharizo. In this passage, it’s in the present active indicative sense – which is a fancy way of saying that it’s speaking of a continuous purifying. So then “walking in the light” cannot mean living without sin, but in dealing appropriately with our sin when we do fail.*

Put another way, when you are conscious of doing wrong or when you realize that your actions or attitudes or words grieved God, as his beloved child, confess your sin and ask him to cleanse you, without for a second thinking, “I hope I’m still saved!”

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What’s the difference between judicial and relational forgiveness? How did Jesus illustrate it? Explain these as best as you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Since confession is discussed today, it’s a good time to practice! And it’s useful to do this with someone else (this is usually easier than a person might fear), but it can be adapted to do it alone.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sins that you need to confess. Then go through Question 3.

3. **Use the Peer-to-Peer Prayer Ministry Guide below to confess your sins.** You can also find a similar tool at: renewal.tools online.

Terminology:

- a. **Person:** refers to the person receiving ministry
- b. **Minister:** refers to the person giving or guiding the time
- c. If you use the tool alone, then you are both the Person and the Minister

Steps:

- a. **Person** confesses their sin: “Heavenly Father, I confess name of sin as my sin. I repent of it and ask you to forgive me”
- b. **Minister** assures them of forgiveness: “Name of person, God’s Word promises that when you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. So, in Jesus’ name I declare that you are forgiven”
- c. **Minister** breaks all bondages to that sin: “In Jesus’ name I break all bondages to name of sin in name of person and cleanse them with the blood of Jesus”

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 23:23-39.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

What Repentance Includes

First: repentance includes the mind

Repentance begins with agreeing in your mind – “what I did is wrong!” There is no place for denial in the journey that you walk with Jesus.

This need for agreement can be seen in the story of the prodigal son, **Luke 15:17-19 (NIV)** *When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'*

However, this repentance doesn’t stop here!

Second: repentance includes the heart or emotions

If you take your sin seriously it will produce a godly sorrow or grief. Here is what Paul says in response to the right kind of attitude about sin, **2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (NIV)** *... for you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

You observe in this passage that emotions can produce either a godly or worldly kind of sorrow. The worldly sorrow ends up in pain and death because it only grieves over the consequences of the sin, and because it's self-centered. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, grieves over the *cause* of those results – your own choices.

That is, godly sorrow is heartfelt, has a measure of intensity and is proved by actual change. Or as Paul says next, **2 Corinthians 7:11 (NIV)** *See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.*

Third: repentance includes the will

Repentance is a choice, an act of the will to change direction and behavior. Feeling bad but continuing to repeat the behaviour is not repentance. As John the Baptist said, **Luke 3:8 (NIV)** *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.* Fruit is the result; the different actions.

Another verse that links repentance and action includes some encouragement from Paul, **Acts 26:20 (NIV)** *... I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.* We also see this connection in the last book of the Bible. There are expected actions in response to God's love and judgments. For example, we can read a prophecy that says, **Revelation 9:21 (NIV)** *Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

Again, the story of the Prodigal Son is useful to meditate on in this regard. It's a vivid picture of repentance. The prodigal recognizes his foolishness, is struck with guilt and eagerly confesses his sins.

We Are to Examine Ourselves Before the Lord

Jesus calls all followers of the Way to regularly examine themselves, so that by his Spirit he can point out sin. Just as people are advised to receive regular medical checkups, the Bible wisely encourages you to do spiritual checkups as well.

In discussing communion, Paul says, **1 Corinthians 11:27-28, 31 (NIV)** *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup ...³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.* What does it mean to judge yourself? It means to judge or deal with your sins!

This is a very different approach than is taught by so many – just pray a prayer and no need to think about sin again! In another passage, Paul even urged the believers at Corinth to test themselves to ensure that they were still in the faith! **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?*

If you need help on knowing how to do this, sincerely and with an open heart, imitate the prayer of David. He prayed, **Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV)** *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* What might be some things that God looks for in such searching? They include: the quality of our faith, our love for him and others, our humility, our obedience, our motives, our goals, and our attitude.

This is so important for followers of the Way. And as you confess and repent, you'll experience two amazing benefits: relational forgiveness AND less discipline from God (which 1 Corinthians 11 also talks about in verse 30).

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 3 things that repentance includes?
3. What are 2 benefits of first examining yourself for any sin?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you had worldly sorrow (sorry only for yourself, sorry that you had consequences), rather than godly sorrow? Write this down.
2. Can you think of a time in your life when you had godly sorrow (you were disappointed that you sinned against your Father and against others), rather than worldly sorrow?

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:1-22.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Confessing to One Another

There's something deeply significant about learning to confess to others and receive their confessions. Some churches believe that this should only take place with a pastor or priest, or between God and the individual, but the Bible is clear that this for the entire family of God. The confessional life is to be lived out in community.

For example, if a brother/sister offends another, the hurt brother/sister is to confront the offender, and the offender is then to confess and repent. The hurt brother/sister is then commanded to forgive, **Luke 17:3 (NIV)** *So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them."* How powerful this is when it is practiced!

The writer of Hebrews also instructs believers to warn one another, as a protection, **Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)** *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.* Notice that this is far beyond just encouraging one another to keep going in life! It's in the context of warning one another about the challenges of sin and the need to get ready for the Day to come!

Paul said something similar, **Galatians 6:1 (NIV)** *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently ...* You may not find such a task enjoyable – whether you're the one who has sinned or the one confronting. However, it's a vital part of being a follower of the Way.

James has something further to think about, reminding the church, **James 5:19-20 (NIV)** *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* Wow!

Now it would really stretch things if you were instructed to confront someone about their sin, without expecting a response (confession and repentance) in return! Which is why James says matter-of-factly, **James 5:16 (NIV)** *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* Mutual confession should happen!

From Acts, here is another example of public confession and repentance, **Acts 19:18 (NIV)** *Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.*

Of course, the Bible does not require that you confess to others every single sin you confess to God. In fact, at times it would be quite inappropriate. For example, you wouldn't confess certain sins to your child. However, for good reasons, God does at times require it. Some of the benefits are:

- it can release healing (inner & outer) and set you free
- it can break pride – which is at the root of all sin!
- it encourages others to confess
- it can lead to mutual accountability
- it can encourage prayer support
- it seals the decision to deal with the sin

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Does the Bible teach that some of your sins should be confessed to others and vice versa? Explain.
3. What are some benefits of confessing to one another?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time in prayer and ask – “God, is there anything that I need to confess to another person?” Many are pleasantly surprised by the kind of breakthroughs which can happen when they confess to others!
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:23-35.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Jesus Judges Believers Who Do Not Confess and Repent

First: Jesus will judge believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ

Paul teaches in the book of Romans that believers will still be judged after they die, **Romans 14:10 (NIV)** *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.* He's saying – don't judge your fellow brother or sister! Jesus will deal with it.

In a letter to the Church at Corinth he says something similar, **2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)** *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* Now that's clear!

Second: Jesus is judging believers in the present

Your faith is so important to God that he sometimes disciplines his children when they stumble along in an area. For example, consider the matter of believing or trusting God in Zacharias' life (Zacharias was told that he and his wife would have a child). He simply asked the angel, **Luke 1:18 (NIV)** *How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.* And for daring to question the greatness of God's power, he immediately could not speak until Elizabeth gave birth to their son John! Without God's discipline, it's easy to forget that Jesus is also to be Lord of everything in your life.

Sometimes God's discipline even ended up in ultimate judgment. In the sobering story of Ananias and Sapphira, Luke gives a real-life example of this (**Acts 5:1-11**). This couple told the apostles that they had given all of the proceeds from the sale of their land; but they hadn't. What was the consequence for their lying? God struck them dead! The result was that fear of the Lord fell on all who heard it.

Paul also emphasizes another possible result of God's discipline for sin, **1 Corinthians 11:30 (NIV)** *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.* According to this verse, God's discipline includes, "weakness," "sickness," and "falling asleep" (premature death!).

There's also the story of Jesus healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, at the Pool of Bethesda. Jesus sent him on his way with these words, **John 5:14 (NIV)** *"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."* Wow! Note: Jesus was equally clear that not ALL sickness was directly connected to a person's sin (see **John 9:1-3**).

Finally, if churches don't repent, Jesus judges and disciplines them – even now! To the church at Pergamum he said, **Revelation 2:16 (NIV)** *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* And to the church at Ephesus he challenged, **Revelation 2:5 (NIV)** *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* These truths should cause individual followers of the Way and churches to be sober-minded.

Some might view this as harsh, but there are three amazing reasons why God disciplines his children now:

- it results in holiness for you and it's for your good! **Hebrews 12:10 (NIV)** *Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share*

in his holiness. When we're disciplined by God, we can make necessary course corrections and increase in right living (holiness!)

- you won't have to be judged with the world later on. **1 Corinthians 11:32 (NIV)** *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.* God wants us to remain in him! He mercifully helps us with this beautiful, loving goal!
- discipline will warn others, bringing about a healthy fear of the Lord and respect for his commands. Again, this is for everyone's good (e.g. the rule – "don't touch a hot stove" and the healthy awe of its heat). The Bible speaks much about fear of the Lord, always presenting it as a good thing.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 2 ways/times that Jesus judges sin? Write this down with an explanation, as finding the right words can help you explain this to others as well.
3. What are 3 reasons for Jesus disciplining his children in the present?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God – "have I experienced anything in the past or am I experiencing anything presently, due to sins I was or am not repenting of?"
2. In response to your answer in Question 1, thank him for loving you enough to discipline you now.
3. Also, in response to your answer in Question 1, ask God if there are any corrective steps that you need to currently take.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 24:36-51.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. This lesson, Abide 12, had some pretty intense stuff! Take some time to re-read the verses included during Days 1-5, while asking the Holy Spirit to gently teach you and encourage you.

Abide 13 – Prayer as Praise and Thanksgiving

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

Throughout the Abide, you've been introduced to different parts of the tool, SMORP. Today the final part, prayer, will be highlighted.

