



THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Resources for Spiritual Formation

ISLAND ECC

Companion material for the sermon series Rivers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	About this booklet 4
I. Discipline For Godliness	Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life 6 Soul Keeping 8 The Reality of Spiritual Warfare 9 Maintaining Your Own Spiritual Life 10 Spiritual Formation as Character Development 12 Connecting with God 14
II. Bible Intake	What is the Bible? 16 The Importance of the Bible 18 Include God in Your Day 20 Ideas for Personal Devotions 22 The Value of a Life Verse 24 Going Deep in the Bible 26 Inductive Bible Study 28
III. Prayer and Solitude	What is Prayer? 30 A Brief Theology of Prayer 32 Basics for Disciplined Prayer 33 Praying the Lord's Prayer 34 Daily Pauses 35 An Experience of Solitude and Silence 36 Journaling 38 The Heart of Fasting 40
IV. Worship	The Necessity of Sabbath 42 The Power of Sabbath Rest 43 The Privilege of Corporate Worship 44 Treasuring Worship Music 46
V. Community	The Vitality of Community 48 Building Community for One Another 50
VI. Service and Outreach	The Joy of Serving 52 Sharing the Good News 54 The Mission of Christ 56 The Practice of Stewardship 58
Conclusion	The Spiritual Continuum 60

INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains basic resources to assist those who desire to have stability, growth and maturity in their spiritual life. The material stands upon the foundations of centuries of scholarship and practical theology in spiritual disciplines while adding newer emphasis on how these are a means for grace and joy in our lives as we follow Christ.

The concept that our spiritual life should be grounded in habits of grace has recently been captured in a book by that name. David Mathis writes:

The means of grace fleshed out in various habits of grace are to be the means of joy in God. And so, the simplicity, stability, confidence, power, and joy of God Himself stand behind these means. These are the path of His promise.

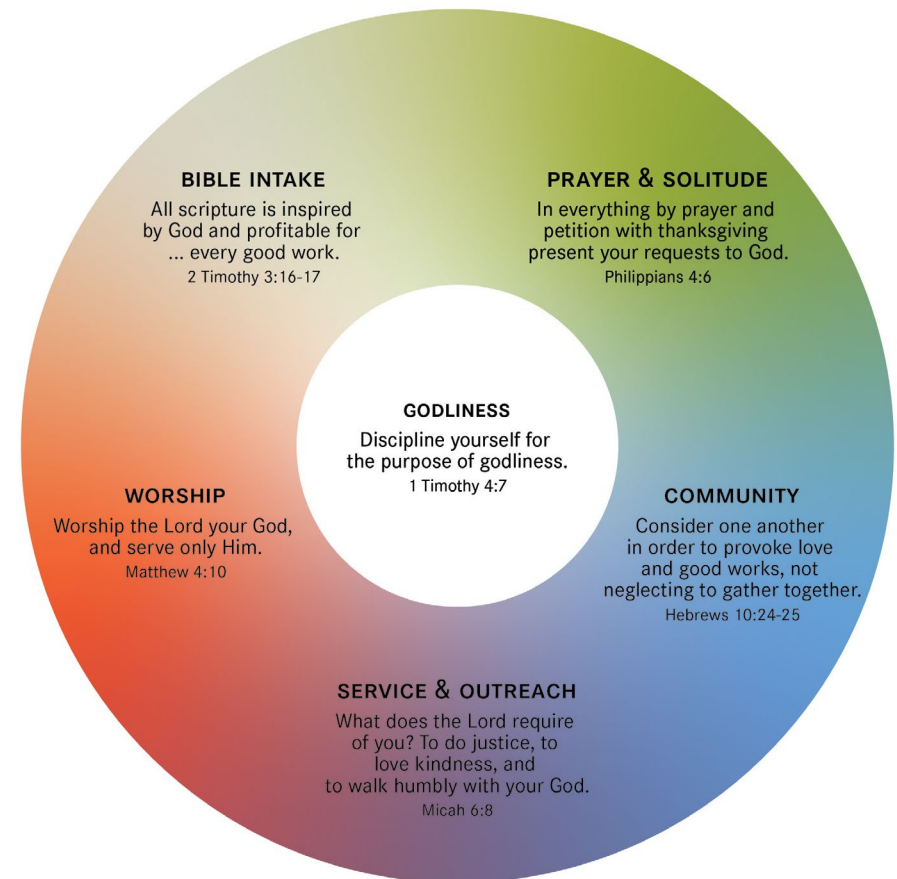
The following pages are filled with simple and practical guidance for the pursuit of an active, healthy spiritual life – one based in living out daily responsive grace in a world where combative forces often cause our spiritual well-being to falter. Ordered around five vital spiritual habits (see diagram), I hope these principles will keep the flow of God's grace and joy active in your life. They are conceptualized around the need to have spiritual discipline and formation (godliness) as the formative center, and each has direct Scriptural promotion:

1. **Bible Intake** 2 Timothy 3:16-17
2. **Prayer and Solitude** Philippians 4:6
3. **Worship** Matthew 4:10
4. **Living in Community** Hebrews 10:24-25
5. **Service and Outreach** Micah 6:8



Rick Bates
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SPIRITUAL FORMATION



For further reading and study on the subject of spiritual formation, the following are suggested:

Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines David Mathis

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life Donald Whitney

The Pursuit of God A. W. Tozer

Spiritual Formations for the Global Church Ryan Brandt (editor)

The Life You Have Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People John Ortberg

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Spiritual disciplines exist for the purpose of godliness. They do not save us and do not make God love us more; rather, they are the means God uses to conform us to Christ's image. Thus, it is absolutely crucial that Christians discipline themselves to live a distinctly Christian life, to move toward more and more godliness! 1 Timothy 4:7 states this clearly:

Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth in believers according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion that have been practiced by God's people since biblical times. There are 6 basic characteristics of biblical spiritual disciplines.

1. Spiritual disciplines are both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines. The Bible prescribes both. There are those spiritual disciplines that we practice alone and those that we practice with other Christians. We are to pray alone and we are also to pray with the church. We don't want to think of spirituality and the spiritual disciplines merely as things we do by ourselves. We are to also engage others in the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

2. Spiritual disciplines are activities. They are not attitudes. Disciplines are practices. Spiritual disciplines are things you do. They are not character qualities. They are not graces. They are not the fruit of the Spirit. The goal of practicing any discipline is not about doing as much as it is about being: being like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in being more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated practice of the biblical, spiritual disciplines.

3. Spiritual disciplines are practices taught or modeled in the Bible. Someone might say, "physical exercise is one of my spiritual disciplines!" We cannot depend on ourselves to determine what is best for our spiritual health and maturity. We rather accept those things God has revealed in Scripture as the means of experiencing God and growing in Christ-likeness. (Exercise is still important and healthy!)

4. The spiritual disciplines found in scripture are sufficient for knowing and experiencing God and for growing in Christ-likeness. The scriptures are sufficient for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Practices that are not found in the Bible that may be promoted by some group may benefit people, but these are not necessary for spiritual maturity in godliness. If they were, they would have been promoted in the scriptures.

5. Spiritual disciplines are derived from the gospel, not divorced from the gospel. Rightly practiced, the spiritual disciplines take us deeper into the glories of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not away from them. They simply take us deeper into understanding the gospel.

6. Spiritual disciplines are means and not ends. We are not godly because we practice the spiritual disciplines. These practices are the means we use to form godliness. We are motivated to use discipline for the purpose of godliness.

The author, Don Whitney demonstrates how ten important spiritual disciplines are found in the Bible. These ten provide a framework for living a God-glorifying Christian life. They are:

Bible intake, learning, worship, serving, evangelism, prayer, journaling, silence and solitude, fasting, and stewardship

How many of these are being practiced in your life?

The foremost of the disciplines is centered in the Word of God and constitutes the reading, study, memorization, and meditation of Scripture. This discipline must not be neglected! Any effort at spiritual discipline should begin with the Word of God, which is "God-breathed" - and therefore contains the power of God!

SOUL KEEPING: CARING FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOU

The soul is that aspect of your whole being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything going on in the various dimensions of the self. The soul is the life center of human beings. Dallas Willard

We live in a soul-challenged world. Jesus told a story about the way the world we live in keeps us from attending to our souls. It is found in Mark 4:1-20. It's a story about seeds, a sower, and some soil. The seed is constant, the sower is constant, but the soil is variable. We can replace the word "soul" for "soil." The world can have negative impact on us and lead to three types of souls:

1. A Hardened Soul
2. A Shallow Soul
3. A Cluttered Soul

You're a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God, which means you were not made to be self-sufficient. Dallas Willard

It's the Nature of the Soul to Have Needs

The Soul needs a **Keeper** The stream of life is your soul. And you are the Keeper.

The Soul needs a **Center** The soul cannot be centered without God.

The Soul needs a **Future** God planted eternity in your heart.

The Soul needs **to be with God** God invites you to let your soul rest in Him.

The Soul needs **Rest** Doing nothing does wonders for the soul.

The Soul needs **Freedom** Surrender to God and His ways frees your soul.

The Soul needs **Blessing** The soul blesses by loving.

The Soul needs **Satisfaction** When you die to yourself, your soul comes alive.

The Soul Needs **Gratitude** Never take for granted that you are the beneficiary of the benefits of God who has your best interests at heart.

THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The Bible is clear that there exists a form of spiritual warfare in our world with darkness and evil actively working against godliness. Our Christian responsibility is to fight against such forces by keeping ourselves strong in Christ.

Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For your struggle is not against flesh and blood... but against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God... Ephesians 6:10-13

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is vital to keep each of these "pieces of armor" active in your life. As listed in Ephesians 6:14-18, the Armor of God consist of:

- Belt of **truth**
- Breastplate of **righteousness**
- Feet ready (gospel of **peace**)
- Shield of **faith**
- Helmet of **salvation**
- Sword of the Spirit (**word of God**)
- All kinds of **prayer**

In order to defeat the influences of darkness and evil, these components have proven valuable, even essential, over the centuries:

- **Stand your ground in faith** Hebrews 11:1
- **Renew your mind** Romans 12:1-2
- **Submit to God** James 4:7-10
- **Obey Christ/Scripture** 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- **Get rid of sin** 1 John 3:7-10
- **Love sacrificially** John 15:12-14
- **Testify to Christ** Revelation 12:10-11
- **Praise God** John 16:33

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

MAINTAINING YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL LIFE

Thriving spiritually in Hong Kong does not come automatically. It takes intentionality to be spiritually healthy, but it is worth the time and effort devoted to this.