- Scriptures** – Refers to reading and memorizing the Bible
- Message** – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you
- Obedience** – Refers to obeying what God instructs you to do
- Repentance** – Refers to sin the Holy Spirit requires you to confess and repent of
- Prayer** – Refers to your prayers to God

It's wise to be a follower of the Way who wants to grow in prayer! In doing so, you're imitating the early disciples, who offered one of the most significant prayers of all: "Lord, teach us to pray" (**Luke 11:1**). In the following twelve verses, Luke passes on four messages about prayer, originally delivered by Jesus. The first message is often called, "the Lord's Prayer." Really, it's a pattern for how his disciples should pray.

Hallowed Be Your Name

This model prayer starts off with the phrase, "Father, hallowed be your name." What does this mean? The word "Father" refers to an intimacy that you can have with God in prayer. This is amazing! However, it's also a reminder that you're not at the same level as God – he is, "hallowed" – which means to be recognized as set apart, unique, and above all. There is none like him!

We can in part understand what this means by seeing a reference to the opposite in the Old Testament. As God said through one of his prophets, **Ezekiel 36:20-21 (NIV)** *And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, "These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land." I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.*

Therefore, to "hallow God's name" includes ensuring that one's motivations, words, and actions are consistent with his ways. Put another way, how we act should bring praise to God!

Further, this phrase – “hallowed be your name” - goes beyond personally recognizing God’s greatness. A disciple is ALSO to pray that God’s uniqueness will be recognized by others, even through their own service to the church and the world.

This is what Jesus was getting at when he said, **Matthew 5:16 (NIV)** ... *let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*. Paul also said, **Ephesians 3:21 (NIV)** ... *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*.

Really, the “heart” of this prayer includes many things! It means:

First: we’re asking God to keep us from dishonoring the name by which we are called

Consider Paul’s words, **1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)** *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*. This means that you’re to pray in a way that is concerned with God being honored; NOT simply for your selfish desires to be satisfied.

That’s why James says, **James 4:3 (NIV)** *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures*.

Second: we’re asking that God be praised among the NATIONS

Abraham provides an example of a prayer where God’s honor is seen as the most important thing, **Genesis 18:24-25 (NIV)** *What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

Similarly, Daniel prays, **Daniel 9:17 (NIV)** *Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary*. This kind of prayer includes the desire to see that faith in God would spread through the world and that more people would honor him.

Third: we’re expressing our gratitude to God, magnifying who he is

This desire for God to be lifted up (some say, “to be glorified”) is the key thought of the entire prayer that Jesus teaches. While praise focuses on who God is, thanksgiving focuses on what God has done. Of course, at some point in practice, the two always end up coming together, for God reveals who he is precisely by what he does! Or we can remember the sad example given by Jesus that though ten lepers were healed by Jesus, only one returned to give God glory.

You can see this in many verses, including, **Psalms 106:1-2 (ESV)** *Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, or declare all his praise?* Of course, God is worthy without our praise. But our praise acknowledges the worthiness!

A person cannot read the Psalms without being deeply impressed that praising the Lord is EXPECTED. In fact, the word “praise” is used 137 times and the word “praises” another 27 times. And consider that Psalm 150 ends the entire collection of Psalms with these words, **Psalms 150:1-6 (NIV)** *Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise*

him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why is calling the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples "the Lord's Prayer" a bit misleading?
3. What 3 things does the phrase "hallowed be your name" include?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. How much time are you currently giving to prayer in your daily devotions?
2. However long that you've walked with Jesus, think about this question – has your prayer life grown or declined over the years? What impacts how much you pray?
3. Spend a few minutes in prayer and ask Jesus – "Jesus, teach me how to pray." Listen in prayer for his response to this desire/request.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 25:1-30.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Why We Should Praise God

Reason 1: he is a great God who is worthy of our praise

The Psalms are a reminder of God's greatness, and the need to praise him in response. Consider these incredible words, **Psalm 96:2-4 (NIV)** *Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.*

For another example, Psalm 103 lists many reasons why the Lord is worthy of great praise! As you read through this, either highlight all the reasons to praise him, or write them down.

Psalm 103:1-5, 8-13 (NIV) *Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's ... The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

Reason 2: praise is an appropriate sacrifice to give to God

Some argue that disciples of Jesus should not speak of, “sacrificing for God.” Of course, Samuel did say, **1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV)** *Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*

So in one sense, you don’t need to sacrifice – that is, sacrifice rams goats or ANYTHING for your sins. The blood of Jesus took care of all your sins! Praise him!

However, you DO have the responsibility for two types of sacrifice. First, to obey him. Second, to praise him. And have you ever noticed that the word “response” is a part of the word “responsibility?” Put another way, there is this responsibility, or response, of sacrifice for followers of the Way, as a reaction to the GREATEST sacrifice.

Consider, **Psalm 50:14 (ESV)** *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High.* And again, **Psalm 50:23 (ESV)** *The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!*

Of course, this expectation is also in the New Testament as well, **Hebrews 13:15 (NIV)** *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.* It uses the word “sacrifice!”

Here’s a good guideline – don’t hesitate to use words that the Bible does. In fact, thanksgiving played such an important role in the New Testament that one writer described it as a synonym for the Christian life.

In Romans 1, Paul notes that sin includes a lack of thanksgiving, **Romans 1:21 (NIV)** *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* The verb translated “glorified” means to give God the praise due to him.

Men and women, experiencing God’s provision in every area of life, should have recognized that he is the source of all good things (see **James 1:17**). This IS the obligation of ALL people. And it’s an appropriate and expected sacrifice for those who are followers of the Way.

Paul modeled this, not just wrote about it, as his introductions, conclusions, and outbursts of praise in his letters are an invitation to join in glorifying God.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What 2 reasons for praising God are given today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that your life is full of thanksgiving and praise? If you feel that you fall short in this, spend some time in confession, saying sorry to your Father for a lack of gratitude.
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4.

3. Memorize Matthew 5:16.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 25:31-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Why We Should Praise God

Reason 3: through praise we experience God's presence

The Bible teaches that God is present everywhere, always. However, you don't always *experience* him, do you? This is an imperfect illustration, but consider marriage. A spouse isn't always right beside their husband or wife, but at any moment they MAY be able to call them, or bring them to mind. In other words, through a bit of effort, someone who is married can usually experience their husband or wife.

Of course, God is far greater, more available and is perfect (e.g. he has no insecurity, isn't moody, etc.)! But it also takes some effort on your part to experience him. And followers of the Way are commanded to come into his presence. And why wouldn't they want to? As God's Word promises, **Psalm 16:11 (NIV)** *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Well, praising him and thanking him are, "doorways into his presence." And in another verse, it declares, **Psalm 100:4 (NIV)** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.* When you bring your offering of praise to the 'gates' of his presence, he doesn't just tell you to drop off your sacrifice and take off! Instead, the gates OPEN up and you can come right into his presence.

Reason 4: we experience the joy of the Lord and peace through praise

The apostle Paul clearly emphasized the connection between thanksgiving, and experiencing peace. When we're anxious by the challenges of life, Paul reminds us to turn to God. However, he surprises us with the manner in which we're to make such requests – with thanksgiving! He said, **Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Not only is peace experienced as you take time to be thankful, but remember there is also fullness of joy! (see **Psalm 16:11** again in the previous section)

And not just peace and joy, but also hope! Which is why Paul said, **Romans 15:13 (NIV)** *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Once you're genuinely thankful in God's presence, anxiety, worry, and stress will go! Why? Because God has NO anxiety, NO worry, and NO stress! NONE! The King of kings and Lord of lords is completely in control and no one can overturn his will or threaten his plans! And so, you're urged to pray with thanksgiving in all circumstances, **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)** *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 reasons for praising God are given today?
3. Why will being in God's presence help you experience peace, joy, and hope?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down something that you are anxious about right now. Spend some time in thanksgiving – e.g. "Father, I praise you for having a plan for this thing that I'm anxious about . . ." Also praise him for who he is – e.g. "God, I am thankful that you are Gracious, Merciful, Gentle, Sovereign, All Powerful, Loving, Perfectly Wise." Stay in this position of praise – it takes practice, especially if you're used to focusing on your challenges.
2. Now bring the anxiety to God. Practice stating it, rather than dwelling on it. Finish this prayer time by thanking God for caring for you!
3. Review Matthew 5:16.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 26:1-25.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Why We Should Praise God

Reason 5: praise increases our strength and faith, helping us to pray expectantly

When you turn to wholehearted praise and thanksgiving, you enter the presence of the Lord – you really experience him. Further, as was noted in Day 3, you'll discover joy, peace, and hope.

And here's a bonus - these emotions in turn will give you strength. As Nehemiah described it, **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)** *Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.* Of course, all followers of the Way will need this strength as they seek to be faithful to Jesus! Jeremiah similarly linked hope and strength, saying, **Lamentations 3:18 (NKJV)** *My strength and hope have perished from the LORD.* Proverbs also tells us, **Proverbs 13:12 (NIV)** *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.*

The apostle Paul also refers to the result of such strength, as he speaks of boldness. He says, **2 Corinthians 3:12 (NIV)** *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.* Praise God that when you're filled with hope, you acquire the faith needed to pray faith-filled prayers!

Reason 6: praise is a spiritual weapon against evil

Worship and teaching are not an end in themselves. They're means to an end. For example, we can battle against spiritual forces of evil through worship. The Bible has a lot to say about praise defeating and driving back the very REAL powers of darkness! For example, 2 Chronicles 20 tells the story of Jehoshaphat, who was facing the invading forces of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites.

In prayer, Jehoshaphat says to the Lord that they are helpless against such a great army, and that all eyes are on him (the Lord). God responds, telling them to not be afraid, as he would fight the battle for them! So, instead of sending out soldiers with swords and spears against his enemy, look at what Jehoshaphat does, **2 Chronicles 20:21 (NIV)** *After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever."*

And what does God do? The next verse notes, **2 Chronicles 20:22 (NIV)** *As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*

What happened here? The physical enemy was defeated because unseen, spiritual enemies were scattered by the power of praise! By worship and proclaiming the Word, we can bring judgment on the kings of darkness, binding them with chains.

The same thing – praise to God resulting in victory - happens when King Saul is plagued by an evil spirit. In 1 Samuel, you can read the whole story! When David would worship and praise the Lord with his harp, the evil spirit would leave. Or in the words of the Bible, **1 Samuel 16:23 (NIV)** *Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.* Wow!