Asia has always been a spiritual place. For as long as people have lived here, they have sought gods to worship, from the pantheon of Hinduism, to Buddha and the lesser Buddhist gods, to a myriad of other gods and customs. Asians have long sought spiritual powers to protect, guide, and bless them. Modernization has changed this in some ways, spiritual forces that have deceived so many in the past are still present. These can combat you as you endeavor to live in the light of Christ and to share the good news with those lost in darkness. Efforts to be spiritually replenished are essential for Christian life in today's world in Hong Kong.

John 15:1-17 contains a vital message for you as a Christian from the very mouth of Jesus: "I am the true vine, you are the branches." Read this entire passage and consider the words carefully for your life. Are you grafted into the vine? Are you bearing fruit for the vine? Are you keeping His commandments? Do you know His joy in your soul? Are you actively loving those around you? One of the best ways to be firmly connected to the vine of Christ is to pay attention to your current devotional practices and vitalize these.

Nothing can replace the living water of the Spirit of God for replenishing your spirit daily.

The simple, yet challenging, day-by-day disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and communion with God are the bedrock of a healthy spiritual life. Build these practices into your lifestyle. Make them a top priority. The responsibilities of work, concerns of your family and friends, and temptations of the world can come rushing at you like a pack of wild animals any day as you open your eye to the morning light. If you do not build a time for God into your schedule, the pace of life in Hong Kong and the constant press of urgent necessities can quickly crowd God out of your life. Keep your soul vibrant!

Consider these practices to help you maintain your devotional life:

- Spend time with God before you use your phone, computer or TV for other matters.
- Be creative in scheduling your devotional time. Time pressures and flat sizes may require you to use a different time or a different place than home.
- Find and stay in touch with a good prayer partner (pray for one).
- Use on-line and phone apps for good sermons, devotionals, blogs, pod-casts that can be used regularly.
- Purchase books & CDs and make it a habit to renew your mind.
- If you have children, have weekly family devotions together. Have fun with your children and model Christian living to them. (Most kids love singing songs and hymns)
- Join a care group that fits your needs – one that fellowships, worships, studies and cares for one another.
- Share your faith on a regular basis. Nothing returns joy to your life like sharing good news with others and seeing life change.
- Schedule a day off each month for some type of spiritual retreat or get-away, even for a few hours. A full day to meditate on your spiritual life and where God is leading you works wonders.

The church has various ways they will support you in your spiritual needs. However, it is your responsibility to be proactive in seeking out community and assistance for your spiritual well-being. Get to know other people. Share your spiritual struggles and victories with those close to you. If you are having problems that interfere with your spiritual well-being, ask a pastor or ministry leader to assist you.

You are part of God's great work of expanding His Kingdom in Hong Kong and beyond. Therefore, it is vital that you live your life out of the strength of the Spirit, not your own strength. Your personal spiritual life is critical to all that you are and what you do. Make time with Christ a priority each day.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

What is Spiritual Formation?

Spiritual formation in the Christian tradition is the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or will. It is being formed, that is, really transformed, in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ. Dallas Willard

The book of 2 Peter covers different key doctrinal teachings, including the forming of Christian character. Peter challenges us to press on in our race to develop qualities that increase our faith, so we do not become ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8

Since we are called to be holy in all our conduct (1 Peter 1:15-16), in order for spiritual formation to take root a lifelong active development in Christ-like character is necessary for Christians and is the foundation to fruitful ministry.

There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christian called holiness. Eugene H. Peterson

How Does Character Development Work?

As Peter emphasizes there is danger without growth in character to build on initial faith. It is vital that each believer do this by making every effort with diligence (spoude in the Greek), that is, make haste, be eager, do one's best, take care, exert one's self. This actionable mindset enables spiritual formation to develop in the heart of a believer. The listed features of character from Peter's teaching give the details of our obligation to live out these manifold Christian virtues as part of our life. Let's look at each character from the biblical standpoint.

Faith (Greek: *pistis*) expresses the idea of trust, a deep inner conviction in relation to the veracity of a person or some claim. It is used 244 times in the New Testament. Faith is a

gift of God that enables us to believe what He says, to trust Him with our lives, and to live upon His Word. Is your spirituality growing based on this definition of faith?

Virtue (Greek: *arete*) means any excelling quality of a person such as in their thoughts or actions shown through moral excellence, modesty, purity. The word virtue is used 5 times. Here the word is connected as an indwelling quality in the exercise of faith for producing virtue in one's inner being by the Holy Spirit. Is this the impression you give others, are you know or praised for this?

Knowledge (Greek: *gnosis*) mentioned 29 times, is simply the general knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Is this only being acquired in worship services or is it also being sought out through bible study and other means?

Self-control (Greek: *egkrateia*) keeping the passions and desires under control, especially in sensual desires, as mentioned 4 times. Self-control follows knowledge in Peter's list, implying that what is taught needs to be lived out. Is self-control a mastered habit or still a work in progress?

Steadfastness (Greek: *hypomone*) mentioned 32 times literally means abiding under trials and testing in a way that honors God: being a Christian that not only endures but contends. Other translations use the words endurance, patience, perseverance. Have past trials grown your spiritual connection with God?

Godliness (Greek: *eusebeia*) mentioned 15 times, basically means reverence and respect. Does our devotion to God distinguish you by a Godward posture which is well pleasing to God?

Brotherly affection (Greek: *philadelphia*) the love for brothers and sisters in the faith. Mentioned 5 times. This act of cherishing each other is to be ingrained in benevolence. Is this something only performed to those closest to you or is it extended to others?

Love (Greek: *agape*) mentioned 117 times, is affection, good will, benevolence, love, especially unconditional love. Have you received fully God's freely given love to you through His Son Jesus Christ?

Overall the list of characters triats is not some formal code to keep, but instead a deep yearning and component of a transformed heart. The urging here is to not be idle in any way in pressing on in personal faith by developing toward and finally reaching full knowledge and presence of Christ. All the listed characters are results of faith, which is listed first, with love listed last, as the supreme result of faith. As C.S Lewis would say, spiritual formation points to the transformation of people into "little Christs".

CONNECTING WITH GOD

Keeping one's personal life connected to God and godliness lies at the heart of having a healthy spiritual life. God, who formed and gifted each of us, has wired into our being a rich mixture of body, mind, heart and soul that encourages this godly connection. Our physical health, mental thoughts, emotions, relational well-being and spiritual vitality are united in inseparable ways to assist us. Unfortunately, forces both within us and outside of us can too often disrupt this God-given unity and health. Simply put, our connection with God gets blocked. Philippians 4:4-13 is a passage that offers five helpful principles that can assist you to combat harmful human tendencies and keep your personal connection with God vital.

Wrong priorities can unsettle your soul. You can refocus your priorities through worship, praise and prayer. The intentional act of rejoicing in the midst of difficulties and remembering to “seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness” has a way of correcting wrong priorities and dispelling anxiety.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in 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 minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Unhealthy pace harms your body. You can take time to slow down within the created world and reflect on Godly things. In the midst of busy-ness and rushed pace, there is wisdom in simply slowing down, mentally and physically. “The Lord is our shepherd” and He desires to lead us to quiet places where we can reflect on the good.

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. Philippians 4:8

Harmful patterns can harden your heart. You can replace these with Godly practices and accept the caring concern of others. Taking personal responsibility for bad habits by putting into practice the truths of the faith opens up and enriches life and relationships. We are relational at our core and often need caring friends to help us in this.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. Philippians 4:9-10

Faulty perceptions distort your mind. You can learn to recognize these and be content with your life rather than compare yourself with others. We need to be able to recognize the ways modern society plays with our minds and stirs up discontent. If we can honestly recognize self-deceptions, we lay the foundation for a transformed mind and new life.

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Philippians 4:11-12

Regardless of what comes your way, you can intimately walk with God through Christ's strength. The core element for successful life and meaningful interpersonal relationships is continual renewal of strength through the person of Christ.

I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is more than a collection of sacred texts, often debated as to their value. The Bible is a source of inspiration and aspiration by all who follow Christ. Read over these quotes and come up with your own quotable statement on the Bible and its value.

To what greater inspiration and counsel can we turn than to the imperishable truth to be found in this Treasure House, the Bible?

Queen Elizabeth

It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom.

Horace Greeley

We do not read the Bible the way it is; we read it the way we are.

Evelyn Uyemura

The letter of Scripture is a veil just as much as it is a revelation; hiding while it reveals, and yet revealing while it hides.

Andrew Jukes

Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand.

Mark Twain

The Bible is no mere book, but a Living Creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it.

Napoleon

The greatest proof that the Bible is inspired is that it has stood so much bad preaching.

A.T. Robertson

No sciences are better attested than the religion of the Bible.

Sir Isaac Newton

Let mental culture go on advancing, let the natural sciences progress in ever greater extent and depth, and the human mind widen itself as much as it desires, beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity, as it shines forth in the gospels, it will not go.

Goethe

I have always said that a studious perusal of the sacred volume will make better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands.

Thomas Jefferson

If there is anything in my thoughts or style to commend, the credit is due to my parents for instilling in me an early love of the Scriptures.

Daniel Webster

The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and oppressed. The human race is not in a position to dispense with it.

Thomas Huxley

Knowing the Word of God does not necessarily mean that we know the God of the Word.

Chip Brogden

For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.

Martin Luther

I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older; then it dawned on me - they're cramming for their final exam.

George Carlin

The longer you read the Bible, the more you will like it; it will grow sweeter and sweeter; and the more you get into the spirit of it, the more you will get into the spirit of Christ.

Romain

The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.

A. W. Tozer

Reputable scholars now believe that the New Testament account is reliable history.

Time Magazine

My personal quote about the Bible:

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BIBLE

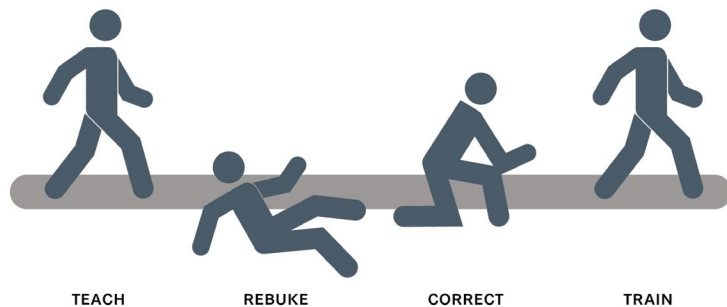
The Bible is a unique book. It is without rival among all other writings throughout history. The Bible was written by more than forty different authors over a period of more than 1500 years, yet it has an amazing unity in all it says.

The Bible itself claims uniqueness as being “God-breathed” as God’s Word of truth to humanity. The Bible is the inspired Word of God.

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

In this beautiful scripture, you can see that:

- God’s Spirit is at work in all of scripture guiding its use.
- There are four primary ways scripture is useful to you. As illustrated below, scripture will teach you which path to take, offer rebuke when you get off the path, give you ways to correct yourself, and train you how to walk in righteousness.
- Scripture can be applied to equipping for every type of good work.



The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

The Bible is designed to be active in your life. With precision, it can penetrate to your center, with judgments and also with encouragements.

The Bible is fully reliable in its substance and truth. You can count on what you read to be dependable.

The Christian Research Institute¹ developed the useful acronym MAPS that covers the key aspects of Biblical reliability:

Manuscripts The quantity of manuscripts and fragments along with the time span between the original documents and the earliest copies known indicate that the Bible has stronger reliability than any classical literature, including Homer and Aristotle. There are more than 14,000 manuscripts and fragments of the Old Testament and over 5,300 manuscripts or portions of the Greek New Testament. The Bible refers to countless historical events, places and people that are confirmed by various historians, such as Josephus, indicating a remarkable reliability.

Archaeology Over and over again, painstaking archaeology and fascinating discoveries affirm the reliability of the Bible. Archaeological evidence continues to confirm the basic trustworthiness of the Bible.

Prophecy The Bible records predictions of events that could not be known or predicted by chance or common sense. The many predictions of Christ’s birth, life and death are dramatically supported as historically valid by the Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah and other prophetic books. The evidence of predictive prophecy is a key aspect of Biblical reliability.

Statistics It is statistically implausible that the Bible’s many specific, detailed prophecies could have been fulfilled through chance or deliberate deceit. The consistent, noncontradictory theme of God’s redemption of humankind culminating in Jesus Christ lends statistical probability, another indicator of the trustworthiness of Scripture.

These four MAPS principles demonstrate that the Bible is of divine origin and can be depended upon as a foundation for your life. Read and meditate on the Bible! It is a unique book that leads to life change!

Meditation is focused thinking. It takes serious effort. You select a verse and reflect on it over and over in your mind... No other habit can do more to transform your life and make you more like Jesus than daily reflection on Scripture.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*

¹equip.org | Article: MAPS to Guide You Through Bible Reliability

INCLUDE GOD IN YOUR DAY

Nothing is more important to our well-being and success in life than staying in tune with God. Yet far too many of us are negligent in having an established, consistent time with God each day.

Every day should include connection with our Heavenly Father. Many choose to do this at the beginning of the day. If you do not have such a routine, here is a proven way to begin. Try this for one full month to help establish it as a habit.

1. Select a Time and Place. It is best for most people to have a specific, consistent time they begin each day. If not, be certain to allow a full 15 minutes before you begin your day. Choose a good place for this. Remember that the important factor is solitude.

2. Be Prepared. Have the basic resources ready to go each day. While some find it helpful to have devotional guides to help, the key is to spend time in God's word itself. Have available a Bible, a pen or pencil, and a notebook or journal to keep notes, prayers, etc. [Phone apps can be good for these.] Have a plan for your Bible reading. Reading through a book of the Bible is simple and can be meaningful.

3. Have a Plan. One of the easiest ways to succeed at establishing this habit is to spend 15 minutes each day in a basic pattern of reading, focusing on the passage, and praying. Each of these three basic elements works best if you take a moment to prepare for that aspect. In this way, your 15 minutes is divided into three sets of 5-minute times: (1) Relax and then read the Bible or devotion (2) find an idea and then focus on it; and (3) prioritize what is most important and prayer about this.

15 Minutes with God

Every day we, as "disciples" of Christ should have the "discipline" to take time to intentionally be with God. Ephesians 3:14 reminds us: "For this reason I kneel before the Father."

You're a soul made by God, made for God, and made to need God, which means you were not made to be self-sufficient. Dallas Willard

The reference of 3:14 can serve as simple framework to have 3 movements of time with God made up of 1 minute and then 4 minutes each and every day. This will give you a total of about 15 minutes of intentional time with your heavenly Father, who loves you and wants to be in dialogue with you that day.

First Movement:

Relax (1 minute)

Slow down and prepare your heart. Be still, quiet, reverent – ready to wait on God, with an attitude of expectancy. "Jesus, I am in need of you and your Spirit this day."

Read (4 minutes)

Begin reading where you left off the day before if reading through the Bible or use the devotion for that day. Read until you feel God has told you something. Then STOP and re-read it if you have time.

Second Movement:

Find One Item (1 minute)

Think about what you have read and select one or two ideas or concepts that relate to your life. Mark the passage or write down a key idea.

Focus (4 minutes)

Focus on the passage and the key idea you found. Meditate on the passage. Probe it with questions. Visualize the scene. Read it aloud. Jot down your thoughts. Memorize a verse that speaks to you in a special way.

Third Movement:

Prioritize The Important (1 minute)

Select one thing that is most important for you to apply today or this week... something that is practical and possible for you.

Pray (4 minutes)

Conclude your time by talking to the Father about what he has shown you.

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

- Each person needs to find a way that suits them for times of personal devotion. Here is a compilation of a variety of helpful ideas for having meaningful times with God:
- Before I get out of bed I listen to the audio of the chapter of Proverbs that is for that day. As I get ready for the day I listen to worship music. In the shower, I pray. In the office, I read *My Upmost for His Highest* or *Daily Wisdom for Working Women*.
- I come early to the office before I start my job, when it's quiet and peaceful and take about 20 minutes. I read a devotion by Chuck Swindoll and contemplate on verses that relate to it. Then, I write a key verse and my prayers in my journal.
- My wife and I do devotions together on Monday night when we are both free. We use *15 Minute Devotions for Couples*. After, we pray together.
- I use *Daily Devotions*¹. I like the simple easy to read and understand system it uses of "Pause ... Listen ... Think ... Pray ... Go." Also, it has music that I can listen to as I pray.
- We put our prayers and worries on slips of paper into a jar. We will pick one each night to pray about that one. When these prayers are answered, we paste them into a prayer journal.
- Each morning I listen to an online 15-minute "Worship and Short Teaching from a Chinese Pastor," read a Bible passage to learn more about God, then pray about 10 minutes.
- I rise early, start with coffee and pray my morning prayers, oftentimes using Phyllis Tickle's prayer guide *The Divine Hours*. With my next cup of coffee, I read through a passage of Scripture and pray through the passage. Sometimes I just sit quietly and listen to God.
- As a married couple, we discuss spiritual matters and pray for one another organically. We share highlights with friends as a way to give thanks to God.

- I have my devotion and prayer time attached to daily tasks; like praying while brushing my teeth, waiting for the bus, or walking the dog. This helps me remember to make devotion and prayer time a good habit. Just as brushing my teeth is not optional, neither is prayer nor quiet time.
- Lately I have been using John Piper's Solid Joys Devotional app. In addition to the easy to read daily devotions, it has an index where you can find devotions from each book in the Bible.
- I like to have a 20-30-minute quiet time at work, reading a verse or passage from a Bible app like *You Version*² and then praying with praise first and then intercession.
- I do my devotion during my long commute. My care group periodically decides on devotional plans to do together. That way we keep each other accountable and we share prayer and action points. I keep a journal with sections like Prayers, Things God Put on my Heart, God's Character. I look forward to writing these Biblical treasures - keeps me motivated, refreshed.
- I use the free *Bible-in-One-Year*³ app every day with commentaries by Nicky and Pippa Gumbel.
- Most mornings, I have a cup of coffee and journal my prayers, always sitting in the same place. I write like it's a conversation with God with no pressure on myself - just thoughts, frustrations, prayers, and joys. I keep a table of contents on the front page and give each entry a title. This journal is the single greatest thing that helps my walk with God.
- I use *bible.com*⁴. I read a part of the Bible then copy and paste that part into an "Evernote" template. After that, I pray through what God is showing me. I write out what I think is being said in that context, and then I consider what I do to apply this truth. Finally, I pick the one main verse and copy that into my notes.

¹ d365.org / ² youversion.com / ³ bibleinoneyear.org / ⁴ bible.com

THE VALUE OF A LIFE VERSE

The use of a life verse can prove helpful to your spiritual vitality. Many Christians have found that the use of a personally selected scripture assists them through the ups and downs of a chapter of their life or even their entire life. The book entitled *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul*, gives some helpful guidelines on selecting a life verse.

Your selected life verse should:

- Reflect your story and personality in some way
- Motivate you - serve as a call to action
- Speak to an area of your life that needs reinforcement
- Be concise and easy to remember
- Be positive, encouraging, and hope-filled

Make certain that your life verse is personally meaningful to you. It should be yours!

There is a wonderful appendix in the book that gives countless possibilities, organized by themes. Here are the categories used along with one scripture for you to consider.