Praise isn't merely a nice way to begin a church gathering, or a personal time of devotions. It's not a warm-up or filler until a sermon or Bible reading. Of course, if praise is just something you do mechanically, it IS meaningless.

Biblical praise however, drives back the powers of darkness, releases the angels of God to do battle on one's behalf and brings God's awesome presence into each situation. Listen to how one psalmist describes praise, **Psalms 149:5-6 (NIV)** *Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands . . .* And another one, **Psalms 8:2 (NIV)** *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 2 reasons for praising God are given today?
3. Why can being in God's presence increase your faith for prayer?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. You're seeing in this lesson that your praise of God is so important! Take a look at your life and schedule – how can you better include this in your devotions and even family life?

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 26:26-46.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

How We Should Praise God

First: with our whole heart

It takes time to learn how to praise God! Since God is unlimited, this is a lifelong journey. But it's important to know that the starting point is to praise him with your whole heart. Or as the psalmist declares, **Psalm 9:1 (NIV)** *I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders.* May your praises be no different!

True praise and thanksgiving are definitely motivated by whole-heartedness – that is what God seeks! How appropriate for the one who is your very life.

Second: we may speak, shout or sing our praises

For sure, you can speak your praises to God. He loves this! However, the Psalms reveal other features of praise, such as singing, **Psalm 147:1 (NIV)** *Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!*

The Bible also refers to shouting in praise. People understand this in a sports setting! But when it comes to an almighty God, many shrink back at the idea of shouting out to him. This is sad! Yet, see what God's Word says, **Psalm 33:3 (NIV)** *Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.* Why not try this, even if in private to start?

Praise can also result in loud or enthusiastic singing as well! **Psalm 47:1 (ESV)** ... *shout to God with loud songs of joy!* And even clapping, **Psalm 47:1 (ESV)** *Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*

Third: with corresponding postures

There's another element to entering God's presence and that's your posture; how you use your body. Consider this instruction in the Bible, **Psalm 95:6 (NIV)** *Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.* To physically bow and kneel are ways of acknowledging greatness! They also can remind us that God's in charge.

It's also appropriate to raise your hands in praise to the Lord, **Psalm 134:2 (NIV)** *Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.* To lift one's hands pictures that we're offering up praise, like the

offering of incense. Or as Psalms puts it, **Psalms 141:2 (NIV)** *May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

And what about dancing? You're to rejoice in the Lord with abandonment – like little children. Sometimes pride stands in the way, doesn't it? When David's wife, Michal, saw her husband (the king) "leaping and dancing before the Lord," she despised him in her heart (**2 Samuel 6:16**). And later the two got into a very heated argument over this (**2 Samuel 6:20-23**), and it appears that God judged her for it.

When your praise comes out of a good and loving heart, postures and movements of your body will flow almost automatically. At other times, the INTENTIONAL use of a specific posture can lead the heart to a place of adoration. Many find that when they take these steps, they are ushered right into God's presence.

Fourth: by adoring or praising him for his attributes.

You may select an attribute of God, such as his mercy, and center your attention on it. Or as you're reading and meditating on the Bible, you'll come across an attribute of God. Either way, you can simply begin to praise God in prayer for that characteristic.

For example, as you begin to read Psalm 3, you read that God is a deliverer. Then, you ponder how he delivered people and people groups in the Bible, and throughout time. Next, you can move on to consider how God has delivered you in your own personal life. As you do, you praise him for that!

Today, there's a lot of excellent praise and worship music available online, which you can use in your quiet time. Try it! It can transform your devotional time with the Lord. You'll never be the same!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 suggestions are given today for how you can praise God?
3. How can postures help you praise God?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you something that you can praise God for, with your whole heart. Once you receive something, write a prayer of praise to God. Let it flow from deep in your heart!
2. Text, phone, or email a friend. Ask them to share what they have been praising God for lately.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 26:47-75.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Write down a list of 8-10 things that God has done for you and/or your family. Then try praising God in a different posture than you would normally use.
2. Choose an attribute of God. Spend some time praising God for: 1) how he has always been this attribute 2) how he displayed this attribute in the Bible 3) how he has displayed this attribute in the lives of others 4) for how he has displayed this attribute in your life. If you get stuck, remember to ask Jesus to help you pray! He will!

Abide 14 – Prayer Changes Everything!

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

There's a very brief part of Jesus' model prayer found in Luke 11 that many give little thought to, **Luke 11:3 (NIV)** *Give us each day our daily bread.* Is Jesus really saying that "daily bread" is the only need you have to pray for?

Remember, this is a simple tool that Jesus gave his disciples, and to all who would follow him. It's a guide for prayer. Of course, it wasn't meant to be a complete list of everything that you can or should pray for! There are many things that we should be asking for!

After all, the apostle Paul referred to consistent prayer, saying, **Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)** ... *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.* And it's something he practiced! Even Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer – which proves that there is MUCH to pray for.

The Need for Intercessory Prayer

Prayer is important, but if God is sovereign, then why is it necessary to ask for things in prayer? We call this asking "intercessory prayer." The answer is connected to God's original plan when he created man and woman. Throughout the Bible, you can observe that God delegated authority and responsibility, for the care of all creation, to people. It all started with Adam and Eve, **Genesis 1:26 (NIV)** *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

Adam and Eve were to represent God on earth (as are all people after them). Though God is sovereign and all-powerful, he chooses to limit himself concerning the affairs of this earth. Instead, he often works through people!

This is exactly what one psalmist echoed, **Psalms 115:16 (NIV)** *The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given (assigned) to mankind.* The Hebrew word, "nathan," translated here as "given," means to assign. Put another way, God didn't give away ownership of the earth, BUT he did assign responsibility of ruling it to humanity. This is staggering and a key reason why you need prayer!

Jesus also told his followers to pray - your kingdom come, your will be done (**Matthew 6:10**). Surely, he wouldn't want you to waste your time asking for something that was going to happen anyways? Jesus anticipated that his followers would pray.

Consider the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 17 and 18. According to James 5, Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain for three years. After the three-year drought, God said to Elijah ... **1 Kings 18:1 (NIV)** *"Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."* According to verse 1, whose idea and will was it to send rain? God's! YET it required Elijah's perseverance in prayer to release God's will here on earth!

Now consider something else James reveals, **James 5:17-18 (NIV)** *Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.* Elijah was just like you! Did he ever sin? Was he ever discouraged? Did he ever want to quit? The Bible says, "yes," to all of these! But he prayed, and God moved. And the same can happen for you!

There are many stories in the Bible that highlight the incredible power of asking! When Abraham prayed on behalf of his nephew Lot, God spared Lot from the destruction that came on Sodom and Gomorrah. When Moses interceded, God changed his mind about killing Israel in the wilderness. When Daniel cried out to God in prayer, God set in motion the deliverance of Israel from Babylonian captivity. When the church prayed, Peter was set free from prison!

Some things God WILL NOT move, unless you pray! Your prayers do make a difference – a huge difference! It changes everything! God wants you to pray for his will to be done in every area of your life; in your family, in your friends' and acquaintances' lives, in your city, in your country, and beyond.

He is calling you, a follower of the Way, to learn and grow in this truth - prayers of faith are not praying once but persevering in prayer!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why is intercessory prayer (asking) necessary? What does it accomplish?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you persevered in asking God for something that built his kingdom in some way? Write down what happened.
2. Call, text or, email a few friends. Ask them if they have something to share in response to Question 1.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16.
4. Memorize Matthew 6:9-13.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 27:1-26.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.

3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

God DESIRES to Answer Our Prayers

A key reason why some don't make requests in prayer is because they're not convinced that God wants to answer. In response, Jesus told a powerful parable!

Luke 11:5-7 (NIV) *Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'*

Jesus is asking, "Can you imagine going to a neighbor, asking for help to entertain a friend and getting such a response – don't bother me?" The Middle Eastern responsibility for a guest is legendary; they are not just a guest of one home, but the entire community! Refusal in such a case is unthinkable.

Jesus continues the parable, "And can you imagine that the neighbor offers such silly excuses about sleeping children and a locked door?!" The scenario is so unimaginable that it's humorous to the listeners! Then Jesus brought home the lesson of the parable saying, **Luke 11:8 (NASB)** *I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

The significance of the passage hangs on the meaning of the Greek word "anaideia," translated persistence, which can have two meanings: shamelessness (a negative quality) or persistence (a positive quality). With only one exception from ancient Greek and the Greek version of the Old Testament, this word is translated as a negative (shame), never meaning persistence. It wouldn't even make sense culturally as a guest in the Middle East wouldn't have to ask but once!

Therefore, the guest is received because of the shamelessness of the SLEEPER! The sleeper knows the host must gather up the essentials for the banquet from the various neighbors. IF the sleeper refused the request of anything so humble as a loaf of bread the host would continue his rounds cursing the stinginess of the sleeper, who would not get up even to fulfill this small request. The story would be all over the village by morning. The sleeper would be met with cries of "shame" everywhere he went. Because he wants to avoid being shamed, the sleeper WILL rise and grant whatever the borrower wants.

This parable uses the lesser to greater argument. IF it is true that the sleeper will get up and get the bread, just to save face, THEN how much more will God, who loves you, grant your requests.

God Offers to KEEP on Answering

In Luke 11 above, you see the words, "ask, seek, and knock." There are so many things you can ASK for! For example, you can ask for food, resources to serve others, inner healing, growth in character, and more!

There are also many things you can SEEK for. What has been lost? You can pray for something you've misplaced or for a reminder of something you've forgotten. What about a restoration of strength, for

work? How about a family member, or friend, or co-worker who is not a follower of the Way – you can pray for them to be found – the Bible teaches that they are lost.

And you can KNOCK! This can include knocking on a door to gain entry to a closed opportunity.

Finally, it's important to note that all three verbs – ask, seek, and knock - are in the present tense and active voice, meaning that a better translation of what Jesus said is: “keep on asking,” “keep on seeking,” and “keep on knocking.” Yes, this means that you need to persevere, but it also points to this beautiful truth – if you ask in prayer God is SO good that you'll keep on receiving, finding, and experiencing open doors! Amen!

And here's something really exciting! Such promises aren't only for mature or long-term followers of the Way. They are for all who know Jesus! Praise God, praise God indeed!

Track Our Answers

A wise habit to get into is to find a place, perhaps in your journal, to track your answers to prayer. This is powerful for two reasons. First, it can spark gratitude in your heart, always a good thing! Why not begin your devotional time by journaling answers from the day before? This can make you more aware of what God's doing in your life! This can quickly lead to gratitude and this can ignite worship.

Second, it can inspire you to pray more. This is VITAL, as James says, **James 4:2 (NIV)** *You do not have, because you do not ask God.* When we see a growing list of what God's done, it can motivate us to get back to prayer, to ask for more and more of his purposes to be accomplished.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the point or points of the parable that was referred to today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Do you desire to pray? If not, don't be consumed by guilt. But DO plan to change this:
 - a. Make it your #1 prayer request
 - b. Ask your spouse or friend to begin praying for you to have a desire to pray
 - c. Track your answers to prayer every day
 - d. Make sure you BEGIN with thanksgiving of specific answers from the day, previous day, week, previous week, and so on! That will jump start your prayer time!
 - e. Make sure you include listening to God. It's amazing to hear him!
2. Review Matthew 6:9-13

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 27:27-44.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

God Desires to Give Us GOOD Gifts

As Jesus continues to teach on prayer, he asks a profound question and gives an amazing promise, **Luke 11:11-13 (NIV)** *Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, HOW MUCH MORE will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

Do you understand the power of what Jesus is saying? He's affirming that if an earthly father will only give appropriate gifts to his child, how much more will the heavenly Father give appropriate gifts to you, HIS child! Also, if an earthly father will give good gifts to his child, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to you, HIS child?

Luke even mentions the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the early church couldn't think of a better gift than the Holy Spirit! He's the best gift! God is THAT generous. All of this is summed up fairly well by Paul's incredibly encouraging words, **Romans 8:32 (NIV)** *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

God Promises to Answer Our Prayers – ALWAYS!

Paul tells believers, in one of his letters, **1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV)** ... *pray continually*. Why such a command? Because God ALWAYS answers prayers! ALWAYS! This is a truth emphasized in the Bible. Wow! Jesus was pointing to this when he said, **John 16:24 (NIV)** *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

Consider also his words in another book, **Matthew 21:22 (NIV)** *If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer*. Or another passage, **1 John 5:14-15 (NIV)** *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him*. Then in Jesus' famous teaching in John 15, he promises, **John 15:7 (NIV)** *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

We're looking at all these verses because this is incredible and shouldn't be forgotten! Paul even says this about God's generosity in answering prayers, **Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)** *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ...* Have you ever received something in prayer that you may have thought about but didn't pray for? Of course, you have! Praise God! God truly doesn't give us less than we ask.

And not only will he often give you MORE than you ask, but he will frequently give you BETTER than you ask. For example, three times Paul asked the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh (see **2 Corinthians 12:7**); but the Lord said he had something better in mind! What was it? To protect him from becoming prideful in how God was speaking to him and using him!

Someone once said: "The Lord cares more about the line of your eternity, than the dot of your present." Think about it: Paul is almost 2000 years into eternity already! Do you think he remembers that thorn in the flesh now? And if he does, isn't it just a faint memory?

You will not always get exactly what you pray for, but due to the goodness of God what you receive will be MORE AND BETTER. As has been noted, this is something Paul learned, saying, **2 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)** *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

No doubt it's a mystery to us at times of what God's up to. But may we not grow weary in prayer because of what's noted here. We should also be encouraged by the truth that many of the key redemptive turning points in the Old and New Testaments are accompanied by "asking, seeking, knocking." For example, Anna identified Jesus as the Messiah early on; Anna being someone who had been interceding for years. Another example is Jesus receiving the Spirit while praying. There are many more such instances!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What should motivate you to pray? What reasons are given in today's reading?
3. Will God only give you what you ask for? Explain your answer.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Throughout this lesson the power of prayer is noted. Of course, specific prayers are natural for someone in a relationship with a good Father. They also glorify God, in that you're more likely to praise him when you see specific answers. Therefore, think of something specific that you can pray for. Record this somewhere to help you to remember to pray about it every day.
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 27:45-66.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Boundary Markers for Answered Prayer

From what Jesus said about prayer above – e.g. "ask and you will receive" - it might appear that prayer is a "blank check" from God. Unfortunately, some have treated God's promises this way, and confused and hurt many people! Of course, it's wrong to believe that a person can be selfish and convince God to respond to all of their requests. Instead, there are three conditions, or boundary markers, for what guarantees an answer to prayer.

Boundary Marker 1: it must not dishonor God

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' disciples are told to pray, "Father, hallowed be your name." Surely then, God will not respond to requests that would diminish his glory.

Boundary Marker 2: it must not threaten his higher kingdom purposes

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, "your kingdom come." God is building his kingdom on earth, and this is an awesome thing! Therefore, he won't answer prayers that conflict with this goal.

Boundary Marker 3: it must not hurt us, ultimately

Yes, you'll experience suffering on this earth, but in the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught you to pray, "And lead us not into temptation" (these are things that will overwhelm or hurt you).

Remember what it said in Luke 11:13, that a good father would not give his child a snake or scorpion? These were common hazards in ancient Israel. Wouldn't that be harmful? Well, neither will God let you be exposed to something that would harm you beyond what may be useful for your spiritual growth. Yes, he allows and uses suffering, but we cannot expect answers to pray from him that will do us long-term damage.

An Objection

Some may object though to such boundary markers. After all, didn't Jesus say, "anything," specifically, **John 14:14 (NIV)** *You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.* He did! But please notice the phrase, "in my name." This isn't a formula or some kind of magic, but a boundary marker itself. Why did he include this? What does it mean?

First: it means praying in a way that is consistent with Jesus' character

In the ancient world, the "name" of a person represented every part of them, including their character. In fact, to have a good name was to have a good reputation, or in the words of Proverbs, **Proverbs 22:1 (NIV)** *A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*

And Jesus has a good name! The psalmist says, **Psalms 52:9 (NIV)** *I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good.* Obviously then, if there are warnings in the Bible to stay away from behaviors that bring harm to his name, then your prayers must line up accordingly. Further, we do well to do everything that keeps in mind Paul's stark statement, **Romans 2:24 (NIV)** *God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.* We wouldn't want that said about us! So let's pray consistent with HIS character!

Second: it means praying according to Jesus' will

John explains this very well, **1 John 5:14-15 (NIV)** *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.* This is slightly different than the first point. That is, it's possible to pray consistent with God's character, but it's something that varies for his will.

Is it God's character to be generous and bless his children? Yes. But his will won't be to always bless someone in the way that they think. For example, imagine that a young person is called to give up their career to follow God into full-time ministry inside the walls of a church. Suppose that this person refuses and instead asks God to bless them and advance their career. They would not be asking according to God's will, though God's character is to bless.

Third: it means praying and acting with Jesus's authority

When you pray consistent with Jesus' character and in line with his will for you, then you'll have his authorization and the power to carry it out! This can be observed in Peter's ministry, as recorded in

the book of Acts. Many were questioning his authority and the authority of other apostles. In response, they would talk of doing things in Jesus' name, or his authority. For example, **Acts 3:6 (NIV)** *Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And the lame man walked!*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 boundary markers for answers to prayer?
3. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? (there are 3 things shared in this lesson) Can you get anything you pray for then? Explain.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of anything from your past that you prayed for, that contradicts one of the boundary markers shared in today's reading?
2. Consider something that you have been praying for recently. Does it fit in with the boundary markers that were shared today? Is this request consistent with praying in Jesus' Name? Ask the Holy Spirit if you need to adjust how you pray for this request.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 28:1-10.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

So Then, Why Don't Disciples Pray More?

Here is a powerful and challenging quote, "the greatest tragedy is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer." You've seen what Jesus promised about prayer. It's incredible! However, why do so many struggle to pray? What are some reasons for unoffered prayer?

First: pride

One obvious form of pride is a religious pride that *theoretically* acknowledges Jesus and the Bible, but *practically* lives independently. Such people seldom, if ever, pray. They may attend church, but they don't really 'think' they need God! It may sound harsh, but they're self-deceived.

A second form of pride is uncovered when people become angry at God because he delays in answering, or because he answers differently than they ask, or because something tragic happened to them. In their hearts they 'fold their arms' in defiance or react with self-pity.

They stop talking to God. They think that they know better than God! They may not express such pride out loud, but they become deeply disappointed and silently give up praying. Often this prideful prayerlessness shows up both privately and through avoiding corporate prayer.

Such pride is so different from Job's response after hearing that EVERYTHING he owned had been taken or destroyed, and that ALL seven of his children were killed. **Job 1:20-22 (NIV)** *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

May that challenge any pride we might have!

Second: laziness or distractions

This usually comes from having too many comforts. As we get attached to the comforts of this world or perhaps face few real needs, it's easy to get distracted by things that don't impact eternity. We can be tempted to move in a direction towards what some have called, worldly 'Christianity.' If we move in this direction, it's easy to become undisciplined and not wake up to greet the risen Jesus in the mornings.

We may think that we're beyond such laziness, but even Jesus' twelve were not always prepared for prayer. Consider Jesus' words to them when he faced his most difficult hour, **Matthew 26:40 (NIV)** *Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?*

Third: unbelief

Some simply do not believe God when he says that when one prays, they will receive. And so they don't ask. But James says, **James 4:2 (NIV)** *"You do not have because you do not ask God."*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 reasons given for why some do not pray very much?
3. What are 2 forms of pride that can stop a person from praying?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Examine your life using the 3 reasons why people don't pray more. Be honest with yourself. Do any of these exist in your life?
2. Many cultures are very busy! Can you imagine standing before Jesus one day and realizing that you missed building his kingdom through prayer because of distractions? **Jonah 2:8 (NIV)** says, *"those who cling to worthless idols, forfeit the grace that could be theirs."* Ask the Holy Spirit if any of these things are idols in your life – sports, television and/or movies, video games, social media, reading simply to escape, a specific hobby. A hungry heart will confess and turn from any idols.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 28:11-20.

2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13.