Assurance *I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 8:38-39

Awe *One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.*

Psalm 27:4

Compassion *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1:27

Contentment *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:33

Courage *The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?* Psalm 27:1

Faithfulness *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.* Proverbs 3:5-6

Gratitude *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* Psalm 139:13-14

Hope *For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Jeremiah 29:11

Humility *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* Philippians 2:3-4

Justice *What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* Micah 6:8

Love *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

1 Peter 4:8

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

Perseverance *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

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

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

Galatians 2:20

GOING DEEP IN THE BIBLE

The Book of Acts describes a group in the city of Berea who “examined the scripture every day.” As a result of intentional practice, many came to believe in Jesus (Acts 17:11-12). Consistent in-depth study of the Bible leads to spiritual growth and maturity.

Today, God has given us a lot more tools and resources than the Bereans 2000 years ago. Here are some key ways to advance into deeper study Bible.

Understand the Big Picture

The Bible is the Story of God. There are real people with real events happening in real time. As such, it is important to let God tell His story in His own way.

1. Understand the Background of any particular Story

As scholars often say, a text without context is just pretext. Understanding the “context” of the Bible is important. Read the Old Testament history to understand how the Patriarchs and the people of Israel encounter God. Read the Gospels to understand the life of Jesus, and the Book of Acts for how the early church grows.

2. Use Timelines and Maps

It is extremely helpful to draw timelines of people and events, and place them on a map. This is particularly true for understanding the Old Testament and Paul’s missionary This will help make the Bible come alive. Some of the most useful resources include:

- *Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, and Time Lines*
- *God’s Bible Timeline: The Big Book of Biblical History*
- *Then and Now Bible Map Insert*

Study an Individual Book

This is what most people have in mind when they think about “bible study.” Let’s use the Letter to the Galatians as an example for how this works.

1. Get the Big Picture

Listen to or read through Galatians in one setting. Do this a few times to get a good idea of the entire letter and to discern main themes.

2. Divide and Conquer

Divide Galatians into a few coherent units (some Bibles do this for you). Then, dig into each segment, verse by verse, word by word. Look for repeated words or phrases, which can

indicate important concepts. Chances are that you will encounter concepts and vocabularies that may be new to you. Research these using the following two types of tools.

a. Bible Dictionaries explain words, people, and places. Some good ones are:

- *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
- *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
- *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel*

b. Commentaries provide detail study of biblical books, usually with background and verse by verse explanation. Two great ones for Galatians are:

- *The Letter to the Galatians* (NICNT) by David A. deSilva
- *Galatians For You* (God’s Word for You) by Tim Keller

3. Apply the Bible Personally

The Bible is not written to you, but for you. Again, the Bible is FOR YOU. The Bible was written by people and to people who lived thousands of years ago. Yet, this is also God’s Word for us! To better apply the Bible to yourself, use these questions as guidelines:

- What is the author saying?
- What does it mean to the original audiences in their setting?
- How does that translate and apply to me today?

To explore this area more fully, here are two excellent books:

- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, by William Klein, et al.

Make Use of Bible Apps and Software

There are lots of apps and software that can significantly help you with deeper Bible studies.

- *Blue Letter Bible* (free) – provides help with basic Greek/Hebrew word meanings.
- *Logos Bible Software* – *This is one of the best, but it tends to be expensive.*

Be Intentional

It is easy to feel intimidated and discouraged when you begin. However, the key is not so much to master details, but to be intentional. If you are consistent in your study, over time you will be amazed by how much you learn. So...

How do you dig deep into the Bible? One shovel at a time!

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

One of the best ways to deepen your relationship with God and develop your Christian faith is to use what is called inductive bible study, that is, to personally extract directly from scripture a key theme/idea for application in practical ways to your life. This is a time-honoured and proven way to be enlightened by God's Word in order to apply what has been learned with the Spirit empowerment in personal growth and change.

To go deeper in your study of the bible, consider utilising the **SOIL** methodology = **Select, Observe, Interpret and Life application.**

Step 1: Select a Passage

- Pray for God to guide you
- Select a specific passage and know why you want to study it
- Read the passage several times, slowly, in multiple versions

Step 2a: Observe the Text

- Note the audience (you, he/she, they)
- Note the verbs (who does what?)
- Note the connectives (therefore, since, but etc)
- Highlight the nouns
- What are the commands/instructions/teachings?
- What are the cause-and-effect relationships?
- What are the repeated words and ideas?

Step 2b: Observe the Context

- What is the passage about?
- How does the passage fit in the context? (What goes before and after?)
- When and where does the passage fit in?
- Does this passage make use of other scripture?
- Who is writing or speaking and to whom?
- Does the text reveal any problems the recipients were facing?
- Why does the author write what he does?

Step 3a: Interpret the Language and Meaning

- What is the style of the passage? (Poetry, history, prophecy)
- What was the original language and meaning of the words?
- List or highlight significant words and check where else they appear in scripture
- What is the cultural meaning? (What did the text mean to the original audience?)

Step 3b: Interpret the Theology - Identify the Principles

- What is the big idea of the passage?
- What do I learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
- What do I learn about human nature and sin?
- What does the passage say about salvation and redemption?
- What do I learn about the Church and/or Christian life?

Step 4: Life Application

- What principles are relevant to me?
- What encourages me? What challenges me?
- Where do I fall short? What do I need to change?
- What will I do about it?
- How can I make this principle a constant part of my life?

This SOIL methodology is in-depth and requires time and effort, but well worth the effort.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

People have vastly different views of prayer, most of which are highly treasured since prayer is such a personal matter. Reading over these quotes from well-known people can stimulate you in examining your view of prayer.

Prayer is the essential human act, a priceless point of contact between us and the God of the universe.
Philip Yancey

God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.
Mother Teresa

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.
Søren Kierkegaard

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.
Martin Luther King, Jr.

More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.
Alfred Lord Tennyson

God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it.
John Wesley

Prayer is nothing else than a sense of God's presence.
Brother Lawrence

Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.
Oswald Chambers

Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth. It is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of God's willingness.
Richard C. Trench

Only those who see the invisible can attempt the impossible.
Dick Eastman

A man is powerful on his knees.
Corrie ten Boom

Prayer is not a vending machine.
Albert Ng

Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself.
Mother Teresa

Prayer is spiritual communication between man and God, a two-way relationship in which man should not only talk to God but also listen to Him. Prayer to God is like a child's conversation with his father. It is natural for a child to ask his father for the things he needs.
Billy Graham

Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.
D. L. Moody

Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.
Charles Spurgeon

Seven days without prayer makes one weak.
Allen Bartlett

Work as if you were to live a hundred years. Pray as if you were to die tomorrow.
Benjamin Franklin

Our prayers must mean something to us if they are to mean anything to God.
Maltbie Babcock

The fewer the words, the better the prayer.
Martin Luther

When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
Jesus Christ

My personal quote about prayer:

A BRIEF THEOLOGY OF PRAYER

Avail yourself of the greatest privilege this side of heaven. Jesus Christ died to make this communion with the Father possible. Billy Graham

Prayer is our direct line with heaven. Prayer is the communication process that allows us to talk to God. God wants us to communicate with Him. We honor God when we talk to Him. Technology explodes each year with advances that help us communicate and connect; and these have become a necessity in today's society – iPhones, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, blogs, etc. Communication devices are in abundance to help us connect, interact and respond to one another.

Prayer is the device we use to do this with God. **Prayer is simply communicating with God – listening and talking to Him.** We can simply pray from the heart, freely, spontaneously, and in our own words. This kind of prayer is a great privilege we all have. In a way, prayer can be like talking to your best, most trusted friend – someone who both knows you and loves you!

As you pray, remember to:

Pray with reverence and worship. *Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool, for He is holy!* Psalm 99:5

Pray with faith. *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him.* Hebrews 11:6

Pray out of your deep desires. *Cast all your anxiety and cares on God because He cares for you.* 1 Peter 5:7

Pray in unity with Christ and others. Jesus gave us a principle about prayer when He prayed for His disciples and all who would believe in Him: *“My prayer is that all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... so that they may be brought to complete unity.”* John 17:20-23

You can have confidence that God is listening to you when you pray. You have God's ear! All you have to do is open the line of communication. No matter how far you roam, the connection with God is always there available to you.

BASICS FOR DISCIPLINED PRAYER

Maintain a Proper Attitude

Humble – continually being open to God and allowing Him to encourage, guide, comfort, teach, convict you.

Vary the Length

Varied – God enjoys simply hearing from you for as short or as long as you would like.

Have the Right Posture

Open and expectant – God cherishes a heart of reverence.

Keep the Frequency

Best to have intentional practice of daily quiet time (morning is often best)

- David Psalm 5:3
- Daniel Daniel 6:10
- Jesus Mark 1:35

In addition, throughout the day and week, pause to connect with God.

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Ephesians 6:18

Choose the Type

There are 3 basic types: Individual, Small Group (2 or 3 gathered in His name), and Corporate. Consider spending extended times of prayer alone with God.

- Jesus spent whole night praying Luke 6:12
- Nehemiah prayed “certain days” Nehemiah 1:4
- Moses prayed 40 days & nights Exodus 34:28

Include needed Elements

Various ways to consider these, such as with the acronym, FACTS:

- Faith Hebrews 11:6
- Adoration Matthew 6:9
- Confession 1 John 1:9
- Thanksgiving 1 Thessalonians 5:16
- Supplication 1 Timothy 2:1

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer, also called the *Our Father*, is the most well-known and honored Christian prayer. It is recorded in both Matthew's and Luke's gospels. The version in Matthew 6:5-13, which is part of Jesus' Sermon of the Mount, is the one that is most widely known. This prayer is a model for prayer for Christians as it is given by Jesus Himself as the way to pray. Both the content, which is structured by seven petitions (three that address God and four that relate to human concerns), and the order are important.