Abide 15 – Jesus is to be Functional Lord of Our Lives

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

The word “Lord” is often seen as outdated and other names for Jesus seem to be more popular. However, “Jesus as Lord,” is a key truth in the New Testament. It’s not presented as optional, and if it’s ignored, the result is fragile Christians and ineffective churches. As Romans says, **Romans 10:9 (NIV)** ... *if you confess with your mouth that, “Jesus is Lord”* ... It’s interesting that he used the word “Lord” here, rather than Savior. It’s obviously vital!

When Jesus is ACTUALLY Lord of your life, it should impact everything, including how important decisions are made. Even if you’ve been a follower of Jesus for many years, can you say that he is Lord of every part of your life? Followers of the Way can always grow in this area. Another way of saying this is, is he your functional Lord? Is he actually functioning as the leader of your life or do you only use his name?

Thankfully, affirming Jesus as your functional Lord is a GREAT blessing, as he comes to bring freedom! As Paul notes, **2 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV)** *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* The Lord he’s talking about is Jesus!

Jesus: Great Shepherd of the Sheep for Today

Jesus is qualified to be your Lord, today, because he is a great Shepherd! Consider what Peter says, **1 Peter 2:25 (ESV)** *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* What a powerful metaphor! A Shepherd of your soul!

Several chapters later, Peter calls Jesus the Chief Shepherd of the sheep - which is the church (see **1 Peter 5:2,4**) This is wonderful news! As a Chief Shepherd, Jesus fully knows and understands his sheep – including YOU. Jesus explained it this way, **John 10:27 (NIV)** *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* Praise Jesus!

Since Jesus is God and was involved in the creation of each of his sheep, he knows what purpose you were created for. He also knows your future and all the Father's plans for you! Isn't this a relief? And the Chief Shepherd also knows THE future – what is coming for the entire world.

This is why, "Jesus as Lord," is not an expired, out-of-date idea. He knows EXACTLY how to shepherd and direct you and this makes him the only Lord that you'll need.

Finally, Jesus knows how to find lost sheep! What an incredible Shepherd! Here's a story from Pastor Ray Duerksen, illustrating this wonderful truth:

"Our son Stefan was listening to a song given to him by his brother, "Come, Just As You Are." You see, Stefan had thought that because of his past choices he wasn't worthy of salvation. Therefore, he had been consciously trying to become worthy of salvation. But the Spirit, knowing this, directed circumstances so that Stefan would hear the words of the song, "Come just as you are." And with that the Spirit opened his understanding and he was wonderfully saved!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why is Jesus qualified to be your Lord? What metaphor is used today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time in prayer asking this question – "Lord, show me what it means for you to be my Shepherd and for me to your sheep?" Write down what he shows you.
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13.

Bible Reading

1. For Abide 15, your Bible reading will include some of your memory verses AND their surrounding verses. Today, please read John 15:1-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

The Church Really Matters!

Did you know that when Jesus died, he died for all – every single person who would live – but he ALSO gave himself to create a church? It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that Jesus' plans are ONLY for individuals!

Instead, Jesus brilliantly balances the extraordinary value of each person, while also seeking to create and shape a beautiful community! Paul says that, **Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)** ... *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* Earlier in that same letter, in describing God's plans, he refers to the church this way,

Ephesians 2:21 (NIV) *In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

Jesus Is the “Owner” of the Church Today

The significance of the church to Jesus is highlighted many times in the New Testament. He LOVES the church! However, many churches and believers sadly act as if THEY are the owners of the church and managers of their own lives! Many denominations (groups of churches), church leaders, or church members are tempted to operate as though they are the earthly “owners.” Now these are appropriate “owners” for organizations that are of this world. But the church is to be different and not of this world!

The prophet Jeremiah, on the other hand, completely understood what everything belonged to, **Jeremiah 10:23 (NIV)** *LORD, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.*

Jesus is to be the owner of all churches, as he bought the church with his OWN blood (see **Acts 20:28**). Think about that for a moment. This is a very important truth! Then consider the pride of a person or group who acts as if they should be running things without the Lord?

Jesus said that HE would build his church, **Matthew 16:18 (NIV)** *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* The way to build Jesus’ church is NOT to ask the members what they want. The way to build Jesus’ church is NOT for the leaders to come up with their best plans.

The way to build Jesus’ church is to carry out what the true owner of the church wants. A radical shift in thinking is needed for this to happen. Local churches do NOT belong to you, nor to any boards or elders, nor to the pastors, nor to any denominations. And these local churches would do better if followers of the Way really understood how amazing Jesus is when we let him function as true owner. This is not a secondary matter but something of primary importance. Will you pray for this and work towards this as a follower of the Way and as a part of Christ’s church?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Typically, who do people view as the owner of local churches? Practically, how do churches or individual believers actually make decisions? Who should the true owner be?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Examine your current and past involvement with the church. Have there been moments when you acted like you were in charge or that your opinion mattered most? Have you ever interacted with others in word or deed in a way that suggested that Jesus wasn’t the actual owner? If yes, spend some time confessing this and acknowledging Jesus as the owner.
2. Spend some time praying for YOUR local church (followers of the Way pray for churches. It’s really important!). Pray that: 1) Jesus would be acknowledged as the owner 2) the leadership of the church would be humble enough to let Jesus lead 3) that the leadership of the church would be supported in their efforts to let Jesus lead 4) prior efforts to run things with one’s own plans or efforts would be turned from.

3. Spend some time praying for the churches of your country. Pray that: 1) Jesus would be acknowledged as the owner in all the churches in your country 2) the leadership of the churches would be humble enough to let Jesus lead 3) that the leadership of the churches would be supported in their efforts to let Jesus lead 4) prior efforts to run things with one's own plans or efforts would be turned from.

Bible Reading

1. For Abide 15, your Bible reading will include some of your memory verses AND their surrounding verses. Today, please read Romans 12:1-8.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Jesus Is Lord Of All TODAY

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a deeply troubling dream about a large statue (**Daniel 2**). Together with his friends, Daniel went to prayer to discover its meaning. Daniel grasped who the Lord of all is, including of dreams! When God revealed what the dream meant, Daniel praised the Lord, saying, **Daniel 2:21 (ESV)** *He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding*

When Daniel arrived at the king's court, he told Nebuchadnezzar that God was the provider of his kingdom, power, might, and glory (**Dan 2:37**). Nebuchadnezzar would be nothing without God allowing him to rule! Put another way, the dream that God gave Nebuchadnezzar was a reminder of who is Lord.

Then Daniel went on to discuss the king's dream of a grand statue, made of various metals, noting that these metals represented various kingdoms which would rise, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire.

Daniel ended his interpretation by telling the king that God had not only determined what the next kingdoms would be, but ALSO that a final one would be raised up, that God himself would rule. In fact, this kingdom would one day destroy all other earthly kingdoms and last forever! This is the kingdom that Jesus spoke of when he said, **Mark 1:15 (NASB)** *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*

Just before Jesus went back to heaven, he announced, **Matthew 28:18 (NIV)** *"... all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* Paul also said that the Father had placed everything under Jesus, **Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)** *And God placed all things under his feet ...*

That isn't something that *will* happen; it has ALREADY happened! As Paul describes the current role of Jesus, he says, **Philippians 2:9 (ESV)** *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name ...* And now, seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus REALLY rules in the affairs of people. Consider these words, found in the last book of the Bible, **Revelation 1:5 (NIV)** *... and*

from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Of course, at this time, there are stubborn pockets of resistance to Jesus' rule. But the final outcome is not in doubt; it has already been determined. In God's timing, all rebels will be defeated, and Jesus' rule will be fully established on earth.

Yes, rebellion continues, but the kingdom, like yeast, continues to spread, as the Lord TODAY guides all earthly matters to their conclusion. And so, followers of the Way are expected to keep praying, "your kingdom come," and engage in the battle for that final victory.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What biblical example is used at the beginning of today's reading to illustrate that Jesus is Lord of all, even today? Can you think of other verses or biblical examples that support this truth?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down a list of different areas in your life – i.e. specific relationships, finances. Thank Jesus that he is Lord over all of this! Also ask him to speak to you – "Jesus, is there something that I am not making you Lord over?" If he reveals something, write out a confession.
2. Pick 3 countries to pray for, other than for your home country. Start with praise – praise Jesus that he is Lord over all. Then ask God – "is there anything specific that I can pray for these countries?" Respond by spending time in prayer.

Bible Reading

1. For Abide 15, your Bible reading will include some of your memory verses AND their surrounding verses. Today, please read John 10:22-42.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Jesus ACTIVELY Rules His Churches Today. He is the Head

It's clear that Jesus ruled and directed his apostles before his crucifixion: he sent them to heal the sick; to preach the Gospel; fetch a colt for him; feed the thousands; prepare a room for him; and so on.

It's also obvious that Jesus led his apostles after his crucifixion, and before his ascension: he instructed Mary to tell the disciples that he had risen; directed the disciples to throw their nets on the other side of the boat; commissioned them to make disciples of all nations; and so on!

But here's a big question - "did Jesus directly rule and govern after his ascension?" The evidence overwhelmingly declares that he did AND does! This only makes sense as he's presented as the head of

the church. In the words of Paul, **Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)** *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

This reality requires that you, and all followers of the Way, should respond to his active leadership by intentionally seeking him. He is to be supreme, as is also indicated by Paul, **Colossians 1:18 (NIV)** *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*

What are some biblical examples of Jesus' active leadership?

First: how the gospel got to the Gentiles (those who aren't Jewish)

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was a God-fearing man who gave generously to those in need, and he prayed regularly. One day, God gave him a vision in which an angel told him to send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Peter, who was staying at the place of a man named Simon.

As the servants approached Joppa the next day at noon, Peter went up on the roof to pray, and fell into a trance. Peter saw a vision of a large sheet being let down to earth, containing all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles and birds. Then Peter heard a voice telling him to kill and eat from these animals, which Peter saw as ceremonially unclean.

At first Peter resisted, but the voice persisted three times. Now, that's directive! While Peter was pondering the meaning of all this, Cornelius's men arrived inquiring if there was a Peter staying there – there WAS!!! And while they were asking, the Spirit of Christ says to Peter, "Three men are looking for you. Get up and go with them, for I have sent them." Without Jesus clearly directing Peter, there is NO WAY that he would have gone with those Gentiles and entered their house – it was forbidden for a Jew to enter a Gentile's house!!

But Peter OBEYED the Lord who was ACTIVELY leading! As a result, the gospel ended up going to the Gentiles!

Second: how the Gospel got to Europe and Africa

The book of Acts highlights the early days of the church, and how the gospel began to spread. It's a thrilling book! Now notice the direction that Paul received from the Holy Spirit, similar to how Peter was specifically led, **Acts 16:6-7 (NIV)** *Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them.*

Not once, but twice on the same journey, the Spirit changed their plans. And the following three verses then go on to say that they went down to Troas, where Paul had a vision (from the Lord) about a man from Macedonia begging them to come over. They concluded, it says, that the Lord had called them to preach there instead. This is how the gospel got to Europe!

You can also read of how the gospel got to Africa. In Acts it says, **Acts 8:26 (NIV)** *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."* Now do angels go around doing what they please? No. This angel had an assignment from Jesus! And

what ends up happening is that Philip encounters a eunuch from Ethiopia – yes, from Africa. He ends up giving his life to Jesus and tradition supports the idea that this is how the gospel got to Africa.

In Acts alone, the Holy Spirit is said to: choose church leaders, warn church leaders, resolve church problems, give prophetic words through people, judge people, and direct church leaders. This is because ONLY the Lord has all the information necessary to guide his kingdom and his church! No wonder that as the church listened and obeyed the Lord, amazing things happened. He truly is meant to be the functional Lord of the church and the life of every single follower of the Way.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What evidence is there that Jesus is still leading the church after he ascended?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Ask the Lord to give you examples of where he has led the church that you're currently a part of. If no examples come to your mind, simply pray for him to lead your church.
2. Send an email, text, or call 3 friends. Ask them to share how Jesus has used the church to help them walk with him.

Bible Reading

1. For Abide 15, your Bible reading will include some of your memory verses AND their surrounding verses. Today, please read Colossians 3.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Jesus Is Evaluating Churches From Heaven

Jesus is meant to be functional Lord! Are we willing to let him lead in every area of our lives TODAY? As the leader, Jesus has every right to evaluate churches, and each follower in each church! He is still leading, as the book of Revelation highlights. In Revelation 2 and 3, you can observe five parts of Jesus' evaluation.

First: Jesus commended their correct behavior

For example, see what he said to the church at Ephesus, **Revelation 2:2 (NIV)** *I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.*

Second: Jesus challenged them to persevere

To the church at Smyrna he urged, **Revelation 2:10 (NIV)** *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Third: Jesus rebuked them for bad heart attitudes and behavior

He rebuked the church at Pergamum like this, **Revelation 2:14 (NIV)** *Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.*

Fourth: Jesus warned the churches of discipline and judgment

See how Jesus warned the church in Thyatira, **Revelation 2:21-23 (NIV)** *I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.*

Fifth: Jesus called the churches to repent

There's an example of this in his command to the church in Sardis, **Revelation 3:3 (NIV)** *Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.*

Remember that Jesus was doing all of this in THEIR “present time.” And he warned the church in Ephesus that if they did not respond, he would remove their lampstand. This means that even if they kept meeting, he wouldn't be there with them! Jesus can do this because he is STILL evaluating and ruling his local churches.

Is He Lord?

Jesus asked many challenging questions! Here's one example, **Luke 6:46 (NIV)** *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* Of course, you can't know what Jesus, by his Spirit, is saying unless you hear his voice. This again emphasizes the need to abide!

Or as Revelation says multiple times, **Revelation 2:7 (NIV)** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* This pattern of listening to the Spirit and then carrying out God's will was even modeled by Jesus. He said, **John 5:30 (NIV)** *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.* Wow!

And so this is what he expects you to do – to listen to and follow him by his Spirit, both through your Bible and otherwise.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 5 parts were there to Jesus' evaluation of the churches?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. You're part of the church! Ask God to evaluate your life – as a member of the church. Does he have an encouragement, challenge, rebuke, warning, or promise for you? (or all of these!) Write down what you receive.
2. Share what you received in Question 1 with someone who is close to you.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8, John 10:27, James 1:22, Psalm 1, Colossians 3:2, Psalm 39:4, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:9-13.

Bible Reading

1. For Abide 15, your Bible reading will include some of your memory verses AND their surrounding verses. Today, please read Psalm 39.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Sometimes we experience God's presence when we take a risk and bless someone that is difficult to bless. Put another way, the joy of abiding in Christ often comes as we step out and love others. Identify someone that you can bless in the next few days and plan for when you'll take action.

Abide 16 – The Value of the Church

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

As we reach this final lesson of Abide in Christ, it's time to balance out what the lessons have taught us up to this point. It's true that we CAN and MUST abide in Christ in a direct relationship with him. However, we'll end up in imbalance if we think that this is the only way we connect to Jesus.

In addition to receiving much-needed grace directly from Jesus, we also require the grace of Jesus that he only offers through his church! What do we mean when we say "church?" To begin with, we don't mean a building. The Greek word "ecclesia" translated, "church," means assembly. It's a gathering of followers of the Way meeting together, whether in someone's house, in a large meeting place or under a tree.

The idea of community shouldn't surprise us, as the concept is rooted in divine community: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Further, this is different than all other human communities, such as unions or clubs, as Christian community is rooted in our shared relationship with Jesus. It unites us in our diversity: rich and poor; married and single; male and female; etc.

Many believers have become thoroughly influenced by increasing individualism in their cultures, so that the necessary role of the church in the salvation of the world and of our spiritual growth has been almost entirely lost. Some are believing a lie, that Christianity is all about "me believing in Jesus." This is even reflected in many worship songs today, which use singular personal pronouns (I, me), rather than the plural personal pronouns (we, us).

John Wesley said, "the New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion." We are called to genuine fellowship with one another. It's not an option. That's why Paul says, **Romans 12:5 (NIV)** ... *so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others*. Did you notice that if we're "in Christ" we are in a body? Elsewhere, Paul affirms, **1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)** *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*. It doesn't get more plain than that!

According to these passages, to be a follower of Jesus is to be joined to Christ, and to be joined to Christ is to be connected to his church. Of course, someone might argue that they're happy to be joined to the universal church, but don't want to be an active part of a local church. That's as foolish as saying "I want to become a member and pilot in Canadian Air Force, but I don't want to join a visible fighting unit that meets together for training, planning and deployment as a squadron." Or "I want to become a member of the National Football League, but I don't want to join a visible local team that meets together for training, practicing and deployment on game day as a team." How bizarre!

We observe that in the early church, people were added to the number of the church immediately after getting saved, **Acts 2:41 (NIV)** *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.* The following verses – verses forty-two to forty-seven – clearly describe their activity as a church. They weren't simply a number, but engaging, serving, praising and ministering to one another. They WERE together, MET together and ATE together. In fact, verse 42 starts with the word "they," firmly establishing that the church is to be corporate in a real, experienced sense.

Some might say, "I don't need to be a part of any local church. I'm a part of the invisible church." But when they're sick in the hospital, who visits them? The invisible pastor? In fact, there are many biblical commands that cannot be obeyed unless one is a part of a local church, such as submitting to, loving and serving one another. Some might claim to love God, but to love God is to obey his commands – including those that relate to the local church. Local churches are Jesus' passion, as it should be for his followers!

Jesus Values the Church

Jesus greatly values the church, and this includes every specific local church. We know this for a few reasons. First, he said he would build his church, **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)** *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Jesus' willingness to ensure that the church is prevailing against the gates of hell is evidence of how valuable the church is to him.

Jesus does use others to build the church, as it's, **Ephesians 2:20 (NIV)** *... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* Here again we see the investment of Jesus, especially as the chief cornerstone.

Second, Jesus died for his church. Acts records this powerful thought about the church, **Acts 20:28 (NIV)** *Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.* What a declaration of the value of the church! As Jesus himself proclaims, **John 15:13 (ESV)** *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Finally, Jesus continues to love the church, even with all its imperfections. If he does, why wouldn't we? The apostle Paul describes his ongoing activity with the church, love is central, **Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV)** *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* Four times here, Paul restates that Jesus is making his church holy, using various words and phrases.

We receive an amazing picture of Jesus' continuing love for and work in the church in the book of Revelation, as he addresses seven specific local churches. We again see that this isn't about a vague

universal church, but specific groups of believers. He evaluates, commends, exhorts, rebukes, warns and comforts them. Therefore, if he's interested and invested in local churches, so will his followers. Revelation describes Jesus as walking among the lampstands, with the lampstands representing churches.

This is the work he was and is doing after he ascended to heaven. That is, he's still walking among his lampstands. For what purpose? To continue to lead and guide them, as highlighted in Abide 15. Jesus doesn't want his churches to miss out on all that he has waiting for them. He also wants them to stand with confidence before him at judgment. Again, this clearly illustrates his love.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How do we know that God desires for every follower of the Way to be connected to and involved in a local church?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Would you say that you're loving a specific local church, as Jesus would expect and command? Invite Jesus to speak to you about this.
2. Ask Jesus to remind you of times that a local church (or specific people in it) have helped you grow in your walk with Jesus. Also ask Jesus to remind you of where you have helped others. Write these examples down. Perhaps commit to sending a thank you note to those who have helped you.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Psalm 133.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

We Join Jesus In Building His Sacred Temple, The Church

As we saw earlier, Jesus said he would build his church (**Matthew 16:18**). However, he calls us to join him in this great work. Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the church, **1 Corinthians 3:9 (NIV)** *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

Paul continues to note that he had been asked to lay the foundation for the church, which is Jesus Christ, **1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NIV)** *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Notice that it doesn't end with Paul! Paul teaches that all followers of Jesus can and are expected to make a contribution to the building of the church. That is, "each one should build with care." We are all co-laborers.

Further, Paul also turns his attention to HOW we participate in building the church. Already noting the idea of care, he continues, **1 Corinthians 3:12-13 (ESV)** *Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw – each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.* Each believer is to make every effort to help build the church in a way that honors God, as guided by the Bible, with no short cuts.

In fact, this is so important that the quality of our work will be tested by God and, **1 Corinthians 3:14-15 (NIV)** *If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

All of this is serious enough that Paul adds a striking warning, **1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NIV)** *Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.* The warning of Paul is tied to the reality that, in God’s eyes, the temple (the church) is sacred. This a truth that is repeated often in the New Testament. While we may be tempted to individualize it, this is a corporate requirement first and foremost.