Opening *Our Father, who is in heaven*

Petition 1 *Hallowed be Your name*

Petition 2 *Your kingdom come*

Petition 3 *Your will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.*

Petition 4 *Give us this day our daily bread*

Petition 5 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*

Petition 6 *And lead us not into temptation*

Petition 7 *But deliver us from evil*

Doxology *For Yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen*

J.I. Packer has written a nice little book entitled **Praying the Lord's Prayer** in which he parallels these petitions with the seven colors of the light spectrum that combine to make one glorious light. The Lord's Prayer covers an enlightening spectrum in these seven distinct activities of prayer:

Approaching God in adoration and trust

Acknowledging God's work and worth, in praise and worship

Admitting sin and seeking pardon and forgiveness

Asking for needs to be met for ourselves and others

Arguing with God for blessing as Jacob did

Accepting from God one's own situation as He has shaped it

Adhering to God in faithfulness through thick and thin

DAILY PAUSES

Among the great spiritual disciplines: worship, Bible study, devotions, centering prayer, Scripture memorization, journaling, and fasting, there is one that offers rhythm powerful enough to anchor you daily. It is a simple practice, but one difficult to build into our busy lives. At the heart of your day, stop and surrender to God in trust.

In the midst of all else, it helps to be intentional at set times during the day to be with God. It is the rhythm of pausing that can make the "practice of the presence of God" (Brother Lawrence) a reality in your daily lives. Four essential elements help with this.

1. Pause / This is essential – to intentionally stop what you are doing. Stop your activity and pause to be with the living God. This time should be unhurried.

2. Be silent / Practice quieting every inner and outer voice to attend to God. We live in a world of noise and distractions. We are uncomfortable with silence. Treasure the sound of silence. In such space, God moves freely.

3. Ponder / Scripture commands, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Move into God's presence and rest there. Let go of tensions and distractions. Be attentive and still, breathing; breathe slowly and naturally; eyes lowered or closed. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Be mindful of what your short earthly life is all about.

4. Be consistent / Find consistent times to do this each day. Many find it most helpful to do these three times a day – morning, mid-day, evening. What works for one person will not work for another. God has built us each differently. If it helps you, do it; If it does not help, don't do it. Be attentive to how God leads you personally.

To assist in pondering God in your life, Psalms can be a great help. The Psalms have served as a prayer book of the church throughout the centuries. Jesus quoted Psalms more than any other book except Isaiah. The Psalms cover the entire gamut of our life experience – from anger and loneliness to trust and praise. You may find it helpful to slowly pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pausing each day to help your heart and mind be connected to God creates the right rhythm for life.

AN EXPERIENCE OF SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

In silence, my soul waits for you and you alone, O God. Psalm 62:1

Many of us never experience a genuine time of being alone with God. We struggle with how to do this. The following material is given as a guide that any person can follow as an aid to this meaningful spiritual discipline.

Solitude, at its most basic and profound level, is simply an opportunity to be ourselves with God. To be in solitude is to choose to do nothing – to simply be with God. Silence is needed to complete solitude, for until we enter quietness; the world still lays hold of us. When we go into solitude and silence, we stop making demands on God and position ourselves in a place to listen.

Invitation to Silence and Solitude

This is your invitation to solitude and silence. As you enter into this time, begin by settling into a comfortable position and sitting quietly for a few moments. Become aware of God's presence with you and your desire to be present with God. If you are feeling tired physically, allow yourself a little time to just rest so that you can be more alert in God's presence. Like a jar of muddy water, it takes time for all of the sediment to settle. So in our lives, it may take some time for all the busyness and restlessness to settle in our hearts so that we can be alert to God. Take the time you need to let your heart settle so you can be quiet before God.

Communion with God

When you feel ready, begin to simply attend to what is most true about you these days – what lies at your very essence. Invite God to be with you and for His Spirit to guide and refresh you. The following questions can be a guide for you. Take as much time as you need with each section and question. Remember, there is no agenda that has to be fulfilled. This is a time for you to be with God and commune with His very Spirit.

- How is your physical **strength** lately?

Are you caring for your body as a temple? How is your pace? Are you tired or energized? Are you satisfied with your level of health and fitness, eating and sleeping well or not, caring for health issues, etc.? Talk with God and listen for His response. Are there

adjustments pertaining to your physical life that you need God's help in making? Ask God for strength and help. He cares deeply for your physical well being.

- How has your **mind** been at work lately?

What concerns and questions have been occupying your thoughts recently? Are you trying to figure things out in your own mind, without hearing from God? Spend time with your concerns and questions. Don't grasp for answers. Don't rush away from what weighs on your mind, but stay with them and be aware of how God speaks.

- How's your **heart**?

Does it ache over some relationship? Does it grieve over a loss? Is it heavy, divided, broken, or is it full? Is there some destructive attitude, habit, or behavior that is affecting your relationship to God or others that needs to be dealt with? Ask God to convict you of any hardness or bitterness that you need freedom from. Open your heart to His grace.

- What is the condition of your **soul** these days?

What concerns are weighing on you? What joys or successes are you celebrating? Where do you hurt? Listen carefully to your soul and allow God to speak to you during this time. Speak directly to the Father and invite Him to be with you.

Reflection

Take a few moments at the close of this time to reflect on what happened between you and God. Are there any shifts or changes that have taken place since you began this time? Is there any specific guidance or invitation that God has given to you? How will you respond? You may want to jot down something that God has spoken to you about for later reflection and action.

Closing Prayer

As you bring this time to a close, thank God for His presence with you. Offer praise for this time with the Eternal. As you conclude, move gently and prayerfully back into the company of others, knowing that God's presence is with you. He is your constant guide to living a transformed life.

Adapted from Ruth Haley Barton, Invitation to Solitude and Silence

JOURNALING

Journaling can be an amazing asset to your spiritual journey and devotional life. It can help connect the dots between the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study and devotional times. It is a wonderful tool that countless people have found valuable and even life-transforming.

What is Journaling?

- A journal is simply a notebook in which a person writes a variety of things to assist in recording and remembering them in a personal way.
- Journaling is the the process of pondering what God is putting on your heart and writing them down.
- What to write? Any insight, question, or concern that comes while reading scripture, having a devotion, or spending time in prayer.
- Why write? Writing helps our minds slow down. It crystallizes thoughts and sheds light. Journaling is not the same as keeping a diary or recording events and activities. Rather, it is a record of various thoughts, feelings, and insights.
- Journaling is not centered on events and “what,” but on pondering “so what” and “what now?”

Why Journal?

- Something like journaling is modelled in **Scripture**. In Psalms, King David repeatedly wrote things down. Jeremiah expressed his grief about the fall of Jerusalem in Lamentations. These are similar to a believer’s heartfelt writing of joys, sorrows, and pleas in a journal.
- Spiritual giants have journaled throughout **church history**, such as Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Livingstone, and Billy Graham. These have brought joy and insights to the countless people who have read them.
- Journaling is a proven way to enhance **spiritual growth**. It assists in making application of Bible reading, as it is a splendid way to help meditate on God’s word and then make personal application.
- Journaling helps in self-understanding and evaluation as you pause to think more deeply about God and yourself. It can help you monitor your priorities and goals and is a meaningful way to express your thoughts and feelings to the Lord (Psalm 62:8).

- Journaling is a way to record prayers, struggles and God’s answers. It becomes a record and prevents them from being forgotten.

How to Journal

- Attributes of a journal include: hand-written, dated, informal, personal, and private! Some find it is helpful to add a table of contents for reference and ease later in finding various subjects.
- Use a journal for reading Scripture. Read a section, mediate on it, then write. Use **SOAP: Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer**.
- Journal your prayers. In one column, write items that need attention or resolution. In the next column, keep a record of updates. In the final column, record the date of resolution (or why not resolved).
- Capture the past. Examine the present for enhancing. Build for growth in the future.

Journaling Tips

- Make it fit you. Journal in first-person with “I.” Be as creative as you are comfortable. Embrace variety.
- Start small and keep it simple. One idea or sentence is enough.
- Begin with prayer and take God seriously. Keep God as the focus, and don’t take yourself too seriously. Allow imperfections and junk.
- Stay with it and give yourself freedom. Have fun along the way. If you are blocked, just sit down and write something, anything. Don’t try to “catch-up” if you get behind.
- Remember that the best life-long journaling is incomplete!
- Collect quotes. Finding thought-provoking items from Christian writers and including these in your journal can boost energy.
- Bring the good news (Gospel of Christ) to yourself!

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Psalm 77:11-12

With the eyes of faith, The Christian life is a great adventure, and a journal can be greatly beneficial in riping our joy along the journey. David Mathis

THE HEART OF FASTING

The Bible clearly shows that the nation of Israel (Esther 4:16), Jesus Himself (Matthew 4:1-2), and the early church (Acts 14:23), used times of fasting to humbly come before God to seek His presence and guidance in times of special need.

What is the purpose of fasting?

Without a purpose, fasting can be agonizing and focus only on the will-power to finish. Having a spiritual purpose for your fast is vital and will prove invaluable. Whenever you fast, do so for the following purposes, which are all found in Scripture:

- Strengthening and sharpening your prayer / Daniel 9:3
- Seeking and discerning God's guidance / Acts 14:23
- Humbling yourself before God / Psalms 35:13
- Seeking deliverance or protection / Esther 4:16
- Overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God / Matthew 4:1-4
- Expressing repentance and returning to God / Jonah 3:5-8
- Demonstrating concern for the work of God / Nehemiah 1:3-4
- Bringing justice and ministering to the needs of others / Luke 58:6-8
- Accepting loss and expressing grief / Judges 20:26
- Expressing your love and worship to God / Luke 2:36-37

What are the different types of fasts?

The pervasiveness and intensity of the need will often determine the kind of fast that is done and who participates.

- The standard fast, which is common in Scripture, is when a person or group eat no food but still drink liquids. There are also times of a simpler version when the person limits their diet for a time period. Less frequently, there is the absolute fast, with no eating or drinking for a period. (Keeping with the account from Esther, it is best to not go without liquids for more than 3 days.)
- A fast can be done as a personal fast by one person. It can also be conducted by two persons who partner together for a time of fasting as spouses, friends, or those with a common concern. There are also times with a larger group within a church or community to seek God in a concentrated way.

- While fasting requires discipline, it is not to be a ritualistic or prideful activity. Guard against selfish motives that can surface. Jesus spoke clearly of the need for us to be humbled during any fast when He condemned any Pharisaic person who would say, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people ... I fast twice a week!"