What does it mean for the church to be sacred? It’s true that when we give our lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to dwell within us. Romans tells us, **Romans 8:9 (NIV)** *... and if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.* However, it’s also true that the Holy Spirit dwells in the church. And THIS is what makes the church sacred!

The church is not just a “called out for a purpose” collection of believers – it’s a group of believers in which the Spirit of the living God dwells. That is what makes it holy! In the Old Testament, if anyone dishonoured the temple, they were punished.

For example, Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord at the Tabernacle. The result? Fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them (see **Leviticus 10:1-3**). Similarly, God’s church is now his dwelling place and is considered sacred.

For this reason, Paul warns that if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. Is there any evidence for this? Yes. In Acts 5, there is the example of Ananias and Saphira. In Revelation, the church of Ephesus is told that their lampstand would be removed and they would lose their status as a church.

Then the church in Pergamum had those who, if they didn’t repent, would experience Jesus warring against them. Finally, in Thyatira they had an evil prophetess who was threatened with being thrown on a sickbed, and those following her would be faced with great tribulation and the death of their children. All of these examples, and there are more, are in the context of Jesus’ ongoing ministry to specific local churches.

Purposes For The Church

First: to minister to God – worship

Paul directs the church at Colossae to worship her Lord, **Colossians 3:16 (ESV)** *... singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* God has destined us and appointed us who are in Christ, “to live for the praise of his glory” (**Ephesians 1:12**). This means that worship in

the church is not merely a preparation for a sermon or something else. Instead, worship itself fulfills a major purpose.

Second: to minister to believers – nurture

To “nurture” something is to be involved in helping it grow. This is a significant reason for the church to exist. To INTENTIONALLY assist others in growing in Christ. Ephesians describes it this way, **Ephesians 4:11-13 (ESV)** *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 ...*

Elsewhere, Paul defined his own role to, **Colossians 1:18 (NIV)** *... present everyone fully mature in Christ.* Indeed, God greatly desires to see increasing numbers make an initial commitment to Christ, but churches are to move forward in nurturing, which many call, “making disciples” (see **Matthew 28:19-20**).

Third: to minister to the world – evangelism and mercy

As we just noted, making disciples is to be a part of the nurturing work of the church. Jesus commanded, **Matthew 28:19 (NIV)** *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...* This evangelistic work of declaring good news is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world.

Yet accompanying the work of evangelism is also a ministry of mercy, a ministry that includes caring for the poor and needy in the name of Jesus. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, to do good, and to lend, expecting nothing in return. Then our reward will be great and we will be sons of the Most High. In fact, we’re encouraged to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful (**Luke 6:35-36**). What a beautiful and challenging purpose!

The point of Jesus’ explanation is that we are to imitate God in being kind to those who are being ungrateful and selfish, not just to those in the family of God. Moreover, we have the example of Jesus who didn’t only heal those who accepted him as Messiah. Rather, **Luke 4:40 (NIV)** *At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.*

This encourages us to carry out deeds of kindness and to pray for healing and other needs, in the lives of unbelievers as well as believers. Such ministry of mercy to the world may also include participation in civic activities or attempting to lovingly influence governmental policies to make them more consistent with biblical norms. Further, in areas where there is systematic injustice manifested in the treatment of the poor, or ethnic or religious minorities, the church should also pray and—as it has opportunity—speak against such injustice.

Of course, such ministries of mercy to the world should never become a substitute for genuine evangelism or for other areas of ministry to God and to believers.

Fourth: to be the pillar and foundation of the truth

To grasp the significance of this, we have to first establish the importance of truth. At Jesus’ dramatic trial before Pilate, Jesus revealed a purpose in coming into the world, **John 18:37 (NLT)** *Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true.*

Jesus talked a lot about the truth and used the phrase “I tell you the truth” over seventy times. What do we mean by truth? Truth is that which conforms to fact or reality – the way things really are. Already at the beginning, we see a battle over truth in the Garden of Eden. Different claims to truth are made – i.e., God vs. the devil. In a sense, Adam and Eve’s sin was to deny truth.

Currently, Satan is now the prince and ruler of much of this world (see **John 12:31** and **Ephesians 2:2**). His main goal is to enslave and control through lies. It’s not surprising then that authoritarian and even so-called democratic governments use lies to control people. They also blatantly or subtly use media and education systems to maintain their grip on power and control others.

Further, many corporations use falsehoods to attract customers to their products, even if their products hurt these consumers. For example, think about the clever claims of the tobacco, alcohol, drug and pornography industries. They’re meant to enslave their customers to bring profit to the corporations.

But the good news is that God’s truth, even now, promises to set people free from the enslavement that comes from Satan’s lies, IF they will believe and follow God’s truths. Jesus promised, **John 8:32 (NIV)** *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* Of course, it’s not just knowing or believing the truth that sets us free; it’s obeying and living it out.

As Paul emphasizes, **Romans 6:16 (ESV)** *Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

It’s also interesting that Jesus didn’t just claim to testify to truth, but also called himself the truth, **John 14:6 (NIV)** *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”* What an incredible statement! What did he mean by this? It means that he is the source of ALL truth. And what does this have to do with the church?

Well, we know that Jesus is no longer walking on the earth. Therefore, he has commanded the church to fulfill the vital role of being a continuing guardian, representative and example of the truth! What a responsibility, or as Paul says, **1 Timothy 3:14-15 (NIV)** *I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Why is the church sacred? What does this mean?
3. What 4 purposes of the church are highlighted today? Explain them in your own words.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you’re a follower of the Way, God has called you to partner with others in fulfilling the purposes of the church. Spend some time evaluating how you’re doing with each purpose and ask God to

give you ideas on how to increase your obedience. If you're a parent, you can also ask him to give you insights on how to lead your family in this direction.

2. To walk out God's purposes will require God's heart with God's power. Invite God to make your heart more like his and to fill you with his Spirit, for his purposes.

Bible Reading

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Benefits Of The Local Church – Part 1

First: protection from deception

In the previous section, we learned that the church is to be a pillar and foundation of truth. Therefore, in discussing the benefits of a local church, we start with how it can protect us from deception. Those who isolate themselves can become easy prey for the devil who, **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)** ... *prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

An individualistic Christian can think they aren't deceived. But here's the problem with that: a person doesn't KNOW when they're deceived! By integrating into a church that teaches and seeks to live the Bible, it'll be harder to slip into deception. As a person is nurtured in the church, Paul says the result is, **Ephesians 4:14-15 (NIV)** *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

Second: to experience the presence of God

One of the primary ways in which we can experience and know Jesus is through the church. In Philippians, Paul emphasizes the many benefits of knowing Jesus, including an incredible inheritance of joy and peace! However, in Ephesians, he elevates the church as a primary way of experiencing Jesus (and the benefits). Put another way, without the church, we'll miss out on so much in our relationship with Jesus. How sad!

For example, a chief way that God draws near to us is when followers of the Way gather together. Jesus declared, **Matthew 18:20 (ESV)** *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.* While it's amazing to pray for God to bring revival, where a sense of his presence increases, his ultimate goal isn't to simply "visit." It's to dwell among and within us in a powerful and consistent way!

Or as Paul exclaims, **2 Corinthians 6:16 (ESV)** *For we (the church) are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* A key purpose for the church then is to be a place for God to live, so that we can enjoy his presence!

In the Old Testament God dwelt in a temple built with hands (i.e., see **2 Chronicles 7:1-3**). But now God is present in the church. Of course, in one sense, God is present everywhere. However, in another sense, we can also seek his “manifest presence,” where we closely experience him.

A simple but imperfect way of understanding this is as follows. When a husband is away from their wife, they can still bring them to mind. That is, they, in a sense, can still have them present through a mental image or memory. Nevertheless, it’s QUITE different when they’re physically in the room. They are “manifest.”

God, of course, can bring us greater pleasure than any human being. In fact, when we experience God for who he is, we’ll lose our appetite for what Hebrews calls, **Hebrews 11:25 (NIV)** ... *the fleeting pleasures of sin*. What a wonderful result of being closer to God! Yet, as a reminder, a person is deceived if they think that they can experience this without connecting with a local church.

Third: for spiritual growth and maturity

Spiritual growth will require much more than exposure from good teaching and preaching. You’ll need the entire church for maturity, which is why only listening to sermons online is lacking. For a spruce tree to grow well, they require soil that has a balance of twelve specific nutrients.

In a way, we’re no different than such trees. We need the many parts (nutrients) that the body of Christ provides. Paul emphasizes that, **1 Corinthians 12:21 (ESV)** *The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”* Therefore, any follower of Jesus who thinks that they don’t need the local church is very misguided.

A person may be blessed with a wonderful Christian family that ministers to one another. However, no matter how gifted or mature, they’ll be missing spiritual gifts required for growth. It would be very prideful or selfish to suggest otherwise. Further, the family of God will need them too! Paul highlights, **1 Corinthians 12:7 (NLT)** *A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.*

Some may suggest that they have the Bible and that’s all they need. The Bible is VERY important (it’s difficult to overstate its importance!) for spiritual growth, but not enough. We need the ministry of others. The Bible itself spends greater time highlighting the ministry of people to one another, even using the words of God, rather than simply relying on the Bible alone.

Consider how Paul instructs Timothy, **1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)** *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching ... Preach the Word ... correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.* Did you notice that all of the actions can only be done in a community of local believers?

God designed spiritual growth to happen in community. There are many examples. In fact, there are thirty “one another” commands that can ONLY be fulfilled in the Church – when you’re together! First, we’re told to love one another (**John 13:14**). This means that all the love a person requires will not come directly from the Head, Jesus Christ, but indirectly from the Head through his body, the church!

Second, we're commanded to accept one another, as God in Christ has accepted us (**Romans 15:7**). Therefore, some of the acceptance we need is going to come through others! Third, we're encouraged to instruct one another (**Romans 15:14**). That means that we're not going to be able to get all our understanding directly from Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit.

Finally, comfort can come from others. Jesus certainly can comfort us, but he often uses others. This is the reason that we're told to comfort one another (**2 Corinthians 13:11**).