Genuine fasting, regardless of intensity, duration, or people involved, has as its purpose to walk humbly with God – a God who is concerned with your heart not appearance. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that seeks God with one's entire self and thereby finds delight in the soul.

How is a fast practiced?

There are much written about how to manage various types of fast. Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ International)¹ offers some helpful details.

Here are a few basic guidelines:

1. Keep the objective clear – for spiritual renewal with a humble, open heart.
2. Determine in advance the details of the type and duration for your personal fast – be committed to these.
3. Maintain focus on trusting God in the situation – be careful not to make this a hunger strike to get God's attention.
4. Keep the approach a spiritual one – with prayer, meditation on Scripture, confession, thanksgiving, and openness to the Spirit.
5. Attend to physical matters – prepare your body, limit activity, expect some discomfort, drink plenty of water/juices, rest well. The first days are typically the hardest, so hang in there.
6. Keep to the determined schedule – avoid distractions. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't go as expected. It takes time to build spiritual muscles.
7. End the fast gradually – with smaller intakes for adjustment.

If you genuinely humble yourself before the Lord and seek God's face in your fasting, you will experience a deeper awareness of Christ's presence. Your confidence in God will be strengthened. You will be refreshed!

¹ cru.org | Article: Personal Guide to Fasting

THE NECESSITY OF SABBATH

There is a built-in rhythm to life. God established human life to flow first with work, then with rest. We are to engage in endeavors and activities for six days, then to disengage for one day. Unfortunately, Hong Kong culture does not acknowledge or assist with this. We need to be intentional in conforming our lives to God's ordained rhythm.

The origin of the Sabbath, which means "to cease," goes back to Creation. After creating the heavens and the earth in six days, God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Genesis 2:2). God ceased from His labors. Just as God rested from His work of creation, we are to cease from our day-to-day labors and rest for one day.

This rest principle is so important to God that it is placed in the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment is "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). It is important to notice that the Sabbath day is more than just rest. It is a holy day in which God is honored. The seventh day on which God rested from the creation memorializes God's sovereignty. Every Christian should endeavor to set aside one day each week for rest and worship. Sabbath is a time to refocus on what's important. It's a day to push the reset button.

Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities enough to see what God is doing. Eugene Peterson

It is critical for your long-term spiritual health to establish the habit of protecting Sabbath rest and worship. The writer of Hebrews begs his readers not to make the same mistake many had done before by rejecting God's Sabbath rest in Jesus Christ.

There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. Hebrews 4:9-11

Protect Sabbath rest and worship. Include Sabbath each week for:

- **Sanity** rest...to remember what is important and stop the chaos
- **Sanctuary** shelter...to protect and recover from the storms of life
- **Sanctity** worship...to experience God and Christ's presence

THE POWER OF SABBATH REST

Most people have difficulty keeping Sabbath rest active in the midst of long work days, family obligations, and crazy schedules. However, it is possible to establish Sabbath rest. To do this it helps to be clear on the basics of Sabbath and to have some practical helps.

Foundational Principles of a Biblical Sabbath

- Foremost, Sabbath is a day of **ceasing**. To stop is built into the literal meaning of the Hebrew word. Therefore, prepare for Sabbath. Complete projects, answer emails, pay bills, clean house. Most of us hate to simply stop. God is at work taking care of the universe and our lives, and He manages quite well without us having to run things. We can trust God and cease from our endeavors.
- Sabbath calls us to **rest**. This requires that the tasks of life that consume energy and time are done at other times. Genuine rest will look different for different people, but for everyone it means not engaging in your work – not even emails and phone messages. When we stop and rest, respecting the limitations of our humanity.
- Sabbath is the **contemplation** of God. God should be the central focus of our Sabbaths. For this reason, Sundays remain the ideal time for most people to celebrate this. Ponder the love of God and the presence of Christ.
- Sabbath revolves around **delighting**. After His work of creation, God declared it was "very good." God was delighted! On Sabbaths we are called to enjoy and delight in creation and its wonders. Slow down so you can pay attention to and delight in people.

Practical Helps

- It is important to make Sabbath fit your own life situation. Experiment. Make a plan. Follow it for a month. Make helpful changes.
- Be with friends, take a nap, read a good book, go to a movie, buy a new plant, play with children.
- Make this a "no obligation" day. No task must be done.
- Consider starting at sunset or dinnertime and keeping Sabbath until the next. [This is the Jewish custom.]
- Light a candle to begin Sabbath and say a prayer or sing a song to begin and end Sabbath.
- If you can't give yourself 24 hours, start with 10 hours and build on your success with this.

THE PRIVILEGE OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

Gathering for worship in fellowship with others is indispensable to healthy spiritual life. At the beginning of His ministry, when undergoing temptation by Satan, Jesus emphasized one of Judaism's foundations declaring "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only," (Matthew 4:10). The first Christians gathered together for koinonia (fellowship/commonality) given their common faith in the risen Christ. An essential ingredient of your spiritual life is worship.

Corporate worship is a vital component for grace to flow in your life. It provides life-changing, genuine joy. Authentic corporate worship brings together the best of collective praise to God, focus on God's Word, prayers and petitions, fellowship and thankfulness. Donald S. Whitney states:

There's an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in 'meeting together' with other believers.

Worship is the act of ascribing proper worth to God, to magnify Him in praise.

True worship is a heartfelt expression of love, adoration, admiration, fascination, wonder, and celebration. It's something that happens in your heart and soul when you begin to praise God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done. Chip Ingram, President of Walk Thru the Bible

Worship is the God-centered focus and response of the soul. It requires that we have within us the One who is the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17) who moves freely in those who come to Christ in faith. We worship in both spirit and truth, with both feelings from our hearts and thoughts from our minds.

Worship is a spiritual discipline to be cultivated, especially corporately. What is important for corporate worship to honor God and inspire and inform people?

- Worship is a spiritual discipline to be cultivated, especially corporately. What is important for corporate worship to honor God and inspire and inform people?
- **Worship exists to give glory to God.** Corporate worship is an anticipation of the heavenly gathering of God's people envisioned in the book of Revelation.

- Worship is focused on Christ. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection made our worship possible. The good news of Christ is proclaimed in corporate worship.
- **Worship is responsive to God's grace.** We meet an amazing, gracious God in corporate worship and experience the presence of His Spirit.
- **Worship honors Biblical truth.** In corporate worship we read, preach, sing, and pray based on God's revelation in the Scriptures.
- **Worship equips people with relevant truth.** Corporate worship draws from the careful, Spirit-filled exposition of Scripture with application to daily life.
- **Worship lifts our voices in song.** Corporate worship utilizes melody, harmony, and lyrics with attention to faithful theology. Both the heritage of church music and the wealth of new songs are accompanied by various instruments with inspirational excellence.
- **Worship is intentionally prayerful.** With a variety of expressions, prayer is foundational for corporate worship. The church is constantly learning ways to best incorporate prayer as a significant aspect of worship.
- **Worship is orderly for congregational participation.** There should be a familiar pattern to corporate worship, a liturgy of sorts, to allow full involvement by those in attendance. With creativity, passion, and contemporary applications worship follows norms established by the earliest disciples, including the regular practices of baptism and communion.

A final caution:

Jesus warned about the act of worship devoid of genuine heart-felt acceptance of God when He stated: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain," (Matthew 15:8). Genuine worship that is pleasing to God depends on a faith-filled grasp of who God is and who we are as people He loves and values. **Great worship treasures God above all!**

TREASURING WORSHIP MUSIC

Why do we sing to praise God? What's so important about worship music when so many other facets of our lives qualify as worship, from prayer to giving to simply honoring God with our thoughts? Does it really matter to God and benefit us?

God Himself Sings

Perhaps we can gain insights into the importance of worshiping through singing by looking to God as our ultimate example. God Himself sings. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that God takes great delight in us and “rejoices over us with singing.” As we grow closer to God, we become more like Him and this should be reflected in the way we worship.

The Bible Encourages Singing

The Bible is clear when it comes to the power and significance of singing, with over 400 references to singing and 50 commands to sing. Ephesians 5:18-19 commands us to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Worship music is designed to support the word of God and honor Him, the same way a gold ring setting supports a sparkling diamond. The ring's true value is found in the precious stone, not its setting, just as the intent of worship music is to serve as a setting for God's glory to shine.

Singing is obviously important to God, and a vital part of the lives of worshippers in the Bible. Here are three reasons worship music and singing should be a regular part of every believer's spiritual life.

1. Singing Helps Us Remember Truth

There's something built into human DNA that allows us to better remember words combined with melodies, rather than words on their own. How many times have you been walking down the street with a song in your head? How frustrating is it when you can't forget a TV jingle! Rhyme and meter are powerful mnemonic devices. When we sing our prayers, or God's truth, we do a better job of etching God's word in our spirits. This brings us life and gives God glory. In Deuteronomy 31, God helps His people remember His words with music.

2. Singing is Expressive

The Bible tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's pretty comprehensive, and implies that God intends for us to worship Him expressively with “all of our beings.” Imagine walking into an ancient stained-glass cathedral in Europe, with midday light cascading through the windows and even the sound of your breath echoing off the stone walls. Now you could just say the word, “Hallelujah” in monotones, but that would fall so short in the presence of such beauty. It wouldn't match the space, would it? Now, imagine a full choir in the room singing the same word “Hallelujah” in masterful harmonies. Something in our spirits was designed to resonate with music.

3. God Tells Us to Sing

It's that simple. In the Psalms we're told to sing to the Lord a new song because He's done marvelous things. And if God tells us to do something, He knows it's for our good and His glory.

Don't worry about what you sound like, or who's standing next to you. Don't worry if it seems out of character, or you don't know the song. Just sing to God, and know He'll meet you in the melody.

Resources Abound

Island ECC releases original music under the name **Renew Worship**. Also, you can find countless original worship songs on all streaming platforms, including iTunes and Spotify. Our hope is that this music, inspired by what God is doing here in Hong Kong, serves as a great blessing to you. We also host **Renew Worship Nights** throughout the year, which allow for extended, creative, and powerful times of gathering together to worship in community.