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 3 benefits of the local church are discussed today? Explain them in your own words.
3. What are some of the "one anothers" listed in the New Testament, that can only happen as followers of the Way gather together? You can go to biblegateway.com and look them all up!

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you're a follower of the Way, you can experience the benefits of the church. Spend some time listing off your personal journey in experiencing the benefits noted today.
2. Invite God to speak to you about anything that is hindering you from experiencing the benefits that were shared today. If he reveals any hinderances, also ask him to show you how to overcome them. Let's take this seriously, as we remember how valuable the church is to Jesus.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Proverbs 3.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Benefits Of The Local Church – Part 2

Fourth: to get more of our prayers answered

It's fascinating that prayer for one another has a great impact. Paul pleaded, **2 Corinthians 1:11 (ESV)** *You also must HELP us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.* There is a theme in Paul's letters (and Peter's), where he's clearly teaching that receiving what he needs is connected to the prayers of others.

As a result, some unanswered prayer can be traced to an unwillingness to engage with a community of believers. This is very sobering. Further, and we'll be very direct here, how unselfish and unloving it would be to only ask for prayer, while otherwise ignoring the very people we ask; this isn't what Jesus intended.

Fifth: to keep us passionate for God

In the same way that being in community with the world can bring us DOWN to its level, being in community with the church can bring us UP. This is why the Bible instructs, **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)** *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Of course, some of this happens in a positive way through words of encouragement and modelling. For example, if you're actively involved in a small group, and have been neglecting Bible reading or prayer, a testimony of another person may increase your passion again. At other times, the journey of following Jesus can become so burdensome and difficult that we would quit if it wasn't for other saints who are alongside of us.

On the one hand Jesus, the Head of the church, tells us to bring our burdens to him (**Matthew 11:28-30**). On the other hand, we're told, **Galatians 6:2 (NIV)** *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."*

Sixth: for protection from Satan

Being in the church and under godly authority can bring spiritual protection. Did you catch the word, "godly?" It's a key qualifier, as there are ungodly forms of authority that need to be challenged and avoided.

When such proper authority exists, one can experience the blessing of spiritual authority. There are a few New Testament passages that teach this (i.e., **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**). It's actually why Paul gives this instruction about some troublemakers, **1 Timothy 1:20 (NIV)** *Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.*

How did the Corinthian church hand this man over to Satan? Simply by putting him out of their fellowship, as those outside the church are in Satan's realm. Or in John's words, **1 John 5:19 (ESV)** *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

Satan can't work inside the church in the same way that he can work in the world. First, in the world, we've already seen that lies often reign. Second, the church is where God dwells. Put another way, being in the fellowship of a local church can offer some protection, as a type of refuge. Of course, as churches aren't perfect, one will need to stay connected to Jesus for full protection.

The wisdom books of the Old Testament frequently point to the value of having others in our lives, especially those who are in Christ. For example, we read that, **Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT)** *A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

Our planet was designed by God to be a habitable place for human beings to live in. Therefore, if a person leaves the planet, they enter a hostile and uninhabitable environment. Similarly, God intended the church to be a habitable place for Christians to live and thrive in. But if they leave the protection of a healthy church, they move into a spiritually hostile territory.

Seventh: a healthy church benefits a community, which directly benefits us

A healthy, vibrant and growing local church directly benefits the community, which benefits us. For example, Sodom could have escaped judgment had only ten righteous people been found there. Further, research confirms that healthy, local churches provide many benefits to their surrounding communities. Further, in 2017, Dr. John Longhurst wrote an article entitled, “Places of Worship and the Halo Effect,”

A study done in Canada, called the Halo Project Calculator, was made available for cities across Canada by Cardus, a think tank based in Ontario. The study found that for every dollar spent by a congregation, about \$4.77 of common good was generated (called the “halo effect”) in areas such as open space, educational programs, magnet effect (drawing people into a community for weddings, funerals, concerts, conferences, and other events), individual impact (better employers and employees and citizens; volunteerism; etc.), and community development. Across Canada, Cardus estimates that places of worship in nineteen major cities produce an economic benefit of \$19.9 billion dollars!

Eighth: synergy

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV) *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Notice that they have a better return on their work together, than if they do it alone. We know this to be true in life.*

For example, it is a proven fact that two Persian horses yoked together can pull more than the sum total of the two horses pulling individually. Similarly, when we band together in a church, we can accomplish much more than the sum of our individual efforts because of the principle of synergy. We can have MUCH MORE impact as a body.

That’s one of the reasons why God wants to combine us, **1 Corinthians 12:12, 21, 24-25 (NIV)** *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body ... The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ... But God has combined the members ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*

Ninth: accountability

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV) *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* In the same way that being in community with the world will bring you DOWN to its level, being in community with the church will bring you UP to their level.

Of course, much of this includes positive encouragement and modeling. But some may even happen in a negative way, through discipline. Paul gives an example, **1 Corinthians 5:5, 11 (ESV)** *... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord ... But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

The deliverance of the person over to Satan may very well be accomplished by removing the person from the church. **1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (ESV)** *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

There are three purposes for church discipline. First, to help redeem the person, especially that they may be saved at judgment, **1 Corinthians 5:5 (ESV)** *... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord ...* Included is that the person learns to not sin, **1 Timothy 1:20 (NIV)** *Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.* If they respond, then they can be eventually restored, **2 Thessalonians 3:14 (NIV)** *Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed.*

Second, church discipline can prevent the spread of sin. As Paul exclaims, **1 Corinthians 5:6-7 (NIV)** *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

Finally, discipline can be used to avoid the appearance of approving sinful behaviour. Paul provides instruction on this too, **1 Corinthians 5:11-13 (NIV)** *But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 benefits of the local church are discussed today? Explain them in your own words.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Spend some time listing off your personal journey in experiencing the benefits that were noted today.
2. Write out a prayer of praise to God for his plans for churches. The failings of churches aren't his fault. His vision for the church is wonderful! Spend some time praising him for your specific local church.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Psalm 84.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Committing To The Local Church

The New Testament doesn't talk about ONE commitment that every follower of Jesus is to make; it talks about two, **2 Corinthians 8:5 (NIV)** ... *they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will*. First, we are to commit our lives to Christ; then we are to commit ourselves to Christ's church!

Isn't it interesting, maybe even sad, that many people know John 3:16, but not 1 John 3:16, **1 John 3:16 (ESV)** *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*. Just as a lifelong commitment to a marriage requires thousands of specific choices, so will a person's commitment to a local church.

But what about the hypocrisy and sin in the church? Certainly, churches should do everything possible to grow in character. That's why we have a whole manual titled, *Grow Your Character*. Further, we're a hypocrite if we think that we're righteous and everyone else isn't. It would also be prideful to think this way. This may sound harsh, but it only follows logically. Isn't it true that we sometimes point fingers at others to simply provide us with an excuse to not get involved?

Moreover, as we stated earlier in this lesson, Jesus LOVES the church! Repeating the words of Paul, **Ephesians 5:25 (NIV)** *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. The church is the Bride of Jesus (see **Revelation 21:2**). How would a loving husband like it if someone said to them, "I like you, but I can't stand your wife?" In the same way, Jesus is offended if a person won't love his Bride.

Remember, it is God who chose to identify Jesus as the Head but leave the designation of body to the church. This is very important, with many consequences. Of course, it doesn't take any special qualities or any character to criticize and reject the church – anyone can do that.

As we complete these Abide lessons, we invite you to again commit to loving Jesus' body, the church. The band Vertical Worship conveyed a proper love of the church through their song, *Who Will Rise Up*:

When she's crying
When she's hurting
When she's fallen and can't go on
When she's broken into pieces
In her mourning has lost her song

Who will help the church
The one that Christ loves
Who will rise up
Who will rise up
How long will we wait
How much will it take
Who will rise up
Who will rise up

It's not an exaggeration to say that a person who isn't fully committed to Christ's body, the church, is someone not close to Christ. Closeness to Jesus will only draw one closer to his other children. Further, the difference between a church attender and one who loves Christ's church can be summed up in one word: commitment.

Just as a marriage is a covenant between husband and wife, there is to be a covenant between believers. God is the inventor of covenants and they are actually a very beautiful thing! Of course, just as no bride or groom will keep be perfect as they fulfill their covenant, one's commitment to a local church cannot require perfection. As God shows us grace, we must also show grace to one another in his body.

Finally, even as we commit to a local church, we keep in mind that God's work in the body of Christ is "trans-local." This means that it extends beyond any one local church. Earlier in this lesson we introduced the word "ecclesia." It can be used in multiple ways. First, it represents specific local churches. Second, it points to a citywide grouping of churches – i.e. the church of Ephesus was various specific local churches.

Third, it exists beyond narrow cultural and political lines. Here we might think of the church of Canada or North America, existing in various ethnic groups contained in these regions (French, Hispanic, etc.). Finally, the ecclesia is universal, consisting of believers globally. Therefore, even as we practice the commands of the Bible within one local body, we must never forget (or cease to pray for) the trans-local forms of the ecclesia.

After all, the church that the New Testament reveals is one that is like a series of waves or ripples produced by a rock thrown into water. The Rock is Jesus, who began the church. Each wave is both particular and one with the other waves. You can see each distinctive wave, yet you can't really see where one wave breaks off and the next one begins, for they're interconnected.

Jesus advanced this vision of the church just before he ascended to heaven, when he mapped out the trajectory of the church, **Acts 1:8 (NIV)** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Amen!*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How would you describe the word "commitment?"

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Find the song "Who Will Rise Up" online. Listen to it at least once.
2. Write out a prayer of commitment to God, regarding his church generally, and your specific local church.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Hebrews 10.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. You've finished all sixteen lessons! Congratulations! This investment of time will bear much fruit in your life.
2. Spend some time writing out a prayer to God, thanking him for the journey you have been on. Also thank him for others who are on this journey with you!
3. Are you committing to continued growth? What is your next step? *Followers of the Way: A Discipleship Pathway* has something called *Grow Your Character* lessons, if you're interested. There are also other lessons as well.
4. Spend some time asking God – are there others that I can walk this journey with, encouraging them to also go through Abide? Perhaps re-do it with them! It might be one person or an entire group. Be bold in inviting others to experience the life found in Jesus!