The book, *Worship Matters* by Bob Kauflin, is a thorough resource if you'd like a better understanding of the importance of worship music and what the Bible specifically says about it. Consider checking it out to learn more about this important topic.

THE VITALITY OF COMMUNITY

Being in community with other believers is an indispensable aspect of the Christian faith. It is one of the chief means God uses to share His grace in our lives. This “koinonia,” the Greek for community, fellowship, partnership, was an anchor for the earliest Christians. From the very beginning, believers have understood themselves as being in Christ, working through Christ, with identity coming from Christ - and these are experienced within community with other believers.

Acts 2:42-47 presents a wonderful snapshot of the early church that gives indication of six essential elements of authentic Christian community:

- **Devotion to Christ and His cause** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* Community is a place that reflects full devotion and passion to Christ, to each other and to the cause of Jesus. Members are one in heart and purpose.
- **Anticipation of God's noticeable working** *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.* People want to be a part of something God-sized. Faith communities pray and expect God to be at work, trusting in His grace and power.
- **Intentional commitment to one another** *All the believers were together and had everything in common.* Christian communities display inter-dependency, mutual support, respect, and love to one another. They work at genuine unity.
- **Generosity in meeting needs** *They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.* As needs and hardships arise within individuals, there is response to assist, encourage, and be generous when essential. Members care for each other.
- **Presence together in positive fellowship** *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.* People in healthy community enjoy each other, playing and laughing and eating together. Over time they know each other well.
- **Sense of joy within God's movements** *praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* Those in the early church saw God moving in dramatic ways, in ways that were beyond their expectations. Those in Christian community see how they are connected to a power beyond themselves. They take joy when others come to faith.

At its essence, living within community is “partnership in the gospel” (Philippians 1:5). It is the means by which believers share in common the One who is Grace incarnate, Jesus Christ; and the medium by which they love one another and extend that love to the world around them.

Community in Christ has a vitality, a potency that is not commonly experienced elsewhere. The writer of Hebrews, reminded his readers of the importance of this vital gathering in community:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

This summons reminds us of the importance of meeting together and that when we do, we are to look to the needs of others. We are to consider one another for love and good deeds - to interact with others and consider each one, exhorting them to the good! In community, we ... Stay in touch... Get close... Know others... Are known... Go deep... Inspire!

At Island ECC, Care Groups are our communities that fosters spiritual growth through authentic friendship. Care Groups are covenant communities that faithfully provide the needed context to maintain integrity and grow in personal faith. Care Groups are different from other social groups because of their unique identity grounded in each member's personal experience of God's covenantal, Christ centered, love for them. This presence of God's grace in the small group is thereby naturally demonstrated in speech (Colossians 4:6), conduct (1 Timothy 4:12) and attitudes (Romans 12:2). These engaging, small groups are one of the best environments for discipleship, with the goal of assisting members be students of Jesus and to grow spiritually.

The discipline of growing in Christ is not meant to only be in private or alone. Christians grow in their faith best when they are nurtured in the context of authentic community, with developed friendships. Through mutual encouragement, members in Care Groups do not only learn more about God, the Bible and one another, they also are better prepared to live out a fruitful life and cope with various challenges with biblical resources and responses.

God has given us each other. Community is the receptacle for God's gracious and sovereign work.

BUILDING COMMUNITY FOR ONE ANOTHER

One of the clearest portraits of Christian community in Scripture is through the simple phrase “one another.” Careful examination of the nearly 60 Biblical passages that contain this phrase reveal truths that can be applied to our relationships with others. These “one anothers” are a valuable assistance in building successful, satisfying, God-glorifying community.

1. Healthy community is enhanced by mutual interactions that build people up.

Greek word that is translated one another is a reciprocal pronoun – which means that both parties will experience the action being done. If the action is positive (love, support, comfort), both parties will benefit. And in the case of negative actions (speaking evil, grumbling), both parties lose. Mark one of the following that you would like to be more active in your life.

- ☐ Be devoted to one another; honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)
- ☐ Comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace (2 Corinthians 13:11)
- ☐ Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)
- ☐ Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13)
- ☐ Have equal concern for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25)
- ☐ Serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13)
- ☐ Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- ☐ Consider one another as better than yourself (Philippians 2:3)
- ☐ Live in harmony with one another, being sympathetic and humble (1 Peter 3:8)
- ☐ Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)

2. Healthy community is characterized by helping each other.

If you actively do the following one anothers, someone will always be helped.

Mark one of the following you could build more into your character.

- ☐ Stir up one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)
- ☐ Love one another for love comes from God (1 John 4:7, 4:11, 3:11, 3:23)
- ☐ Carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- ☐ Bear with one another in love, being completely humble, gentle, and patient (Ephesians 4:2)
- ☐ Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- ☐ Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- ☐ Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another (James 5:16)

3. Healthy community demands being careful not to treat others in certain ways.

If you go against these one anothers, someone inevitably gets hurt. Mark one of these that you need to watch out for, especially in times of stress.

- ☐ Don't judge one another (Romans 14:13)
- ☐ Don't grumble against one another (James 5:9)
- ☐ Don't slander one another (James 4:11)
- ☐ Don't lie to one another (Colossians 3:9)
- ☐ Don't provoke or envy one another (Galatians 5:26)
- ☐ Don't bite and devour one another (Galatians 5:15)

THE JOY OF SERVING

Too often, people neglect serving as a spiritual discipline. However, for anyone seeking godliness and Christ-likeness, serving is a critical component. Jesus Himself explicitly states that “even the Son of Man came to serve, not to be served.” (Mark 10:45)

While other spiritual disciplines can bring us closer to God and grow our faith, there is nothing quite like serving others to bring personal joy. Through serving, we express our love for and partner with an amazing God, we practically reinforce and mature our own faith, we see prayers answered, and we get to witness the hand of God moving for His purposes. These traits make service a critical component for maturing and maintaining our faith in Christ.

Any service that reflects the love of Christ is considered Christian serving. This can range from ministering to the disadvantaged, visiting those in prison, doing right in daily life, being honest with clients, teaching children and youth at church, and caring for our families. Our city and world are in desperate need of Christ’s love and, as Christians, God has tasked us to bring that love into the world through the spiritual discipline of serving.

Andy Stanley made an interesting observation about the early church: **“The primary activity of the church was one-anothering one another.”** In the New Testament, there are 59 exhortations to “one-anothering,” with all manner of actions linked to this, from love to greeting with a holy kiss, and from honouring and accepting to carrying burdens. Serving is the spiritual discipline where we “one-another” one another and, in doing so, build up each other and the church so that, together, we can see lives transformed by Christ and His light for the world. Every believer is called upon to one-another and God grants each and every believer for this:

1. Every Believer Is Equipped to Serve Others

God has given every believer one or more spiritual gifts that are to be used in the service of others. “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” 1 Peter 4:10 There is no better setting than the community of fellow believers to discover, hone and impart those gifts. The church thrives when all engage as active participants

2. Every Believer Is Tasked to Share the Gospel

Christ gave an engaging commission to all who believe in Him to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Our cities are desperate for the powerful, freeing and transformative message of Christ, and as believers, we are tasked to share it, not only in straightforward broadcasting, but also in living out the Gospel in our lives. Serving others develops practical sensitivities in responding to the varied needs of others.

3. Every Believer Partners with God to Advance His Kingdom

As God’s partners, we beg you not to accept this marvellous gift of God’s kindness and then ignore it. (2 Corinthians 6:1) A church as a community of believers partners with the living God when showing tangible manifestations His love. God’s love is clearly reflected within the body of Christ when people do not ignore the ways they have been gifted and instead use these to serve within their church and community.

Joyful Service

Since followers of Christ are equipped and tasked to partner with God, joy comes in genuine acts of serving. Few things in the world bring as much delight as being able to encourage or carry the burden of another, or seeing someone turn to Christ for forgiveness and transformation, or even granting a smile to someone who is feeling down. In the midst of any act of serving, two reflections assist in maintaining a joyful posture:

1. A Heart of Humility

Joyful serving requires humility because it is in humility that we are able to obey God with a wholehearted willingness for His purposes, and go the extra mile for those we serve. As Paul writes in Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

2. A Heart of Love

Joyful serving springs from a heart of love for God and for others, and that love comes from the constant recognition of what God did to set us free from the bondage of sin and the ceaseless realisation that we have been forgiven by our faith in Christ. From this comes our ever thankfulness for God’s grace to us, and our genuine gladness that we are free to live our lives forever transformed. From a heart transformed by personal experience we ... “Serve the Lord with gladness!” (Psalm 100:2)

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

There are many ways to share what you have personally discovered in Christ with others. These include inviting them to a Sunday service or a special event at church, welcoming them to join you in your care group, and certainly letting Christ lead you to show interest and care for them personally.

Sharing our faith face-to-face is hard for many of us, partly because we overinflate what evangelism is. Basically, it's sharing good news. Think of the last great movie you watched or book you read, or restaurant you discovered. You probably went out of your way to tell people about them. When you love something, it's easy and natural to talk about it. Sharing the Good News of Christ should be no different. Here are four ways to keep this simple.

1. Know the basic story of salvation

Many outlines are available, but make it as straightforward as possible. This 4-step pattern is an easy one to remember.

- **God gives.** God created everything, including mankind in his own image; giving us authority to care for and rule. Men and women were meant for a perfect, unspoiled relationship with God.
- **People respond.** However, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God. They ate fruit from the one tree God had forbidden. This sin broke the wonderful relationship between humankind and God.
- **God gives.** God then gave His Son Jesus Christ to reconcile everyone and restore people back to Himself. Simple belief, in faith, that Jesus Christ died on the cross, paying the price for our salvation, restores and heals our relationship with God.
- **People respond.** Everyone has a choice to accept or reject this gift. Not everyone receives salvation. Although many receive this wonderful gift, some reject it outright, and others are interested but want more time to consider it.

2. Know one Bible verse.

A misconception about sharing our faith is that people think we need to memorize many Scripture passages to share effectively. Don't put that pressure on yourself. Just be familiar with one verse that is meaningful to you. Memorize it and be familiar enough to share it confidently. One familiar Scripture that is often used is John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."*

3. Know your audience.

Get to know the person you are sharing with, learn their background, interests, and what they're facing in their life. Any kind of communication is more effective, the more you understand your audience, and sharing the gospel is no different. Remember that others are willing to listen and talk about themselves when they are with someone who cares.

4. Know your own story.

Just share what Jesus means to you and how God has changed you; what life is like now compared to then. One of the best testimonies found in the Bible is someone Jesus healed who stated simply, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25). Your story of how you met Jesus is powerful and effective.

5. Lead in a simple prayer.

If the person you're sharing with wants to become a Christian, you can direct them in this simple prayer of salvation:

*Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.
I believe You died for my sins. I turn away from my sins,
and invite You into my life as my Lord and Saviour.
In Your name I pray, Amen*

Regardless of the person's response to your invitations or sharing, continue to be interested in this person and show your care for them and their life, and therefore allow the Good News of Christ to move through you.

THE MISSION OF CHRIST

For many people, the word “missions” means mission trips or a missionary from the church who has been sent to another country. Those are indeed expressions of missions but at its heart, missions is about God’s glory. God wants His glory to be known by everyone so that He may be worshiped and enjoyed by His people.

God Sends, We Go

God often chooses to reveal Himself and accomplish His will by sending His people in His name. That’s why we do missions!

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”
And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”* Isaiah 6:8

Isaiah had a vision of the Lord with His glory filling the temple and angels declaring, “Holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (Isaiah 6:3) Even though the earth was full of His glory, Isaiah still lived among people of “unclean lips” who didn’t know God. The Lord asked for who He could send to these people, and Isaiah responded with an obedient Yes to God’s missional calling (6:8). This pattern of God sending, and His people faithfully going out is seen throughout Scripture, from Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) through Moses (Exodus 3:10), and into the New Testament.

Missions has its greatest expression in the Great Commission: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded”* (Matthew 28:19-20). These are the last words of Christ as He ascended to heaven. Here is the Son, sent from the Father to us as the embodiment of the Good News, sending us to go forward in His name, to share good news and to carry on the mission the Father had given Him.

We Grow As We Go

Like other spiritual disciples, participating in missions helps us to grow in our faith. Mission trips can accelerate our spiritual growth by putting us in unfamiliar environments where we’re forced to depend on God. Mission trips also help us to see that our way of Christian life is not the only way or the best way. We are stretched and built up when we see God at work in other peoples and other cultures.

It’s an old joke that the Great Commission is often dismissed as the Great Suggestion. Believers can too often excuse themselves from participating in missions, saying it’s only for those who are called to be full-time missionaries or that they’ll go on a mission trip “when they have time.” As Christ-followers, we cannot read the Bible selectively. Being on mission for Christ is a scriptural commission.

Fortunately, there are other ways to be involved besides *Going*. International cities like Hong Kong have people from many cultures and ethnicities. Some people are from countries where Christianity and mission activity is restricted. Yet in Hong Kong, they can hear the gospel and meet Christians with the freedom and safety to consider what they learn. This practice of missions is known as *Welcoming*. When we intentionally reach out to international students, new arrivals or co-workers from other countries, we can engage in global missions in our local context. Another aspect of missions is *Mobilizing*. This means helping others to go by inspiring them in a class or by assisting with planning or logistics for someone else’s mission trip. Yet another important aspect of missions is *Sending*. Senders are those who support the “goers,” meaning those who have been called to go to the mission field. Senders pray for the missionary, provide financial support and in other ways encourage those more active in mission activities. This assists them to remain effective and strong while on the field (and nurtured and care for when at home). The Sender is often both the missionary’s home church and individuals within that church.

Each of these four practices – *Going*, *Welcoming*, *Mobilizing* and *Sending* – complement each other and together are important to fulfilling the mission of Christ and the commission to those who follow Him.

Missions is the attitude of being ready to go forward in faithfulness and obedience to where God sends us for the glory of His name.

THE PRACTICE OF STEWARDSHIP

God loves and cares deeply for us. He wants the best for us and knows that from time-to-time money will be a struggle for all of us, and He wants to equip us to handle it well. That's why God inspired so much in the Bible that deals with possessions and money.

You may be surprised to know that Jesus offers more wisdom and has more to say about money than any other subject besides the Kingdom of God. The truths in the Bible are timeless, teaching us how to earn, spend, give, save, invest, etc.

In order to better understand how we should approach possessions and money, some key principles provide proven guidance:

1. Principle of Ownership

Many people believe, "I deserve everything that I have, and more" or "All that I have belongs to me. I am the rightful owner." As a result of this attitude, they believe that it is totally up to them to deploy the things that they own for their own enjoyment. However, the fact is, that God owns everything. We are simply managers or administrators acting on His behalf.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1

Understanding this truth leads to the commitment of one's self and one's possessions to God's service, recognizing that we do not have the right of control over our property or ourselves.

2. Principle of Blessing

The people of Israel trace their unique identity back to Abraham, the father of faith. God initiated a covenant with Abraham which forms the foundation of a new relationship between God and humanity.

I [God] will make of you [Abraham] a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. Genesis 12:2

We all are granted many blessings from God: our education, talents, earning power, time, relationships, etc. God, the owner of all, chooses to give blessings to each of us. It is God's character to be gracious!

3. Principle of Responsibility

We are to manage what belongs to God. A steward is someone who manages somebody else's property or finances. We are stewards and need to responsibly manage God's holdings in good ways and in accordance with God's purposes. As stewards, we have the real responsibility of managing assets well.

The fact is, that God invites us to know Him more by being properly responsible for our lives and resources. We grow in spiritual maturity when we practice being faithful stewards of all that God has given us within the opportunities we have. By this, we glorify God, serve the common good, and further Christ's kingdom.

4. Principle of Generosity

Under the Old Testament, a tithe, or 10%, of a person's "first fruits" were to be given to God. In the New Testament, the emphasis of this responsibility moved deeper into a calling for giving of self and possessions to be charitable, generous, and even sacrificial. Jesus intentionally noted to his disciples that a poor widow who gave a small financial amount, but an amount that was needed for her livelihood, had given more than those who gave a small percentage of their abundance (Luke 21:1-4).

God desires for us to be faithful and generous, regardless of how much we have. "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Generosity comes from one's heart, knowing that giving is a responsive act that represents genuine gratitude to God. It is the giving of self for the sake of others.

Understanding and applying these principles to your finances and to all of your life, that is, to live as a steward, with a desire to manage well what God graciously bestows can be life-changing. While it includes dedicated practice, such stewardship is driven and sustained by personal devotion and gratitude to Christ who redeemed us.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

The giving of yourself and your finances with an attitude of gratitude and love is vital for spiritual vitality to flourish. Give generously, regularly, voluntary, cheerfully and sacrificially.

THE SPIRITUAL CONTINUUM

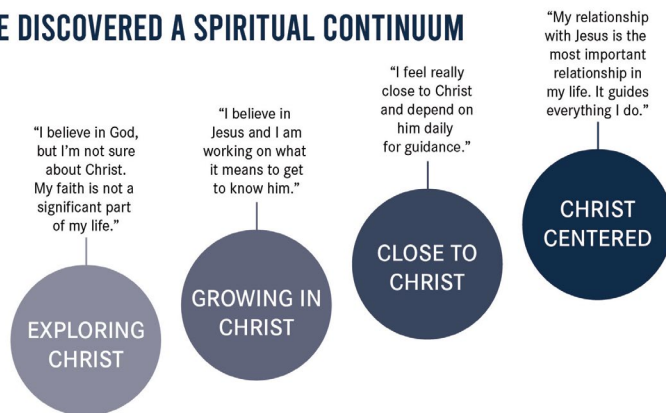
Various publications and systems identify and detail a continuum to spiritual formation and growth. One well-documented study is found in the book, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*

After extensive correlation of data from over 250,000 people taking the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey, they came up with a clear, easy to understand, assessment of a spiritual continuum, which has impact on how people might best utilize of the material in this booklet.

This spiritual continuum includes four basic segments that explain where a person is in their personal faith in Christ.

1. **Exploring Christ:** These people have a basic belief in God, but they are unsure about Christ and His role in their lives.
2. **Growing in Christ:** These people have made a personal commitment to trust in Christ and are just beginning to learn what this means and how develop spiritually.
3. **Close to Christ:** These depend on Christ and see Him as someone who assists them in life. They turn to Christ for help and guidance for the issues they face.
4. **Christ-Centered:** These would identify their relationship with Christ as the most important relationship in their entire lives, subordinating everything to His will and desires.

WE DISCOVERED A SPIRITUAL CONTINUUM



This framework emerged in our research as the most powerful predictive description of how people grow spiritually. This means that the strength of people's spiritual beliefs and their level of engagement with spiritual activities depend on (or can be predicted by) how they describe their relationship with Christ

As people grow spiritually, they move from one segment to the next through three movements of spiritual growth. It should be noted here that while these are the three major movements, each person's spiritual path will be somewhat distinct, with spiritual growth not being purely linear or predictable.

Movement 1

The movement from Exploring Christ to Growing in Christ is all about Christian basics; developing a firm foundation of spiritual beliefs and attitudes. This is a trust-building phase, when the impact of church activities is most significant.

Movement 2

The movement from Growing in Christ to Close to Christ involves deciding that one's relationship with Jesus is personal; and hinges on developing a routine of spiritual practices that make space and time for a growing intimacy with Christ.

Movement 3

The movement from Close to Christ to Christ-Centered replaces human self-centeredness with Christ self-sacrifice. They pour out their increasing love for Jesus through spiritual outreach activities.

The material in this booklet can be used with a high level of confidence that the spiritual disciplines detailed are foundational to personal spiritual well-being. However, for the best use of this material, it is advisable that you determine which of the above four segments and which of these three movements describes you at this time. From this vantage point, you can better determine what in this material is of most use for application to your spiritual formation and growth as a Christ follower.

PERSONAL NOTES



ISLAND
EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH