

RHYTHMS OF A TRANSFORMED LIFE



DAILY GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to *Rhythms of a Transformed Life*!

Life as a disciple of Jesus is a journey of transformational growth. The call to follow and learn from Him is an invitation to be changed from the inside out, growing more free to experience His Kingdom purposes for our lives and our world in the process. We become more and more like Jesus.

From the church's earliest days, this growth has been lived out through spiritual disciplines that Jesus Himself practiced and taught, such as prayer, worship, devotion to God's word, and sharing in God's story. These have become the individual and community rhythms of life in Christ, passed on from one generation of believers to the next.

Recently, a team of Westminster ministers and congregation members set out to develop a guide to seven rhythms fundamental to this kind of spiritual formation, along with practical steps to apply them in daily life. This *Rhythms of a Transformed Life* Daily Guide is the result.

Using this Guide

Rhythms is not primarily a Bible study; it's a guide towards deep spiritual formation. Each of its seven chapters presents a specially chosen Rhythm of spiritual practice. The goal is to help you find ways to build each of these rhythms into your life—not just over the course of this study, but far beyond, even for a lifetime!

Each week of the guide begins with a brief introduction and a memory verse. The week's content is presented over five days, and includes specific ideas for putting the rhythm into practice. Week upon week, each new rhythm is intended to add depth and richness to your experience of spiritual growth.

The big margins on the sides are a place for you to write your own notes and comments: things that stand out to you, questions you have, prayers—anything that comes to mind. Make it a goal to wear this guide out by the time you're finished!

Group Experience

Although it's possible to benefit from *Rhythms* individually, it's really designed to be one component of a dynamic small-group environment. As you and your group journey together through the material, you'll find new perspective and have a chance to build into each others' lives. For many people, these group times are the highlight of the experience.

Here's the ideal flow for a weekly small group focusing on the *Rhythms* material:

- Open your time with an icebreaker activity or brief game.
- Listen to a group member's story of their spiritual journey. Over the course of your weeks together, everyone will have a chance to share their personal story.
- Look back over the past week and share experiences with the rhythms you are learning to apply.
- Discuss the current week's *Rhythms* reading: ask questions, share parts you enjoyed, parts you didn't enjoy, and anything that was meaningful to you.
- Share any prayer requests group you'd like group members to pray for during the coming week.
- Conclude by praying for one another.

We are so excited for you to begin the journey through the spiritual rhythms highlighted here! Some of the concepts you encounter may be familiar, and some not. Whether you're new to this journey of faith or have been walking with Jesus a long time, we believe that all of us will learn and grow together along the way.



R H Y T H M O N E

SHARING IN GOD'S STORY

Because God's story of transforming love is at the heart of all creation, I learn to recognize where He is at work and respond to His invitation to partnership. I do this by...

- Entering God's story
- Understanding my story
- Recognizing where God is at work
- Joining God's story in church
- Joining God's story in the community

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

Live wisely among those who are not Christians and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone.

—Colossians 4:5-6

Day 1 - Entering God's Story

*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation
for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.
Everything was created through him and for him.
He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.
Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.
He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.
So he is first in everything.
For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.
—Colossians 1:15-20 (NLT)*

You just read God's amazing story, packed into six short verses by the Apostle Paul. (This is quite amazing when you think that unpacking those six verses took all sixty-six books of the Bible!)

Whether this story is new to you or you've heard it from a young age, it's incredibly easy for any of us to get lost in the busyness of life and current issues in our world, and as a result to miss the relevance it holds for our every moment.

God's Story begins in Genesis with His creating a perfect world—land, plants, animals and people—and then inviting man and woman to take care of it, to co-create and subdue those things that have overgrown in order to make them beautiful again. God, in perfect, harmonious community with woman and man.

But something happened to mar this goodness: The evil one, also called 'the devil' or **Satan** (more on this in Week 4), convinced man and woman

SATAN (noun)

Proper, personal name for the chief of the fallen spirits, adversary of God and mankind. Others of the many titles for Satan emphasize his characteristics or actions. For example, 'the devil' means 'the slanderer.' I Tim. 3:6 indicates that Satan fell under God's condemnation due to ambitious pride (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

that God was holding out on them, and that they didn't need God in order to reach perfection—they could do it on their own. The moment they bought into this lie of independence from God, its falsehood ran through every part of their being, and they in turn ran and hid from the One who had created them.

But God, who is the ultimate lover and pursuer, went to them. Instead of shaming them for embracing the lie, He asks them to admit where they are, hiding from Him. He opens them to deeper understanding of how shame and blame are a heavy burden to bear, and not what He intends for His creation. Then God offers a way back into relationship with Him through the blood-sacrifice of an animal, whose skin provides a covering over Adam and Eve's shame. God provides them another place to live, and at first, they are grateful. But it doesn't last long.

Reading through much of the Old Testament, we see the pattern of God providing for His people and His people turning away to reject him. All the while, through all kinds of people and in all kinds of ways, God hints towards a promised Deliverer who will not simply cover over our shame, but will put into us a new heart and new spirit. At just the right time He sent into this world the most beautiful provision: Not a great king or warrior, but a humble baby born to impoverished parents (Luke 2:24). This baby grows up and provides the ultimate sacrifice for our continual wandering away by His death on a cross and resurrection from the dead, so that we also might enter into this same kind of life.

God's story is the
first love story ever
written; all other
love stories are
echoes of His.

Because He is a loving, pursuing provider, God has a plan for everything that's ever happened or ever will happen—and His plan is good. God's story is the first love story ever written; all other love stories are echoes of His. God even tells us how this ends: It's a 100% guaranteed "happily ever after" ending. (Check out the last two chapters of the book of Revelation if you want to see it for yourself!)

There's an even shorter, one-sentence passage that further condenses this universal story. It's John 3:16: *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"* (NLT). Give yourself a minute or two to think deeply about the significance of each phrase in that sentence.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for creating this world and creating all of us. Thank you for pursuing us when we go astray and bringing us back to a loving relationship with you. Help me to continue to grow in understanding that this is your grand story and I get to partner with you in it. Thank you for the way you have created me, and for the way you have uniquely created others around me. Help me to see you in this world and in others today.

Application

We just read about God's love and pursuit for us. Our experience of love begins in God's character and goodness. Keep your eyes, heart, and mind open today to something beautiful and thank him for it!

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

Live _____ among those who are not Christians
and make the most of every _____. Let your
_____ be gracious and effective so that you will have
the right _____ for everyone.

—Colossians 4:5-6

Day 2 - Your Story

*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.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

—Psalm 139:13-14, 16 (NIV)

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's **sins** against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

—2 Corinthians 5:17-19 (NIV)

SIN (noun)

A violation of God's holy standard, missing the mark of perfection through either action or inaction. Sin entered humanity in the very beginning and impacts every aspect of who we are.

Yesterday we talked about God's story, and in the process we also saw glimpses of ourselves as the receivers of His deep, deep love. Today we'll look more closely at the way God's love intersects with our lives.

A coin has two sides; so does your story. One side is those things you share in common with every person who has ever been born into this world. The other side is everything that is unique to you alone.

The "same as everyone else" side includes the fragility of our humanity and the struggle to enter into our true identity in Christ. Even though we all hope to find success, happiness, and meaning in our lives, being born into humanity means experiencing the relentless pull of self-centeredness, arrogance, fear, greed, and impurity, which all lead to pain and death. That's true for all of us, regardless of time, place, or culture.

On the other side of the coin, the unique part of your story is that you were created for a purpose, one that flows from your specific gifts, experiences, interests, abilities, and relationships. When we live in our true identity as a created, redeemed, and Spirit-filled child of the King of the Universe—and when we live out the purpose for which He created us—life is incredibly meaningful even in the midst of tough circumstances.

Novelist Frank Peretti once observed that, when you boil it down, there are really only two religions in the world: Either God is God, or man is

god. Since God created every human with a free will, we have opportunity multiple times every day to choose which of those two storylines we're going to live from.

When living as if man is god, we claim freedom to do whatever we want, as we climb the ladder set for us by society or self-will. Along the way, though, we move further and further from our true identity. We struggle with control issues, addictions, depression, strongholds, and destructive behaviors at all levels. And this harm spills out over others around us.

One of our *Rhythms* authors shares how she first started to find her place in God's story:

I was raised in a small, conservative town on the bald prairies of Alberta, Canada. Though my parents loved Jesus, I chose to live a two-faced life of rebellion: I lied; I skipped school more times than I can count; I snuck out at all hours to smoke and drink with friends. In honest moments, I could sense the emptiness of it all, as well as the guilt and shame that accompanied my choices. But I wasn't willing to change.

One day in my junior year of high school, a couple carloads of high schoolers from a far-away town arrived. They started telling us stories of their lives, caught up in drugs, gangs; some had already done jail time. To be honest, it sounded very cool to me at first—I thought I could learn some new tricks from them!

As I listened in that moment, I knew I was at a life-story crossroads.

Then they shared how God had brought transformation. Their lives had turned around when they fully surrendered to God. Now they were going town to town, sharing their stories of freedom in Christ—and inviting others to experience the same freedom.

As I listened in that moment, I knew I was at a life-story crossroads. I could cynically throw off this invitation, or I could surrender my desires, will, emotions, relationships, and dreams to God's authority.

That day, God gave me the humility and faith to surrender it all to Him. It was hard to do! A huge battle raged in my mind and heart. But that was the day God enabled me to align my story with His purposes. And my life has never been the same. -Sylvia R.

What about your journey? How has your story intersected with God's big story to bring you to this time and place? This is a good time to say: If you sense that you haven't truly come to the point of surrendering all

that you are to the love of God, that's something you can do right now! Here's what it might look like in prayer form:

Lord, thank You for seeing me and desiring a relationship with me right where I am. You have never stopped loving and pursuing me through every circumstance of my life. I invite you to come in and fill me with your love, presence, and purpose. I'm sorry for the ways I have rebelled against your love, and I turn away from those things. Thank you for dying on the cross to pay the price for my sin. Empower me to live the life you created me for. I receive you into my life as Lord and Savior.

If this is your prayer, you can be assured that God hears and makes His home with you through His Spirit. Your personal story is now a part of His greater story!

Prayer

God, I am grateful for the way you created me and pursued me with your love. Help me to live from that place of love as I grow in becoming more of who you created me to be. Thank you for opportunities to tell others about how you have transformed and are continuing to transform my life. I am so grateful to be your child.

Application

If today you prayed to invite Christ into your life for the first time, please tell your group leaders so they can celebrate with you! If you have already prayed a similar prayer, thank God again for entering your life and for the unique way he wants to use your story in the lives of others. Ask the Lord for an opportunity to share your transformation story with someone this week.

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

Live _____ among those who are not _____
and make the _____ of every _____. Let your
_____ be gracious and _____ so that you will
have the right _____ for _____.

—Colossians 4:5-____

Day 3 - God is at Work

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

—Ephesians 2:8-10

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

—John 14:26-27

Sometimes a phrase is said so often that it becomes cliché. 'God is at work' can be one of these: It's thrown out in powerful, life-changing moments almost as often as in moments when people have no clue what is happening but want to offer some kind of comfort. So even if you groaned a little when you saw today's topic, don't tune out! It goes to the heart of this rhythm of Sharing in God's Story.

In Day 1 of this week we discussed God's invitation, which goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis, to participate with Him in His work. God invited man and woman to partner with Him in caring for all creation, and throughout the Old Testament we see God looking at humanity for partners who will share in this glorious work of creating and restoring. When Jesus came He entrusted this life-giving mission to His church, inviting us to live out the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand everywhere we go (Mark 1:15).

This is a radically different way of thinking about work than what most of us grow up with! In Week 5 we'll talk more about experiencing God in your work in practical ways; today is focused on cultivating the mindset needed within this rhythm of Sharing in God's Story.

When you invite Christ into your life, God's Holy Spirit comes and makes His home within you (2 Corinthians 1:22). This third Person of the **Trinity** empowers Jesus' followers to live a Kingdom life. Then, from this relationship secured in love, we get to partner with God and with others to see transformation in ourselves and in our world. God uses both sides

TRINITY (noun)

While there is only one God, this God exists and is known in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost in older translations). In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

of the coin we talked about on Day 2—both those things that you have in common with everyone else and those things that make you unique—to continue unfolding His story of redemption and restoration.

Your family background, the time period and location where you were born, the people you interact with regularly—all these things God wants to use to invite you to share in His story. If you will let Him.

David Bowling is director of the local non-profit ministry Congregations for the Homeless. He shares his story of seeing God at work throughout his life:

My journey of being a servant to, and bringing hope to, people experiencing homelessness started when I was a young boy. My family had very little money during most of my childhood. Although we didn't have much, my parents worked hard and lived out their faith for us kids to witness. My dad would often pick up hitchhikers and bring them home for a meal and conversation before driving them down the road. We didn't have much, but we shared what we had with those who had less. When I was in my late twenties, I moved to Australia and joined a ministry that served the local impoverished community. It was here that I befriended many people experiencing homelessness. Now, all these years later, I feel so blessed to live out my calling as part of a community that brings real hope and love to men on the margins, helping them find their dignity, purpose, and meaning. -David B.

Recognizing and joining in God's story might sound like hard work, but the good news is that God has already done the hardest work on our behalf (see Ephesians 2:8-10). In David Takle's book *Formation*, he gives perspective on how this mystery works by comparing two similar, yet very different, forms of transportation: a rowboat and a sailboat. Both boats offer protection from the ocean water, and both get you somewhere, but in very different ways.

If you're aboard a sailboat, you are wholly dependent on the power of the wind.

If you see your faith journey as a rowboat, you're living a story where moving toward your destination depends on you trying really hard. Those oars don't row themselves, after all! It's a lonely and grueling experience, in which it's easy to start comparing yourself to all the other rowers out on the water—who is or isn't trying hard enough, and why?

On the other hand, if you're aboard a sailboat, movement comes through dependence on the power of the wind. Your important work is to learn how to position the sails most effectively, moving forward by benefit of the wind's energy. Your companions are other seasoned sailors who have learned the art of catching the wind just right and also being patient when the wind is calm. This is the heart of recognizing where God is at work: Relying on His power and trusting that He has gone ahead of you to fulfill His good plans in your life and in the world.

Prayer

God, thank you for the work done on my behalf and thank you that you invite me to join you in this work. Help me to stay open and aware to all that you are doing in the world. Give me opportunities to share this goodness with others. Thank you for the Holy Spirit's guidance and the peace that you bring to my heart and life as I follow you. Even in the hard times, I know that you are with me and are working beyond what I can see.

Application

How has God been at work in your life lately? Ask someone around you this question this week and be ready to share something from your life. God is at work all around us, pray for eyes to see and tell of His goodness.

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

Live _____ those who are not _____
and make the _____ of every _____. Let your
_____ be _____ and _____ so that you
_____ have the _____ for _____.
— _____ 4:5- _____

Day 4 - Joining God's Story in the Church

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

—Ephesians 4:1b-7 (NIV)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

—Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

When was the last time you heard a story of transformation in someone's life? In a world with so much focus on chaos and trauma, our souls need to be invited again and again into God's greater story, recognizing that we can trust Him.

This is what the author was inviting the people of God to do in Hebrews 10 (quoted above). Christians were dealing with a lot of hard things and were tempted to forget the good story God was telling in and through them. The author of Hebrews encouraged them to go against the flow in continuing to gather and tell each other what God was doing in their lives—how they had seen Jesus at work. This offered great encouragement in such a confusing, chaotic world.

Our world today is much the same. Statistics tell us that the number of people attending church in person has been dropping year by year in the United States. There are a lot of reasons for this, and attending church online can be a perfectly valid choice, especially if it's for a particular season or reason (such as a global pandemic!). For some people, though, their distancing goes deeper than that, including various forms of hurt and broken trust. To be certain, there is no perfect church, and on any given day you certainly might have a mixed bag of experiences spending time with 'God's people.' So why bother?

We will explore this more in future weeks, but for now let's bring it back to Jesus: He instituted the church (Matthew 16:18) because, being both fully God and also the most brilliant man who ever lived, He knew this

environment was the best place for people to "proclaim the excellencies" of God (1 Peter 2:9). God made us to flourish in community, and experiencing this with others on a faith journey opens up possibilities for growth we simply can't find on our own. When we rub shoulders regularly with people who we might never have interacted with apart from the shared faith drawing us together, it's a soil for growth you can't find anywhere else. Making that experience meaningful, however, doesn't just happen by accident.

In her book *Making Sunday Special*, Karen Mains offers a simple philosophy that may help: When we come together with other believers, she says, imagine that you bring with you two baskets, one in each hand. The first basket is empty, and the goal is to fill it with encouragement and training through God's Word, expressions of friendship from others, new insights about God's plan for our lives etc., so the empty basket can

What if we all had a similar daily two-baskets goal of first listening to others' stories and then sharing ours whenever appropriate?

be brought home full of new things to process and grow from all week. The second basket is full of words and actions flowing from a heart that shares in God's story. The goal is to prayerfully offer the contents of this full basket to the Lord and to other people, so the full basket is emptied out, one interaction at a time.

What if we all had a similar daily two-baskets goal of first listening to others' stories and then sharing ours whenever appropriate? In this, it's so important that we be people who *listen*

first! Proverbs 18:43 says, "*Answering before listening is both stupid and rude*" (MSG). We all have to continually battle a natural tendency to speak first and then *maybe* get around to listening later.

Joining in God's Story along with others is both a spiritual practice and a discipline. When we take on a discipline, we don't always see immediate results, and this can be true of spiritual community. But in an environment where we all show up with something to give and something to receive, diverse yet united, amazing things can happen, even in this confusing and chaotic world. In ways we don't always recognize, we're telling a watching world that God can bring wholeness to brokenness—as He has been doing all throughout history.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you so much for your encouragement through the fellowship of other believers. It's amazing how different we all are; help me to see people through your eyes of delight and love. Help me also to be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry. Thank you for the way you invite me to share with you, help me to share authentically with others and receive the care you offer through your people. Help us to show the world that is watching your love by the way we love and care for each other. Show us what radical generosity and hospitality is all about.

Application

When you are with people this week, imagine the two baskets. As you walk away, ask yourself what did I learn about this person? How could I pray for them? Also ask, how did their unique gifting have impact on you? Thank God for the unique and beautiful ways we are different in the body of Christ.

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

Live _____ those _____ not
_____ and make the _____ of every _____.
Let _____ be _____ and _____
so that _____ have _____
for _____.
— _____ 4: ____ - ____

Day 5 - Joining God's Story in the Community

The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation.

This is the way our Savior God wants us to live. He wants not only us but everyone saved, you know, everyone to get to know the truth we've learned: that there's one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free.

—1 Timothy 2:3b-4 (MSG)

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

—Matthew 28:18-20

DISCIPLE (noun)

The student of a teacher. In New Testament times it was not uncommon for people who followed a particular teacher to be called *disciples*. For followers of Jesus, being a disciple is often associated with following Jesus on His travels (Mark 6:45), being called by Him (Luke 9:59-62), loyalty (Mark 8:34-48), and, at least in some cases, being willing to abandon worldly security in order to out Jesus first (Mark 10:21,28) (New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press)

What do you take note of? Does your eye naturally go to styles and trends? Sports cars? Social media posts? Nature? We spend time looking at and caring for the things we value. God values His creation, which includes the people made in His image. In fact, when God created man and woman, He said it was *very good*. And He invites us to value others made in his image as well, leading you to take note of the individuals in our spheres of influence. The people you know are in your story for a divine purpose.

As we discussed in Day 4, when we take time, energy, and perseverance to develop interpersonal connections, especially with people you wouldn't naturally choose to hang out with, you show the love of a God who delights to unite people who are different. Jesus invited people from all backgrounds to follow Him: fishermen, a money shark, prostitutes, and at least one swindler helped form the foundation of His church. He is inviting us to grow in the skill of courageously entering the story that He's writing in the lives of people in your home, neighborhood, workplace, school, and beyond.

It is an exciting adventure when you partner with God by observing the story God is writing into the lives of those around you! The commitment, discipline, and practice to ask gently leading, open questions, and to

actively listen more than we speak is a great investment into the larger story God is telling. God will use the things in your story, to invite others to wonder about the larger story He is telling.

In *The Weight of Glory*, author C.S. Lewis offers this perspective: *"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."*

God desires everyone to come into a personal, eternal relationship with Himself. God purposefully places us in the family, neighborhood, job, gym, school, club, and other places where He knows we can best represent His truth and love, and share the Good News through our uplifting words, caring actions, and God-honoring motivations (more on this in Week 5).

The reality is, God brings people across your path and into your life-story because He loves them as much as He loves you. Jesus calls you as His follower to live out His beautiful plan for making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). In this way, we move towards the fulfillment of Jesus words: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations"* (Matthew 24:14a). We get to be a part of that!

So, how do you do it—How do you fulfill this **calling** to carry your story into the world? As we've said, it starts with listening and recognizing where God is working in the lives of those around you. Then, in a conversational way, you can ask something like, *"Do you mind if I share a little of my experience?"* If they say no or start looking at their watch, be sensitive and aware! If it seems like a door is opening, focus on the following:

- **Parallels between what's going on now and a challenging time or experience in your life.** Don't share your whole life story; share just enough to help make a connection.
- **How the situation impacted you and made you feel.** Be real and honest!
- **Ways that God pursued you and invited you to partner with him.** How did He show up in your situation?
- **How you responded and what the result has been.**

There is no set formula for how to share your story. Honestly, most people can sniff out a formula or rehearsed answer from a mile away! But if you open your heart and experience to others, and then watch and listen, trusting God to do what only He can do, miraculous things can happen.*

CALLING (noun)

This word appears some 700 times in the Old and New Testaments in various forms. Though used in a variety of ways, 'Calling' here refers to a specific invitation to be a part of God's eternal purposes (Romans 8:28ff) (New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press).

Prayer

God, thank you so much for letting me partner with you. It is amazing how you take things from my story and bring people across my path who share something similar. Help me to be aware of who you have placed in front of me, to listen for you timing to share, and to see you at work in the lives of others. Thank you for these chances to see your love and power displayed as you pursue your children.

Application

Think back on your week. Did any conversations or interactions lead you to think about your story, or your place in God's story? Take a moment to pray for the person or people involved. Ask God to help you make even more space in your life to listen to and love like Jesus the next time such an opportunity comes.

**To see a further example of someone sharing their personal story of God at work, as well as a helpful tool for connecting with your neighbors, see pages 138-139.*

RHYTHM 1 MEMORY VERSE

_____. _____

_____.

_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus have **open eyes** to see the story God is telling and **open hearts** to accept His invitation to be a part.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Slow Down.** It's nearly impossible to have open eyes and an open heart if you're always rushing through life. Take a look at your schedule and identify places where you can pause from normal activity to reset your heart and mind to the story God is telling all around you.
- **Take a 'Two Baskets' Approach.** As was discussed in Day 4 (pg.18), when you come together with other believers, hold a mental picture of your 'full basket,' filled with those things God has given you to offer others, and your 'empty' basket' that is ready to receive.
- **Journal.** For a length of time that seems appropriate to you, commit to keeping a daily journal focusing on how you have seen God's story unfolding around you. Re-read what you've written at the end and look for new insights you've gained.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Sharing in God's Story (Rhythm 1) is a way of seeing all aspects of life from the perspective of His great love for us. It's what gives us the space for entering into all the rhythms we'll look at in the coming weeks, and it fills each of them with meaning and purpose.

You'll know growth is happening here when, instead of simply reacting to stressful situations from habit or instinct, you find space for a pause in your heart and mind, and an inner drive to recognize where God is at work.



R H Y T H M T W O

DEVOTION TO GOD'S WORD

Because God is a good and loving Shepherd, I get to know Him better by regularly connecting through His Word, the Bible. Some helpful practices that support me in this rhythm are:

- Reading or Listening to Scripture
- Digging Deeper into Scripture
- Memorizing Scripture
- Meditating on Scripture
- Applying Scripture

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Day 1 - The Bible

LORD (noun)

When Lord appears in all caps in the Bible, it is a representation of the Hebrew word for the Name of God, usually pronounced 'Jehovah' or 'Yahweh', which is God's unique name revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. LORD translates roughly as "I Am who I Am" (Exodus 3:14)

SCRIPTURE (noun)

Another way to refer to The Bible, emphasizing it being a written record. In general, the word 'scripture' refers to a collection or body of writing considered to be sacred or authoritative (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

*The instructions of the **LORD** are perfect,
reviving the soul.*

*The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

*The commandments of the LORD are right,
bringing joy to the heart.*

—Psalm 19:7-9 (NLT)

*All **Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

When it comes to the Bible, we all bring to the table different levels of familiarity, different questions, and different attitudes. See if any of the following resonate with you:

- “Why do we call the Bible ‘God’s Word’?”
- “Why are there so many Bible versions? Which version is the best?”
- “I have read the Bible before. I don’t need to read it again.”
- “I only read the New Testament. I don’t need to read the Old Testament.”
- “What’s a Testament?”

Over the course of this week we will explore some of these questions and perspectives, but let’s start with the very first one: “Why do we call the Bible ‘God’s Word’?” Does this expression mean that God actually wrote the Bible? Well, no, and yes! We believe that the Bible is inspired—which literally means ‘breathed out’—by God, to a variety of different people who were faithful to put down His story in writing. While written by more than 40 authors over the course of 1,600 years and arranged into 66 books, the Bible really tells one story: God’s story. From Genesis to Revelation, God is sharing His great love for us and the desire for relationship with us for all eternity.

It’s also worth mentioning that these concepts of the ‘Word’ and ‘Breath’ of God have application beyond the printed words of Scripture as well. In fact Jesus himself is referred to as the Word of God (John 1:1), which is really amazing if you think about it! But for clarity’s sake as relates to this week’s rhythm, we’re going to focus primarily on ways to interact with the written Word, the Bible.

Another question: Why are there so many different versions of the Bible? Globally the most-translated book of all time, the Bible is avail-

able in a variety of versions and languages in order to help us understand the original biblical languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. While the number of different versions can be overwhelming, recognizing a few basic guidelines can be helpful in sorting out the differences.

Some Bible versions are considered “word-by-word” translations, also called literal translations. The English Standard Version (ESV), which we use at Westminster Chapel, is an example of this. One benefit of literal translations is they draw attention to unique points of emphasis in the original languages; one disadvantage is they sometimes read less naturally in English.

On the other end of the spectrum, some Bible translations employ a “thought-by-thought” approach, which tries to capture the overall sense of each passage. While this has the advantage of being more accessible and natural sounding, one drawback is that some details and nuances of the original may be obscured. A thought-by-thought version, such as the New Living Translation (NLT), or even a paraphrased version, like The Message (MSG), can be helpful for times where you are reading the Bible on your own, as it can feel more personal. In *Rhythms* we have intentionally incorporated a number of different Bible translations so you can get a feel for the approach each one takes.

While there are many English translations of the Bible that faithfully represent God’s message as presented in the original languages, unfortunately some are less accurate. If you are ever unsure about a translation, don’t be afraid to reach out to a Westminster staff member and ask! You may find that you have a few versions you prefer, and it’s often helpful to compare challenging Bible passages across different versions. The intent of each faithfully written translation is the same: to help us get to know God’s story better.

A third common question: What are the Old and New **Testaments**, and which parts are important for today? The short answer: They both are! The New Testament, the last half the Bible, tells the events around Jesus’ birth and ministry, as well as the activities and teachings of His followers. It’s an essential guide in getting to know Jesus and who He made us to be. If you are a new believer, it’s a good idea to spend most of your time in the New Testament, especially the **Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) which describe the events of Jesus’ life on earth.

The Old Testament, which is the first part of the Bible, tells of how the world was created by God, how He made humanity in the overflow of His love, but how humanity turned away from Him. Nevertheless God chose a nation of people that He called His own, and through them worked to bring all humanity back into relationship with Him. Once we understand this view, we can read both halves of the Bible with an appreciation for God’s great love for us and the amazing sacrifice Jesus made in dying on

TESTAMENT (noun)

A word that occurs several times in the New Testament as a translation of the Greek word *diatheke*, more accurately rendered “covenant”—a binding agreement or contract between man and man, or man and God. (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

GOSPEL (noun)

‘Gospel’ is Old English for Good News, and translates the Greek word *euangelion*. In the New Testament it refers to the Good News Jesus proclaimed of new life in God’s Kingdom. Describing the first four books of the New Testament as Gospels (as is done here) became common among Christians of the 2nd century (New Bible Dictionary, Intervarsity Press)

the cross. We see that God created a way for us to be forgiven and have an eternal relationship with Him.

This week's memory verse, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, tells us that God uses the Bible to prepare and equip us for doing His work in the world. One of the incredible things about the Bible is the same passage of Scripture can impact us in quite different ways over the course of our lives. Even if you have read the Bible before, it will not seem the same the next time you read it because you and your life circumstances will be different. Our interaction with God's Word grows as we grow closer to Him!

Prayer

God, I want to thank you for sending us your Word. You desire a relationship with the people you created, and that includes me! Please open my eyes to see beyond the words of the Bible, all the way to your heart of love and your invitation to partner with you in this world. Help me to experience for myself the power that comes with receiving Your Word.

Application

Take some time this week to explore a few different translations of the Bible. Look up this week's memory verse (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) as well as any other passages that come to mind to see similarities and differences across the translations. There are a number of sites and apps you can check out for this, including the YouVersion app, biblegateway.com, and bible.com.

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is _____ out by God and profitable
for _____, for reproof, for correction, and for
training in _____, that the man of God may be
complete, equipped for every _____ work.

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

Day 2 - Digging Deeper

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

—Acts 17:11 (NIV)

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me [Jesus]...

—John 5:39 (NIV)

Today we are looking at ways to dig deeper into God's Word through the practice of reading, studying, and applying it to our lives. This is an essential step toward experiencing the transforming freedom, peace, and purpose that we are created for.

We find an example of this perspective in the New Testament, in the Book of Acts. While the Apostle Paul was journeying and taking the message of Jesus with him, he came to the town of Berea. The Jewish people there heard Paul's words, and rather than just rejecting (or even blindly accepting) them, Acts 17:11 says they "*examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*" Just like the Bereans, we can grow in truth by digging into God's Word.

When digging into God's Word, it helps to consider questions such as:

- **What does this passage tell me about God, Jesus, or myself?**
- **Who was the original audience?**
- **When did this take place?**
- **What is the style and genre of writing?**
- **What is the context—what happened before, what happens after?**

There are many good questions to ask ourselves as we listen to God's Word being taught or as we read it for ourselves. This is where a study Bible (a Bible with notes included) or a biblical commentary can come in handy. Good notes or commentaries are written by Bible scholars and give us extra information about a passage. It is also helpful to read a passage in multiple translations to get a better understanding of what is being said and how it applies to us.

God did not give us His Word as a reading assignment we're supposed to 'complete.' He gave it to us so that we would come to know Him and to recognize how Jesus meets our deepest needs. In John 5, Jesus was talking to religious leaders who spent years reading, studying, and memorizing the Old Testament. He said, "*You study the Scriptures dili-*

gently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39-40, NIV). Digging deeper into the Bible is about our relationship with God, not completing a checklist.

Prayer

Open my eyes and heart to understand your words at a deeper level. Guide me, Lord, to know you better as I dive deeper in your word individually and in community. I am so grateful that your word has such depth and speaks of your love and pursuit for people, even though we often turn away. Thank you for your patience and wisdom.

Application

Starting today and through the rest of the week, I want to invite you to put into practice some of the techniques we are discussing. For this exercise we will use the same passage of scripture each day from Jesus' words in the Gospel of John. Today's focus will be on applying specific questions in order to dig deeper into understanding the passage. Slowly read through the passage, then work through the reflection questions on the following page:

John 15:9-17 (NIV)

Jesus speaking to His disciples:

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: Love each other."

Reflection Questions:

1. What does this passage say to you about Jesus—His character, His qualities?
2. Though Jesus sometimes addressed large crowds of people, John 14-17 was shared specifically with His closest disciples. How might these words be suited for that audience?
3. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples the night before His crucifixion, knowing that in just hours He would be betrayed and arrested. How does that context affect your view of the passage?
4. What does the passage say to you about yourself?

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is _____ out by God and _____
for _____, for reproof, for _____, and for
training in _____, that the man of God may be
_____, equipped for every _____ work.

—2 Timothy 3:16- _____

Day 3 - Memorizing Scripture

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

—Deuteronomy 11:18 (NIV)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

—Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

—Romans 12:2 (NIV)

These days, there are fewer and fewer things we feel a need to memorize. Technology allows us to access nearly limitless information wherever we go. If you're someone who has a Bible at home (or maybe even more than one) and a Bible app on your phone, what need do you have to memorize Scripture?

One good reason for memorization is because life never takes a pause. It's always on the move, with a million things vying for attention. In moments when we are experiencing discouragement, doubt, or defeat, it usually isn't possible to say "*Time out! Just stay still while I find my Bible and see what it has to say on the matter.*" It's in those moments that the

words of Scripture we have memorized—the ones that we have in our hearts and souls—will instantly rise up as a source of strength, comfort, and redirection.

Several places in the Bible provide precedent for this practice of memorizing Scripture. As Moses addressed the Israelites, instructing them on how to live a life that is God-honoring, he emphasized the importance of having the teaching of God in your heart and soul. Look at Deuteronomy 11:18 again: *“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”* Fast-forward to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 6 on the armor of God: The only offensive piece in the collection of armor listed is in verse 17: *“...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”* If Scripture is our best offense against the tactics of Satan, it would be a good idea to have it memorized and ready to go!

If Scripture is our best offense against the tactics of Satan, it would be a good idea to have it memorized and ready to go!

As with so many things, Jesus is our ultimate example. When He was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11), Jesus’ defense was Scripture. Rather than getting caught up in the trap Satan was attempting to lay, Jesus used scriptural truth to refute the lies point by point. In the same way, when we face temptation and attack in our lives, the Word of God is our most powerful weapon—and memorization is one of the best ways to ready that weapon for our times of need!

Okay, let’s get practical. Scripture memory can be really intimidating if you have never done it before or it’s been a while. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Start small! No need to start out memorizing huge portions. Start with 1-3 verses.
- Pick a verse that speaks to your current situation.
- Write the verse out—more than once!
- Try a memorization aid, such as putting the verse to music—pick a familiar tune and substitute the words of the verse or verses you are memorizing. Or, in the style of what we’ve offered for our Rhythms memory verses, you could write your verse on a whiteboard and erase one word at a time in order to test your memory.

Scripture we have memorized is available the exact moment we need it. Memorizing Scripture isn't something we do to prove we are some sort of Super Christian! Rather, it truly is a practice that flows out of a desire to both know God's Word more intimately and be prepared for the challenges we face.

Prayer

Lord, thank you once again for your Word, the Bible! Help me to see it as your love letter to me, and as something that is worth treasuring in my heart, mind, and spirit. Help me to see the life-changing potential in memorizing your Word, and please empower and encourage me to take a next step.

Application

For today's practical activity, read John 15:9-17 again, and choose one verse from the passage you'd like to memorize. Share your verse with one person and tell them why you chose it.

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

All _____ is _____ out by God and
_____ for _____, for reproof, for
_____, and for _____ in _____,
that the _____ of _____ may be _____,
equipped for every _____ work.
— _____ Timothy _____ :16— _____

Day 4 - Meditating on Scripture

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word...

I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you...

I delight in your decrees;

I will not neglect your word...

Your word is a lamp for my feet,

a light on my path.

—Psalm 119: 9, 11, 16, 105 (NIV)

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

—Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

What do you think of when you hear the word **meditation**? It is likely that you have heard meditation talked about in contexts outside of Christianity, and for that reason it is important for us to define clearly what biblical meditation is. The definition given in The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms is: *“Reflection and thought upon a subject, often a scriptural passage, and often coupled with prayer, as an exercise in Christian devotion in order to gain spiritual insight.”*

In life, when we care about people, we spend time getting to know them. We learn their likes and dislikes, what is valuable to them, what brings them joy, and what drives them crazy. Just as it takes time to get to know another human, it also takes time to get to know our Heavenly Father. What better way to know God than to read His inspired Word to us, spending time reflecting on its meaning, considering how it applies to life today, and prayerfully inviting God to continue transforming us? This is the practice of meditation. It requires an investment of time and effort on our part in getting to know the words and heart of God, our Creator and Father, on a deep and intimate level.

Here's a recent example from one of our authors:

As I was reading Jesus' words in John 13, my attention was drawn to these verses: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). As I reflected on Jesus' words, it occurred to me this new command was not just for the disciples gathered with Him 2,000 years ago, but for all followers of Jesus

BIBLICAL MEDITATION

Reflection and thought upon a subject, often a scriptural passage, and often coupled with prayer, as an exercise in Christian devotion in order to gain spiritual insight (Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms)

everywhere—including me! After much time spent praying about what Jesus' words meant for me, it has changed my relationship with other followers of Jesus, and changed how I approach my work. I want the love that Christians have for each other and God to be so easy to see that people who do not know Jesus will grow curious about our faith. This means I seek to make Westminster's Children's Ministry a place that's as welcoming and loving as possible. I am so glad that God's Spirit prompted me to stop and think about these verses and revealed an opportunity to let them change me.
—Martha C.

It occurred to me this new command was not just for the disciples gathered with Him 2,000 years ago, but for all followers of Jesus everywhere—including me!

So, how do you practice meditating on God's Word? First of all, meditation works best in small bites. Read and then re-read a chosen passage, allowing all your senses to engage with the words, individuals, stories, and images. Don't rush. Pay attention to the responses of your heart, mind, and body in the process (Luke 10:27), allowing your spirit to turn the words into prayer as well.

Prayer

Lord, help me to continually slow down and feast on your Word. As I meditate over and over on the things that you say in your Word, you are anchoring them more deeply into my heart and life. Help me to see my life through the lens of your love and your Word. As I slow down and chew on the things you have said, please recall them to my mind throughout the day.

Application

Each of the daily reflections for the rest of this week offers a different way to meditate on God's Word. Try them all! Being comfortable with the practice of meditation might not happen right away. But there is great reward in building this rhythm into your life.

The practical assignment for today is to meditate on John 15:9-17 by reading or listening to it *three times*. If you read the passage yourself, it's ideal to read it out loud, possibly even in different versions. Each time through the passage, record what you're hearing, thinking, and feeling:

1. **First time through: Listen with your ears.** Listen carefully to each and every word. Think about the fact that every word in the Bible was breathed out by God for a reason. What do those words mean?

2. **Second time through: Listen with your mind.** Use both your reason and your imagination. Try to visualize the invitation Jesus makes, recognizing how one thought leads to the next.

3. **Third time through: Listen with your heart:** Think about how these words make you feel. What parts make you feel things? What are those things you are feeling?

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

All _____ is _____ out by _____ and
 _____ for _____, for _____, for
 _____, and for _____ in _____,
 that _____ of _____ may _____
 , _____ for every _____ work.
 — _____ :16- _____

Day 5 - Applying Scripture

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

—John 5:39-40

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

—James 1:22-25 (NIV)

PHARISEES (noun)

One of three well-known religious groups of Jewish society in Jesus' day. The word 'Pharisee' can be translated as "the separated ones." The Pharisees held to strict, elaborate rules for preserving their ceremonial purity and worked to bring other Jewish people to the same outward obedience (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

The rhythm of Devotion to God's Word is a response of the heart, mind, and spirit to the love that God shows towards us. Our desire to know Him more deeply flows out of His desire for a relationship with us. It's in the context of God's love that the practices of reading or listening to the Bible, digging deeper into what is said, meditation, and memorization become meaningful. With this, however, comes a responsibility: We are called to apply what we know!

Look again at John 5:39-40: *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life...yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."* This is Jesus' teaching to a group called the **Pharisees**, who had a lot of Bible knowledge (and boasted about this all the time!) but failed to apply it correctly in order to recognize Jesus as the Messiah—the One sent to restore our relationship with God. The Pharisees knew all the rules and believed their outward obedience proved how 'good' they were. They did not see that their pride was separating them from God's love.

The Pharisees have a lesson for us today: It is not enough to just know Scripture; we also have to live what we learn. On this subject, the Apostle James doesn't pull any punches: *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (1:22). Following this is the illustration of seeing your face in a mirror one second and immediately forgetting your appearance the next: It is easy to hear Scripture and feel an urge to change in the moment, but then quickly forget and move on with life. If, however, we purposefully apply what we see in the Bible, we are

promised blessing in our lives. The reverse side of this coin is pointed out in James 4:17: “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

How do we apply Scripture to our lives? It often starts with attitude: We approach our time in God’s Word with a spirit of wanting to grow in our ability to listen and love. As we read, dig into, memorize, and meditate on Scripture, we ask God to show us how it can be applied to our lives. It might serve as an encouragement, a defense

against areas of temptation, or a call to get involved with a specific social issue. As you sense God leading you to apply Scripture, lean into it. Talk about it with Him and with people close to you. Then act!

Again, Martha shares her experience:

An example of applying scripture in my life was during my transition from one job to another. I was torn about the best way to move forward, as the possibilities seemed overwhelming at times. In my personal time in God’s Word, I read Psalm 27. Verse 14 really challenged me as I read, “Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord” (NLT). I felt strongly convicted that I should pause on any plans and wait for the Lord to give me wisdom—that in fact, this was going to be a brave and courageous thing for me to do! So I waited and God met me as I prayed for wisdom. I did not make any decisions for a month. When I finally did make plans, I felt like God had given me much more clarity and I was not afraid to proceed. I can look back on that time with assurance of God’s faithfulness to me as I obeyed him. —Martha C.

It is not enough to
just know Scripture;
we also have to live
what we learn.

Several places in Scripture, the Christian life is compared to running in a race. Anyone who has ever been a runner (or has even watched runners on TV from the comfort of your living room) knows that training to run farther and faster requires a lot of disciplined, consistent practice. It’s also clear that intellectual knowledge of even the very best running techniques does no good if you never get off the couch!

The story of God’s Word calls us again and again to get off that couch. *Engage*, it says. Partner with God in His work. Live out the Good News of the Kingdom by showing the love of Jesus to others. When we enter this kind of rhythm of applying God’s word in practical ways, we experience more and more of the transformed life God intends for us.

Prayer

Lord, thank you that you both call me to meaningful work in this world and give me the power to see it through. Help me this week to see places I can apply your Word in order to partner with you in the things that are on your heart. Help me to trust and to depend on you as the source of transformation, and to not depend on my own strength. I pray you would be honored through the ways I put your Word into action.

Application

Now it's your turn to choose a place to read from in the Bible! Take a look at the 'Three Ways to Start' on the next page for a few suggestions. Again, there are a number of sites and apps you can use as a resource, including the YouVersion app, *biblegateway.com*, and *bible.com*.

RHYTHM 2 MEMORY VERSE

_____, _____,

_____, _____

_____, _____

_____, _____

_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus build into their lives **consistent, meaningful** engagement with **God's Word**, the Bible.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Set aside Time.** Choose a distraction-free location and a time of day when your mind is sharp. For some people this is easy to identify, for others it's incredibly challenging. Ask the people in your life to help you make this consistent time happen.
- **Dive into a Book.** If you're new to the Bible, start with a gospel, such as Mark or John. A New Testament letter such as Philippians or 1 Peter is a good follow-up choice. Make space for a chapter or half-chapter a day. This can be an individual experience, or something you do together with others, such as family or your small group.
- **Be Mindful.** Make use of practices like memorization (Day 3) or meditation (Day 4) to bring God's Word into all the other moments of your life. Along the way, try some of the tools for digging deeper found in Day 2. They'll help you overcome obstacles and connect with the heart behind the words you're reading.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Sharing in God's Story (Rhythm 1) set the stage by encouraging us to recognize where God is at work in our lives and the world, and to partner with Him in that creative, restorative work.

Devotion to God's Word (Rhythm 2) supports this by helping us to hear and recognize His voice, spoken through this love letter, the Bible.

You'll know growth is happening when you find your heart, gut, and mind instinctively drawing you to say, "*Lord show me where you are present in my current situation.*" The Bible truths we read, meditate on and internalize help us interpret the events of our lives and of the world around us from God's perspective.



R H Y T H M T H R E E

PRAYER

Because God pursues an intimate, caring relationship with me, I get to know Him better by regularly connecting in prayer. Some practices that help guide me in this rhythm are:

- Entering into practices of Praise, Repentance, Asking, and Yielding
- Learning to listen at a deeper level to God's voice
- Praying God's Word back to Him
- Allowing God to cleanse my heart from places of unforgiveness

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me into your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

—Psalm 25:4-5

Day 1 - P-R-A-Y Acrostic, Part 1

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*
—Psalm 139:23-24

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

In exploring ways to grow deeper in prayer, sometimes it's hard to know where to begin. Many people enjoy having a guide or model to lead them forward, as these can help us to slow down and bring focus to the experience. While there are a number of useful models Christians in different times and places have used, one such guide we've chosen to highlight is the simple acrostic P-R-A-Y. We will take the next two days to dive a bit deeper into this prayer method's four elements, which are *Praise*, *Repent*, *Ask*, and *Yield*.

PRAISE (noun)

A broad term for words or deeds meant to exalt or honor someone. In the Bible, praise is often associated with music and singing (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

PRAISE

The Bible is filled with examples of people praising God for who He is and for what He has done. One example is Psalm 9:1-2 (NIV), “*I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.*” Praise is a great way to start our prayer experience because we are reminded who we are praying to. Praise sets our hearts in a position of awe and gratitude. Try taking a few minutes today to list the wonder of who God is, and what He has done for you. Your heart and

mind are changed when you shift from the problems in your life to who God is and all He has done and continues to do for you.

We will return to the topic of Praise in Week 5, which focuses on the Rhythm of Worship, but you can take a next step in praising God through prayer even today!

REPENT

Your loving heavenly Father does not want you to carry any extra weight. When we have areas that are missing the mark in our lives (sin), God's Holy Spirit will **convict** us very specifically about what we need to confess. Then we **repent**, which literally means to turn around and go the other direction.

In the life of a Jesus follower, there's a critical difference between *conviction* and *condemnation*. Romans 8:1 tells us there is now *no* condemnation for those who belong to Jesus. Yet sometimes the old condemning voices can still crowd in on us. Have you heard "global" accusations that tear down who you are as a person? Those are not from God. Those are things that the enemy of our soul, the devil, plants in our heads, so we don't hear our Heavenly Father's voice.

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

After we act or think in a way that doesn't honor God, it is easy to move to shame and beat ourselves up. Jesus offers a better way: He invites us to draw near to God, and stop listening to the condemnation the enemy is pouring over us. Let Him know what is going on (confess) and recognize that He is there with you, helping you to see a better way that will bring life.

Repentance means you agree with God that your heart was believing the wrong thing. You submit that thought to God and replace it with God's truth. For example, let's say you recognized that you fell short in the way you interacted with a family member this morning. Where *condemnation* might sound like, *"I always blow it, I'm such a critical person,"* Spirit-led *repentance* could look more like this: *"Lord, I confess that I used sharp language with my _____ today. I'm sorry for that. I was worried I was being accused of being lazy. I could have admitted I was feeling insecure. Thank You that You desire honesty in relationships. Please help me see my identity comes from You and not what others think of me."* A regular practice of repentance frees us and brings fresh life.

CONVICTION (noun)

Conviction is experienced in the believers' lives when they become aware of the evil nature of a particular sin in their lives, and of the negative consequences that sin invites. The purpose of conviction is to lead to godly repentance. (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

REPENTANCE (noun)

A change of mind and a change of soul in regards to sin. Repentance is a resolute turning away from sin and an acceptance of the Holy Spirit's empowerment for holy living (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

Prayer

Lord, thank you for all that you are, so beyond my comprehension and yet you continually invite me to know you and praise you more. Thank you for making a way to clear my mind and heart as you reveal areas through your Holy Spirit where I need to repent. You are drawing me closer with your love and kindness. Help me to trust you more. Thank you that you do not bring condemnation. Help me to discern your voice leading me to more life.

Application

Ask the Father, "Where do I have areas I need to repent of? Where was I quick to speak and slow to listen?" Take a minute to release these things to God and invite him to speak life and truth over you.

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

Make me to know your _____, O LORD; teach me your _____. Lead me into your _____ and teach me, for you are the _____ of my salvation; for you I wait all the _____ long.

—Psalm 25:4-5

Day 2 - P-R-A-Y Acrostic, Part 2

"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

—Matthew 7:7-11 (NLT)

Yesterday we addressed the first two parts of the acrostic tool P-R-A-Y: Praise and Repent. Today we will look at the last two, Ask and Yield.

ASK

Asking God for things is that comes to mind when they think of prayer. In contrast, the PRAY acrostic starts with praise for God, followed by making sure nothing is in the way of the relationship with Him by repenting. As a result of these first two steps, we are more aware of what would be helpful to ask Him. We are much more likely to pray according to His will instead of ours, telling God what to do.

Asking on behalf of others in prayer is such a privilege, but we'll have to overcome a few common struggles along the way. One of these is not taking time to listen to God on behalf of the other and ask God how He would have us pray. Secondly, it can be easy to think that a person's prayer request becomes our personal burden to carry, instead of leaving it at the feet of Jesus. Also, don't fall into the bad habit of being an "I'll be praying for you" person! Instead of giving an "I'll be praying for you" that you may not remember to actually do, it usually works best to pray with the person right then and there, or in the moment right after leaving.

While we are on the topic of Asking, many wonder, What about asking God for healing? Some people avoid the topic of healing prayer because it holds too much mystery. Others who have been harmed by negative experiences in this area no longer want to even consider healing prayer.

The first thing to know on the topic of healing prayer is that ultimately, all healing comes from God, whether through the medical profession (who we are blessed to have), or through supernatural, miraculous heal-

ing. We see many examples of healing in the Bible, including spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical healing. It is God's nature to heal and restore.

When we approach God asking for healing, we enter with faith and expectation that God can heal and that He does answer prayer. The

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

answer to our request may be a *Yes*, or a *No*, or a *Not Right Now*. But we can trust that God sees our love and care for the person as we invite and receive whatever He has for them.

Even if the answer to our prayers looks different than what we asked for or what we expected, we can grow to trust God's timing, and that He is working out the best plan for all involved. The truth is, sometimes we might not understand this plan until we are with Him in heaven. Even so it delights our Father when we bring our needs to Him and then leave them there. Too often, though, we lay them at His feet, pick them right back up again, and wonder why we still feel so burdened!

What is an audacious prayer that you are willing to ask God for? What might be holding you back from asking? (For more ideas on prayer, see Susie Larson's book *Your Powerful Prayers*.)

YIELD

Yielding to God at the end of the prayer is such an important part of a well-rounded prayer time. In the midst of His greatest trial, Jesus provided the ultimate example of yielding; as He contemplated going to the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, He concluded His heart-rending prayer by submitting to God's purposes: *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup [of suffering] pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will"* (Matthew 26:39).

Yielding is a pause at the end (and hopefully at the beginning) of prayer in order to listen to what God might want to share with us and to surrender all to Him. Often, He is speaking His love and delight over us, which we can miss if our prayer is focused on making our requests and moving quickly on with our day. He might, as our Good Shepherd, have a specific direction for us for the day that He wants to let us know. It brings such peace when we yield. We enjoy the still waters David speaks about in Psalm 23 before we race off into our day.

As you pray through this acrostic, it is helpful to have a pen and paper beside you to note anything that comes up. In addition, we never want to just follow a formula and check the box. It is good to mix up the different ways of praying, and this acrostic is one potential way to do that.

Prayer

What a gift, Heavenly Father, that you delight in me asking you for things. Help me to trust you with the result! Help me to leave any can burdens at your feet because you are trustworthy and working out a plan far beyond what I can hope or imagine. Thank you for the way you answered _____, and I take time to yield to You even now to hear your voice as I go forward in my day.

Application

Write down the things you are asking God for and take a few seconds after each one to listen to what God might be saying to you about that prayer request and how He wants you to pray.

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

_____ me to know your _____, O LORD; teach me
your _____. Lead me into your _____ and teach me,
for you are the _____ of my _____; for you I
_____ all the _____ long.

—Psalm 25:4- _____

Day 3 - Listening Prayer

*For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.*

*Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. **Selah**
—Psalm 62:5-8*

SELAH (noun)

The term Selah occurs 71 times in the Psalms and also in the book of Habakkuk. While the exact meaning is unknown, many believe it refers to a poetic point of emphasis or pause for reflection, possibly introducing a musical interlude (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

The God of the universe wants to speak to you—that's amazing! He wants to tell you more of who He is and how much He loves you. He wants to invite you into true partnership, guiding and directing you toward real life.

A lot of people think of prayer as talking to God, which is easier than slowing down to be still and know (recognize, understand) that He is God (Psalm 46:10, AMP). The goal of prayer is to know God more, and listening is a very important part of that.

One of our authors shares her experience with listening prayer:

Recently when my mind was active and I was stressed about the day, I took a few minutes to simply pause, be still and ask, "What do You want me to know, God?" I sensed that He reminded me who I was, who He was, and that His timing was much better than mine. I sensed He let me see how I was pushing on something because of my anxiety, and that He wanted me to trust Him with it.

*Waiting on God's timing is a muscle I am continually growing. It was a great reminder for me to surrender my plans and agenda to Him that day and watch Him move in a more fruitful way.
—Holly P.*

The practice of listening prayer helps us purposefully seek the thoughts of God as we move our minds off of Self.

Some people are concerned that engaging in "listening prayer" means taking on a practice of emptying our minds that is not consistent with Jesus' teaching. This is not what we

are referring to here: The practice of listening prayer helps us purposefully seek the thoughts of God as we move our minds off of Self. It's the great exchange—our thoughts for His thoughts that are so much greater than ours. Listening prayer is a way of surrendering our ways and thoughts to God and asking Him to fill us with His thoughts and what He wants us to know and do.

As you step into the practice of listening prayer, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Anything that you hear or sense should align with Scripture. If you aren't sure, make sure to discuss it with someone who is intimate with God's Word. (Review Week 2 "Devotion to God's Word" for more on this topic.)
- Sometimes you may feel God laying something on your heart or mind that doesn't make sense. If that happens, write it down. Ask Him to reveal over the coming days and weeks what it is He wants you to know or do.
- A few great questions to ask God during the practice of listening prayer:

"Lord, what do You think of me?"

"What is it You want me to know today?"

"What do you want me to know about You today?"

Often, when you first begin this practice, you will notice that your mind has drifted. When this happens, just move those distracted thoughts gently to the side and go back to listening. Tell God how grateful you are for His love and patience as you learn to listen more, know Him better, and become familiar with His voice. Another idea if you are distracted is to listen to a Worship song that can help you dwell on who God is and why it is important to listen to what He might say to us through prayer.

Remember that God is love, so anything He says will be given in love. If there is something you need to confess, the Spirit will be very specific, not global. (For example, if you yelled at someone today, God would likely ask you to apologize rather than generally state that you are a bad person. The first one you can do something about; the second one puts a burden of shame on you.)

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that you love me and that you care about the details of my life. Help me to quickly turn to you and ask what I should think and do at all times. Your way and thoughts are higher than mine and you know what is best for me. Help me to hear your truth throughout this day and to live in the assurance you want to guide me if I will listen.

Application

Take some time to try this practice of listening prayer. If this is new for you, start with setting a timer for 5 minutes.

For Further Reading:

Guide to Listening Prayer by Rusty Rustenbach

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

_____ me to _____ your _____, O LORD; _____ me
your _____. _____ me into _____ and
teach me, for _____ are the _____ of my _____;
for you I _____ all the _____.

— _____ 25:4- _____

Day 4 - Praying Scripture

*Forever, O Lord, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.
Your faithfulness endures to all generations;
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.
By your appointment they stand this day,
for all things are your servants.
If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.
—Psalm 119:89-93*

The practice of being speaking God's Word back to Him in prayer is a powerful way to strengthen faith. It's pretty amazing to see in the Bible all the times people heard from God and then prayed these words back to God. His words are powerful!

If you're wondering what praying scripture might look like, here's an example prayer based on Proverbs 18:10: *"Lord, You said in Your Word that You are a strong tower. I need to remember this image throughout the day. Can You please remind me?"* Or we can pray, *"God, You said Your peace passes all understanding and will guard my heart and my mind. Please let me rest in Your peace"* (see Philippians 4:7). You might imagine praying God's words back to Him being like a child saying to a parent, *"Remember when you offered me that good advice? You were right; and I am trying to remember it, especially now when life feels confusing."*

Again, Holly shares her experience:

Praying God's word has been a muscle I continue to grow in my prayer life. Recently I had a conversation with a friend based on Hebrews 12. Talking about what it would look like to fix my eyes on Jesus in a practical way together gave me an opportunity to confess both to my friend and later in prayer: "Jesus, I am worrying about things that I can't control, and it is not leading me to more life (John 10:10). Would You please show me where You are right now and help me to listen to Your words for me instead of my fears? Thank You for the peace You want to bring to me." We pray as we go through life while we listen to the Spirit bring God's Word into our hearts and minds. -Holly P.

The more you read and memorize God's Word, the more opportunity for the Spirit bringing these words back to your mind when you are thinking (or stressing) about something. Anytime you come to a passage that

LAMENT (noun, verb)

Mourning, expressing deep sorrow, horror, or grief. Lamenting in public was common in Old Testament times; a dozen different Hebrew words are translated 'lament' in English. Lament was treated as a poetic genre, especially in the Psalms and Book of Lamentations (The Revell Bible Dictionary)

speaks to you as a fresh word for your life, practice praying that Scripture back to God.

The Psalms are a wonderful place to start. A third of the Book of Psalms are prayers of **lament**, crying out to God from a vulnerable place about the hurt and injustices the psalmist faced, while also holding out hope that God was just and would act in His timing and for His glory. Rich Villodas says in his book *The Deeply Formed Life*, “*In the practice of lamenting, we pour out our souls to God and in turn receive grace and power to respond.*” We have much to lament in our society, and many people have wrongly taught that we should not dwell on our pain and instead just focus on the positive. The Psalms give us the beautiful model of pain wrapped in hope in who God is and what He can do.

Another model is seen in Matthew 6:9-13, also known as the Lord’s Prayer. It starts with a focus on the majesty of God and an acknowledgement that God’s kingdom looks different than the world’s kingdoms. When we see ourselves correctly as belonging to God’s Kingdom, of course we would want His will to be done. Remembering that

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those
who sin against us.
And don't let us yield
to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.
-Matthew 6:9b-13 (NLT)*

He has been a faithful God and has protected and provided is important. A key part of also focuses on forgiveness: Jesus invites us to see how important it is to consider those we have not forgiven, and to ask God to help us forgive one another as we have been forgiven (more about this in Day 5). We see throughout the New Testament that receiving the forgiveness of God and then giving that forgiveness to others is an important part of our relationship with Him.

We also see Paul modeling how to pray in his letters to the churches, which are wonderful sources for Scripture to pray through. In Ephesians, Paul says, “*Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to*

those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance” (Ephesians 1:15-18, NLT). These are great verses from Scripture to pray for yourself or for someone who has asked you for wisdom in decision making or who might be doubting their purpose in life.

As you can see by these few examples, praying Scripture is a great way to get God's Word more ingrained in your heart. It can help you better understand His love and heart for people. As you read your Bible, when something stands out, pray it for yourself and ask God, “Who else do You want me to pray this verse over?” In the process you build the listening muscle, and see God's Word come alive. You delight the heart of God when you speak His words back to Him.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you that you gave me your Word so that I can know you better. Please Holy Spirit, reveal to me these words when I need them and remind me of your truths. Show me how to pray these promises and truths, so that I might remember that you have a plan and purpose for my life.

Application

Ask a friend if God is bringing any Scripture to their lives that is impacting them presently. Write that Scripture down and pray that over them whenever God brings that person to your mind.

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

_____ to _____, _____;
_____ me _____. _____ me into _____
_____ and teach me, for _____ are _____ of
my _____; for _____ all _____
_____.
— _____ 25: _____ - _____

Day 5 - Prayer of Forgiveness

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

—Luke 6:27-36

As we discussed on Day 4, a key part of the Lord's prayer is about forgiveness. *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"*—these are powerful words! When we grasp the love and forgiveness Jesus gives to us, we are able to love and forgive our enemies. When we refuse to forgive, Jesus knows that it wears us down and steals the joy and life He longs to give us.

But you might be thinking, *You don't know what this person has done to me!* Forgiveness doesn't mean that what someone did to you is erased or forgotten; forgiveness means you are not going to make them "pay" for the wrong or hold it against them, because of what Jesus has won by His life, death, and resurrection from the grave.

In Romans 12, Paul helps us know how to live as a Christ follower. The previous chapter ends by declaring who God's magnificence: *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things"* (Romans 11:33-36a). Then comes the word *"Therefore"* at the start of Chapter 12; Because of who God is, we are *therefore* called to sacrifice our rights and renew our minds continually so we can know His will, which is for our good and His glory! The more we practice this the more we better understand the freedom Jesus died to give us.

Later in Romans 12, Paul encourages us to follow a Jesus-centered way of being by saying, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"* (v. 14). Are you willing to pray this prayer? *"Today, I look to love others as You love me, Lord, blessing everyone I meet, even those who mistreat me."* This sounds really hard if it depends on our own power! But when we have taken time with God praising, confessing, asking, and yielding (listening to what He wants), we learn that forgiving and blessing is actually the way to live fully and freely.

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. We think God will judge us the way we judge others. However, when we refuse to forgive ourselves, we are in effect saying, *"My sins are too much for God to forgive."* We are trying to earn our forgiveness somehow. If this is you, will you confess that you are holding unforgiveness toward yourself and not receiving the fullness of Jesus's work on the cross? Thank God for the full work of the cross on your behalf! Picture Jesus washing it off of you, and go and live your day, renewed and restored.

We live the gospel by saying, *"I can't; Jesus can; the Holy Spirit does through me."*

One thing that we need to keep in mind is that most people hurt others out of their own personal wounding and brokenness. The truth is, we are all broken and need a Savior to redeem and restore us. Others can't see this picture, so out of fear they end up moving against you in some way. Jesus even prays for forgiveness for those who hung Him on the cross, stating, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). You might be thinking, *I'm not Jesus, and I can't do this.* You are right! You can't. When we accept Christ as paying for our sins, we're enabled to live the gospel by saying, *"I can't; Jesus can; the Holy Spirit does through me."* We can pray, *"Holy Spirit, help me by Your power to forgive this person. Let me see this person the way you see them."* The Lord invites us into the process by teaching us to surrender our right to hold a grudge and helping us forgive the wrong done to us. Then His Spirit does the work in our lives.

Donna Winship, in her short booklet 'Become What You Believe,' shares this method of praying for someone: *"God, in the name of Jesus, I release _____ for committing the sin of _____ against me. In the name of Jesus, I ask that You would bless _____ and restore my heart, soul, mind, and spirit regarding him/her."* As you pray, it may help to visualize the cross of Jesus, focusing on giving that person to Jesus on the cross (see 2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

You may or may not *feel* any different after praying such a prayer, but the more you surrender and pray the way Jesus modeled for His disciples, the more you will find freedom and joy in your life. If you are having a difficult time with this process, please reach out to a pastor, friend, or counselor to walk you through this process. Persevere in the prayer of forgiveness and blessing until you are walking in the freedom Christ died to give to you.

Prayer

God, thank you that you are a loving and generous God who forgives me time and time again. Today I ask you to forgive _____ and please reveal anyone I am holding unforgiveness toward. Help me to love and forgive like you, so that I might live more freely in my walk with you.

Application

Ask the Father if there is someone you need to forgive. If the Spirit reveals someone, try praying the prayer outlined above. If you feel stuck and unable to forgive, talk to a pastor or counselor about this hurt—someone who can listen and be patient as you work through the process.

RHYTHM 3 MEMORY VERSE

_____, _____
_____; _____.
_____, _____
_____; _____
_____.
_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus develop regular rhythms of prayer that help them in knowing God better.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **P-R-A-Y.** Use the acrostic PRAY (from Days 1 and 2) to develop rhythms of Praise, Repentance, Asking, and Yielding to enrich your time with God in prayer.
- **Listen.** Prayer is a two-way conversation, and listening may be the most important part. As you are finding times to pause in your daily schedule, start asking God to speak into your situation His words of peace, truth, and hope.
- **Pray Scripture.** If you have trouble finding the words to pray, let God's Word guide you. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) or a Psalm from the group of Psalms called 'Songs of Ascent' (Psalms 120-134) is a great place to begin. Read the words back to God in a conversational manner.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Sharing in God's Story (Rhythm 1) set the stage by encouraging us to recognize where God is at work in our lives and the world, and to partner with Him in that creative, restorative work.

Devotion to God's Word (Rhythm 2) and **Prayer** (Rhythm 3) support this by helping us to hear and recognize His voice, spoken through the words of the Bible and spoken by His Spirit into our hearts.

You'll know growth is happening when you find yourself praying regularly, "*Lord show me how you are present in my current situation,*" while at the same time sensing an increase of His peace, joy, and assurance in response.



R H Y T H M F O U R

EXPERIENCING FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Because God has set me free in Jesus to live as His child, I purposefully live every day from this place of freedom. Some helpful practices that support me in this rhythm are:

- Living authentically
- Practicing confession on a regular basis
- Living in awareness of spiritual realities
- Inviting God to break strongholds in my life
- Building authentic, caring community with other people

RHYTHM 4 MEMORY VERSE

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

—John 8:36

Day 1 - Living Authentically

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. [...] He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

—Luke 4:14-20 (NIV)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

—Matthew 23:27-28

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

—1 John 3:2

Calling someone *hypocrite* always packs a punch. The word itself goes all the way back to ancient Greece, where it referred to stage actors who would hide their true faces under decorated masks in order to take on new identities. This is also where we get the expression "two-faced".

It's interesting that people across a variety of cultures and time periods all seem to react negatively to hypocrisy. We somehow know it's wrong, even immoral, to show one face to the public and another behind closed doors. Maybe it's not so surprising when hypocrisy shows up in secular

society: business, politics, social groups, families. It seems just as often, however, that Christians are being labeled 'hypocrite'—and many times with good reason! From megachurch pastors to deacon boards to Bible study leaders, it seems churchgoers can't shake free of the temptation to lead a double life.

Jesus Himself directed His harshest condemnation towards the hypocrisy of so-called religious people. In Matthew 23:3, He warns about the religious group called the Pharisees (see pg. 39), saying, *"Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach"* (NIV). Underneath this statement is a recognition that faith ought to make a difference in how we live—otherwise, as James points out, what good is it? (James 2:14)

Transparency and authenticity are hard. Nobody starts out in life wanting to wear a mask; we learn to put them on in response to the hurts and disappointments we experience along the way. Doubly sad, though, is when we don't feel safe even among those calling themselves Christians. In the end an unhealthy church can feel like a dysfunctional costume party, where some long to remove their masks but are too afraid of how they might be received, and others have been wearing the mask for so long they believe it's real.

Jesus directed His
harshest condemnation
towards the hypocrisy
of so-called religious
people.

What is lost when we live like this? Intimacy—knowing and being known for who we really are. Not just knowing other people, but knowing ourselves, and God as well. As we saw in Week 1, this destructive pattern was set all the way back in the Garden of Eden: After Adam and Eve chose not to follow God's plan, their first instinct was to hide themselves, and intimacy with God and each other was broken.

Jesus said that He came to set the captives free. That which we're unable to do for ourselves, He accomplished for us through dying in our place and raising to life again. *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,"* Jesus says (Matthew 11:28, NIV). There is great freedom in that invitation, but to step forward in response still takes a lot of courage.

The Latin phrase *Esse quam videri* sums this up well: "To be, rather than to seem." Today, will we settle for *seeming* like people transformed by Jesus? Or will we take up the call to put away the mask and live out this journey authentically, in community with others wanting to experience the same?

Now, this doesn't mean we need to tell our darkest secrets to everyone we've just met! There are times, places, and degrees of transparency. But authenticity means looking honestly at ourselves, and it means confession—a word that means 'say the same thing.' Authenticity leads us to say the same thing that God says about ourselves, our mistakes, and our fears. In this we can find the pathway to new levels of intimacy and freedom, available to each of us.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for coming to bring freedom to the captives and good news to the poor. Help me to see any areas in my life where I am still captive to thoughts, beliefs, and actions that aren't grounded in the new life you bring. Help me to move forward in living the authentic, spirit-filled life that you offer me, and help me to trust that you'll be there to walk alongside me through the changes this brings.

Application

Think about a time in your life that you felt most known for who you really are. What was special or unique about that time? In what ways was it different from your life today?

RHYTHM 4 MEMORY VERSE

So if the Son sets you _____, you will be _____ indeed.

—John 8:36

Day 2 - Confession

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*
—Psalm 51:1-6

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our
sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*
—1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Last week as we explored the rhythm of prayer, we saw that confession and repentance are essential parts of listening to and talking with God. Today we'll go a little deeper into this topic. Confession can sound scary, like something that happens in the back room of a police station under bright lights—It can feel like the end of freedom. But this isn't the confession that God invites us to: Rather than bringing captivity, the confession God invites is intended to set us free.

What does confession look like practically? Well, it starts with the transparency and authenticity we discussed in Day 1, when we let down our masks enough to be honest with ourselves and with God. This allows us to cultivate awareness of the places we fall short, and the courage to name them for what they are, trusting we'll still be loved and accepted when we do. The traditional word for this recognition of ways we've fallen short is conviction. When the Spirit of God convicts, He doesn't intend for us to wallow in that negative awareness, but instead to move

swiftly to an act of confession. As was mentioned yesterday, confess means 'to say the same thing'—to align our thoughts and words with God's authority and loving guidance.

This is the practice God invites us to throughout our spiritual journey: Authenticity will lead to Conviction; Conviction leads to Confession; Confession leads to Repentance—a conscious turning away from sin through the power of God's Holy Spirit (see pg. 45). '

It's important to note that sometimes confession and repentance are private—just between us and God—and sometimes they should happen publicly. When we fall short in ways that hurt someone else, God will often call us to take steps to make it right, both through words and action. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we shouldn't even bother making an offering for God if we know one of our brothers or sisters has a legitimate grievance against us—make it right first, He says (see Matthew 5:23-24).

This side of heaven, none of us will ever be free from the need to repent of sin. According to 1 John 1:10, anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar. No doubt we've all had interactions with other people that bear this out! However, this leads us to revisit another important point from last week: For some people, their awareness of sin follows them around

We don't need to
live under a cloud,
wondering what
God thinks of us.

like a dark cloud. They can't shake the feeling that God's basic posture towards them is one of disappointment: *"Well, I see that they blew it again. After all I've done for them! I was expecting so much more."* God becomes the parent we can never quite please. Sure, we can believe that God loves us. But do we believe that God *likes* us as well?

A right understanding of today's topic can go a long way here. When we align our view of sin with God's view, confessing and repenting from the heart, He wipes away every trace of condemnation (Romans 8:1). Psalm 103:12 says he moves it as far away as the east is from the west. That is infinitely far! We don't need to live under a cloud, wondering what God thinks of us. The real question in regards to sin is this: Is the amount of time between when you become aware of sin and when you've repented of it growing shorter as you grow older? That's a huge mark of spiritual growth.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your overwhelming love, which is greater than any sin in my past, present, or future. Thank you for the forgiveness you offer, guaranteed through the sacrifice of your Son Jesus. Help me to see those areas of my life that are not surrendered to you, and to see that in calling me to repent you desire what is best for me. By the power of your spirit, bring me to a place where I can confess these things and move forward into the new life you bring.

Application

Listen to what God may say to you through His spirit. If people, situations, behaviors, or attitudes come to mind where sin has taken root, acknowledge these areas and ask for God's strength to turn away from them.

RHYTHM 4 MEMORY VERSE

So if the _____ sets you _____, you will be _____
_____.

—John 8: _____

Day 3 - Entering the Fight

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

—Revelation 12:7-11

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

—Ephesians 6:10-13

LUCIFER (noun)

Another name for Satan or the devil, the chief of the fallen spirits, adversary of God and mankind. I Tim. 3:6 indicates that he fell under God's condemnation due to ambitious pride (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

From beginning to end, the Bible asserts that the things we can see, touch, and measure in this world only tell part of the story. It consistently calls us to recognize another side of reality, in which spiritual forces, both good and evil, have huge impact on our world and even our daily lives.

To believe the gospel message is to believe that God hasn't left us alone in the universe, but rather that He entered into human history to accomplish personally what we could never accomplish for ourselves. Together with this comes a recognition that something has gone deeply wrong with our world. Wars, death, hatred, and selfishness—these come as the fruits of our broken spiritual condition. In prior weeks we've made reference to some of these unseen realities, and today we'll unpack them a little more.

Before human history began, an angelic creature named **Lucifer**, which means light-bearer, rebelled against God's authority. Passages in Genesis, Revelation, and elsewhere* paint a picture of Lucifer being cast down

to the earth, and of humanity taking sides with him against God's perfect plan for abundant living. The result is sin: falling short of God's mark of goodness through pursuit of self-interest above all else. What was our first ancestors' sin in the Garden (Genesis 3) becomes each of our sin personally, as again and again we don't do the good that we know we should, or we do the wrong that we know we shouldn't (Romans 7:19).

On earth, Lucifer is better known by the names the devil or Satan, which means accuser. As an outworking of the hatred that was born in their rebellion, Satan and those fallen angels that joined with him (which came to be called demons) work tirelessly to oppose the work of God in every form. Make no mistake: Satan hates the Church, and hates anyone desir-

As followers of Jesus,
we have a caring Shep-
herd to walk with us
through the hard times,
as well as the Holy
Spirit's power to break
us free from the chains.

ing to live a godly life (2 Timothy 3:12, Revelation 12:17). It might seem weird to think of being hated in this way, but it's true! Satan is the father of all the hatred our world has ever experienced.

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) instructs us, *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* Although a day will come when God puts an end to all evil (Revelation 20:12),

humanity is in a desperate position at present, with a real external enemy on one hand, and an internal battle with human nature on the other.

Let's be clear: As we discussed yesterday, God has the power to forgive and restore even the most broken life. God is *for* you, not against you (1 Peter 5:7). But that truth doesn't change the fact that our choices have consequences, for ourselves and others. Romans 6:16 warns, *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"* (NIV) The Christian who again and again chooses self-interest and self-indulgence over the purposes of God is tied up inside, just as much as the person who doesn't know God.

The difference is, as followers of Jesus we have a caring Shepherd to walk with us through the hard times, as well as the Holy Spirit's power to break us free from the chains. This is the invitation of God: To walk in the Spirit, and in so doing to not gratify the desires of our old sinful nature (Galatians 5:16). No, it's not easy. But as we've seen today, there is more at stake in this spiritual battle than we can ever fully realize.

In the remaining days of this topic, we'll look at some practical tools for walking consistently in the freedom we are made for. Please note that tomorrow, Day 4, you may need to set aside 10-15 minutes more than usual to get the most out of it.

Prayer

Lord, I give you praise that You have already won the victory over darkness! Help me to take up the invitation of First Peter to be alert and of sober mind, so I won't be unaware of sin's influence on my life, and on the lives of those around me. Help me to take up the armor of God in order to stand firm in Your truth.

Application

Spend some time reflecting on your current views on spiritual realities and the topic of 'spiritual warfare.' Can you think of people and experiences that have helped you to form this perspective? Have your views changed over time or stayed consistent?

***For More Information:**

If you're curious to learn more of what the Bible has to say about the fall and destiny of Satan, check out the following passages: Genesis 3, Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28:11-19, Matthew 25:31-46, Revelation 12 and Revelation 19-20

RHYTHM 4 MEMORY VERSE

So if _____ sets _____, you _____
_____.

— _____ 8: _____

Day 4 - Freedom from Strongholds

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish **strongholds**. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

—2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

—James 4:7

Today we dive into a spiritual reality that might be new for you. Maybe you'll have to re-read this once or twice in order to process the topic; that's okay. On the other side of this conversation, through implementing the practice of recognizing and finding freedom from strongholds, we hope you'll experience a new level of closeness with Jesus and empowerment for working out His purposes in the world.

Let's start with a working definition: Spiritual strongholds are *places of spiritual resistance to God's work in our lives, formed when we accept and internalize lies about God's character and goodness*. In the Second Corinthians passage above, Paul describes the attitude he has towards strongholds in the life of a believer: They ought to be demolished, destroyed, torn to the ground. The Greek word for stronghold here is *ochuroma*, which also described literal stone fortresses that dotted the first-century Mediterranean coast, as well as—in more ancient texts—prisons. In this passage, Paul may be drawing to mind the coastline of his native Cilicia, and the naval battles that frequently centered on the fortresses there. In order to take military control of a territory, the fortified strongholds needed to be broken open.

Spiritual strongholds are more than what we think of as sin. Though they can form around areas of habitual sin in our lives, they also form for a variety of other reasons. The common root, though, is an internalized belief that God is holding back His goodness from us in some way. These kinds of belief can hold power in our lives whether we call ourselves Christians or not.

SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS

Places of spiritual resistance to God's work in our lives, formed when we accept and internalize lies about God's character and goodness.

Here is the experience of one of our authors:

My parents divorced when I was fourteen. Through the pain and confusion of that experience, one message I internalized was that I needed to protect myself from being vulnerable to that kind of hurt ever again. That message took root and developed into a stronghold of Control in my life.

I've grown to recognize the stronghold of Control shows up in me as a hesitation to trust others deeply, and a quickness to put up walls when I feel like someone has wronged or misunderstood me. I've also learned that Jesus is calling me to greater freedom in this area of Control. I'm growing to recognize those times when I am feeling vulnerable or out of control, and I'm learning to invite God's help so that I don't respond from this place of mistrust, but rather from a place of love and peace. -Mark P.

The Bible says that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). When we allow ourselves to internalize a lie about God's loving protection over us, we become partners with the darkness. We have become partners to our own bondage.

When we allow ourselves to internalize a lie about God's loving protection over us, we become partners with the darkness.

As we discuss strongholds, it's important to affirm once again that healthy boundaries in life have their place—the call to freedom isn't a call to open yourself to everyone and everything. Jesus Himself had boundaries: things He didn't do and places He wouldn't go because they were not appropriate to His purposes. It's through prayer and

meditation on God's Word that we learn to recognize those things that are rooted not in the truth and goodness of God, but rather in a lie about His character or our own worth.

In the rest of this topic, we'll explore some common strongholds and a rhythm to put into practice for moving toward transforming freedom. Though there is no formula when it comes to finding freedom from strongholds, the following pages present a few guiding steps to consider, as well as a list of commonly recognized spiritual strongholds.

Guiding Steps Toward Freedom from Strongholds

- Cultivate awareness of an area in your life where you aren't experiencing the joy, peace, and freedom that Jesus brings. Pray and ask God to help you see and give words to the negative things you are experiencing. Spiritual strongholds impact body, mind, spirit, and emotions, so pay attention to feelings and physical sensations connected to the area you're examining.
- In prayer, ask God to take your mind back to past instances of related thoughts, feelings, and actions. Then invite God to make you aware of the common threads that unite them—the situations, themes, emotions, fears, desires.
- Look over the list on pgs. 75-76 of common strongholds that others have identified. See if any resonate with or give words to your experience. (These examples are adapted from the book *Rooted* by Mariners Church; see index for more information.)
- Invite a person or small group of people you can trust into your story. Ask if they're willing to pray for you and support you in finding and walking in greater spiritual freedom.
- At the root of spiritual strongholds is a lie about God's character and goodness. In a prayerful frame of mind, try to give specific words to the lie you have embraced (some examples are provided on the following pages). This can be scary, but it's part of inviting God to shine His light into your situation. You'll know when you've found the specific lie you've embraced because of the power those words have—power built upon untruth. It can feel like a punch to the gut, and may bring tears.
- Confess before God the ways you've embraced a lie about who He is and who He made you to be. Ask and embrace His forgiveness in this area. An example prayer might look like this:

Lord, I come to You in the name of Jesus. I declare that I belong to You, and that You have granted me power through the blood and authority of Jesus to demolish spiritual strongholds in my life. I confess to you that I have surrendered ground to the enemy through the stronghold of _____, and I now renounce this stronghold. I claim the truth of Your Word in this area, and ask that You enable me by the Spirit's power to walk in this truth.

- In place of this lie, pray aloud the truth of God's word (Suggested passages can be found on the following pages). Be sensitive to the Spirit's presence, and pay attention to the response within your own heart, mind, body, and spirit.
- It may be necessary to revisit the same area of spiritual bondage more than once. The deeper the lie goes, the more investment it will take to uproot it. It's also worth mentioning that you might find your negative experiences getting worse in this area before they get better. The Enemy doesn't want to give up territory and will throw everything possible your way to keep you from finding freedom. Keep praying, trusting, and persevering as you invite Christ's freedom into your life!

STRONGHOLD	FREEDOM
BITTERNESS <i>resentment, hate, unforgiveness, anger, violence, revenge</i> Potential Lies: <i>Holding onto past hurts gives me power / protection</i>	FORGIVENESS God's Truth: Colossians 3:12-15
CONTROL <i>manipulation, lack of trust, worry, craving recognition</i> Potential Lie: <i>When I control my life, I will be safe and happy</i>	SURRENDER God's Truth: Matthew 16:24-25
DESPAIR <i>hopelessness, self-pity, isolation, addiction, self-harm</i> Potential Lies: <i>I am alone / abandoned</i>	HOPE God's Truth: Psalm 34:17-18
DECEIT <i>lying, delusions, rationalizing behavior, manipulation, habitual exaggeration</i> Potential Lie: <i>The real me isn't enough and will be rejected</i>	TRUTHFULNESS God's Truth: John 8:31-32
FALSE SPIRITUALITY <i>religious spiritual ties, consulting spirits, occult, astrology, fortune telling</i> Potential Lies: <i>I can find my own truth to guide me / protect me</i>	LIFE IN CHRIST God's Truth: John 14:1-7
FEAR <i>fear of failure, phobias, perfectionism, compulsions</i> Potential Lies: <i>The real me isn't enough / will be rejected</i>	TRUST IN GOD'S CARE God's Truth: 1 John 4:13-19

STRONGHOLD	FREEDOM
IDOLATRY <i>selfishness, greed, apathy, pride, stubbornness, vanity, materialism</i> Potential Lie: <i>If I just had a little more, I would be content</i>	CONTENTMENT God's Truth: Matthew 6:25-26
INSECURITY <i>feeling inferior, withdrawal, people pleasing, worry, overly dependent relationships</i> Potential Lies: <i>I am defective / 'less than' other people</i>	GOD'S EVERLASTING LOVE God's Truth: Romans 8:31-39
JEALOUSY <i>spitefulness, gossip/slander, betrayal, a critical/judgmental spirit</i> Potential Lie: <i>I deserve more</i>	GRATITUDE God's Truth: Matthew 7:9-11
PRIDE <i>control, boastfulness, belittling others, selfishness, vanity, superiority</i> Potential Lie: <i>I deserve the best</i>	HUMILITY God's Truth: Matthew 20:26-28
REJECTION <i>seeking acceptance, feeling unworthy, withdrawal, addictions, compulsions</i> Potential Lie: <i>I am unlovable</i>	ACCEPTANCE God's Truth: 1 John 3:1-3
SEXUAL IMMORALITY <i>lust, inappropriate sexual relationships/seductiveness, pornography</i> Potential Lies: <i>I'm not enough / I have to use sex to be loved</i>	PURITY God's Truth: Galatians 5:13-16, 19-21

Day 5 - Hope for the Future

At that time, Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses, diseases, and evil spirits, and he gave sight to many blind people. Then Jesus answered John's followers, "Go tell John what you saw and heard here. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor. Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed!"

—Luke 7:21-23 (NCV)

There is a powerful moment in the Old Testament book of 2 Kings: Israel is at war with a neighboring kingdom called Aram, and the prophet Elisha is in a town called Dothan. The king of Aram wants to capture Elisha, so overnight he takes his entire army and surrounds the city. In the morning, Elisha's servant wakes up to discover a multitude of enemy soldiers, horses, and chariots in every direction.

We pick up the action in verse 15:

"Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

—2 Kings 6:15b-17

Those 'chariots of fire' he saw are a portion of God's armies of angels, fighting on Israel's behalf. Elisha was aware of a spiritual reality his servant was not—a reality that completely changed his perception of the situation. Instead of responding in fear, he was able to respond in hope and confidence because he had eyes to see the power of God ready to be unleashed.

What impact might it have on our day-to-day lives to recognize there is more at work around us than what we can see, touch, and hear? That God's purposes are waiting to be worked out in and through us, if we will learn to surrender our small ambitions to Him and partner with Him? Take a minute to really think about that—such perspective could change everything!

Maybe the words of Elisha can become a foundational prayer in support of this rhythm: *Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see.* When something happens in a close relationship that feels painful and hard to understand: *Open my eyes, Lord, that I may see.* When culture and politics in our world appear to be more polarized, when tragedies and disappointments happen, when it seems that you're stuck in life and nothing will ever change: *Open my eyes Lord, that I may see.* Then, if God in that moment brings to you an area requiring action, or confession, or the breaking of a spiritual stronghold, you have so exercised your spiritual muscles that you are ready to take on that next step.

Who wouldn't want that? Satan, for one. As we've discussed this week, spiritual forces are constantly at work to distract and dissuade us from having a mindset like Elisha. So part of this rhythm is claiming over our lives as often as necessary the victory of Jesus on the cross: *"I am a Child of God, washed through Jesus' blood shed for me. In His name I reject the lies of the Enemy."* Resist the devil, says James 4:7, and he will flee from you.

"Open my eyes,
Lord, that I may
see."

This is important, but it's only half the story. In this rhythm of Experiencing Freedom in Christ, we must also become willing to let go of our own ways of doing things, and of the sources of strength and protection we've built up over the years that don't line up with God's truth and character. Letting go of these old 'friends' is painful, but along the way, we begin to see more clearly the destructive ways we've been cooperating with the strongholds of darkness in our lives. In dependence on the Spirit's help, we also find a growing willingness to trade in some of those life-fuel sources we've always depended on—fuel sources that burn hot, but also burn dirty—in exchange for a more Christ-centered, harmonious way of living.

It's hard to do this alone—some would say impossible. Just as Elisha's servant needed Elisha to pray for his eyes to be opened, we need others to come alongside and support us in the journey of finding increasing freedom. That's where a healthy church family can come in: One in which we've all agreed together to set aside the masks. By embracing this and the other six rhythms in community, we learn what it means to be a people on mission, encouraging and defending one another as together we bring the hope of Jesus to a broken and hurting world.

Prayer

God, help me to see where you are at work: in my life, in the lives of those around me, and in the world. Help me to be quick to confess and repent from those things that don't lead me to the abundant life you offer. Thank you that you have already won the victory! More and more, I want to experience the freedom and life you purchased for me on the cross of Jesus. Show me what it looks like to establish this rhythm of finding spiritual freedom in my life. And please lead me to value building community with others who are looking to live out the transformation only You can bring.

Application

Revisit the list of spiritual strongholds on Pages 74-75, as well as the steps towards freedom on Page 73. Respond to any promptings God may give you in taking a step towards freedom.

For Further Reading:

- *Boundaries for Your Soul* by Alison Cook & Kimberly Miller
- *The Cure* by John Lynch, Bruce McNicol & Bill Thrall
- *Rooted* by Mariners Church
- *The Sacred Romance* by Brent Curtis & John Eldredge
- *Self to Lose, Self to Find* by Marilyn Vancil
- *Waking the Dead* by John Eldredge

RHYTHM 4 MEMORY VERSE

_____,
_____.
_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus learn to walk in the truth of who God is and who, in His great love, He made them to be.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Seek Authenticity.** Find one relationship, one conversation, or even one thought in which you recognize you have been hiding from the truth. What step could you take, in love, to move towards more honesty?
- **Reflect.** Look again at the list of common strongholds on pgs. 74-75. For any that catch your attention, spend some time in thought and prayer. Write down anything that comes to mind—related thoughts, past experiences, prayers, anything.
- **Read.** Any of the books listed on the previous page will offer deeper insight into the topic of Experiencing Freedom in Christ. Give one a try!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You are sharing in God's Story, recognizing where He is at work in your life and the world, and the ways He invites you to partner with Him.

God's Word (Rhythm 2) and **Prayer** (Rhythm 3) support this by helping you to hear and recognize His voice, and to learn the truth of who God is and who He made you to be.

You'll know growth is happening when you begin to make use of the spiritual practice of rejecting lies in favor of God's truth through prayer and the power of God's Spirit, in order to experience greater freedom, peace, and readiness for his plans and purposes in the world.



R H Y T H M F I V E

WORSHIP

Because God has poured his transforming love into my life, I partner together with God's Spirit to experience each moment as an opportunity to worship Him. I'm growing to worship God through:

- Whole-Life Worship
- Private Worship
- Experiencing Work as Worship
- Worship in Community
- Worship through Steps of Faith: Baptism and Communion

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:1-2

Day 1 - Whole-Life Worship

Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out.

*Is there anyone around who can explain God?
Anyone smart enough to tell him what to do?
Anyone who has done him such a huge favor
that God has to ask his advice?
Everything comes from him;
Everything happens through him;
Everything ends up in him.
Always glory! Always praise!
Yes. Yes. Yes.*

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

—Romans 11:33-12:2 (MSG)

As we have emphasized all throughout *Rhythms*, God desires for us to live whole, connected lives. Wholeness in worship is an integral part of this.

The paraphrase above from Paul's letter to the Romans goes to the heart of what we mean when we say whole-life worship. Too often, worship is simplified to reference the songs we sing in church, when in reality it's so much more. When we start with taking in the deep generosity of God, His wisdom and awesomeness in our daily lives and in our corporate experience, we can't help but echo the words that end verse 11: *Always glory! Always praise!*

This is the experience of worship God invites us to enter. In the process, we not only give Him the glory He is due, but we also open new path-

ways for joy and for encountering the Holy Spirit's power in every aspect of our lives.

It can be easy to frame worship as an 'event' we attend once or twice a week. All the other hours and days of the week aren't part of that personal worship picture, which can leave us believing it's up to us to accomplish and provide—that we must make it on our own. But when we expand the worship frame by embracing the fact that everything we do flows from a God so deserving of adoration, reverence, praise and awe, the picture of worship we see inside the frame is transformed! This new picture invites us into the larger story of God's love and moment-by-moment provision for us.

What might that look like in your family? When you wake up, remember that God gave you this family and He wants you to see them through His eyes. Look for ways to bless your family and help them see the God who created each with unique gifts to be used to help the world flourish. Help to nurture those unique personalities and gifts so they can be all they are meant to be.

In the process, we not only give Him the glory He is due, but we also open new pathways for joy and for encountering the Holy Spirit's power.

What does that look like when it comes to work? Say you are a nurse: God gave you wonderful skills to care for people, ask God to show you today how he wants you to use these gifts to represent him in the world. Or say you are an engineer at Boeing, you are helping people fly toward their family, their work, and rest. Your work matters to God and He delights when you work as if you are working for Him and for the flourishing of people made in His image. We'll talk more about this on Day 3 as well.

When we live through God's frame of the world, bringing the best out in others and helping others flourish, we are changed in the process as well, as we represent a good and generous God who is always at work. Look for ways this week where you can encourage someone in their Kingdom worship in the way they love their family, the work they are doing or the good way they are serving their community. This is powerful fuel for the praises we speak and sing back to God during those times we gather as a church family!

Prayer

Lord, help me to see all my life as worship of you! Help me to rely on your wisdom, perspective and insight in each thought, decision and action in my life. As I see you work in and through me, remind me to praise you and help me to celebrate the Jesus I see in others. Thank you that you are the head and we are your body, working together to bring you glory.

Application

What area of your life would you like to see from the perspective of worship? How might you invite the Spirit's understanding and power into this area today? As you invite the power of God in all areas of your life, take notice of how your mindset shifts and how you will feel even the smallest details are part of the work in the Kingdom of God. Know that God is in the details and He loves when we invite Him to move in all of our life.

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the _____ of God, to present your _____ as a living _____, holy and acceptable to God, which is your _____ worship. Do not be _____ to this _____, but be transformed by the _____ of your mind, that by testing you may _____ what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:1-2

Day 2 - Private Worship

[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

—Mark 12:41-44

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

—Mark 1:35-39

In Week 3 we focused on Prayer as an essential rhythm of spiritual growth. In many ways the topic of private worship is most fully experienced in the midst of a rich prayer life, so it's a great idea to take some time going back and reviewing the Prayer Rhythm. Today, however, we will dig deeper into specific practices of worship that will hopefully highlight some of its benefits for our spiritual growth.

While universal in one sense, meaningful rhythms of private worship are also unique to every person—to our individual personalities and the ways God made us. This means enormous freedom and variety for how each person expresses private worship, but it also means each of us must invest the time to explore the topic for ourselves.

The Bible demonstrates a variety of ways that we can worship God in private: Prayer (Matthew 6:5-6), Bible study (Psalm 1:1-3), fasting (Matthew 6:16-18), and doing good deeds (Matthew 6:1-4) are just a few. Perhaps the best example of a life dedicated to times of private worship is Jesus. All throughout His life He would regularly draw away from others to spend time with God the Father (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16).

Author Gary Thomas, in his book *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God*, outlines nine spiritual temperaments that can offer insight into meaningful practices of worship. The idea of these temperaments

(which he calls sacred pathways) is that our experience of the richness and diversity of God grows as we express worship in ways that align with who He made us to be.

Here is Thomas' list of spiritual temperaments:

- **Naturalists** love God best outdoors. These people worship in the midst of God's creation. They celebrate His majesty and discover spiritual truths through nature.
- **Sensates** love God through their senses. These people worship through sensual experiences: sights (like art), sounds (music), smells, and more.
- **Traditionalists** love God through religious rituals and symbols. These people worship through the traditions and sacraments of the Church. They believe structure, repetition, and rigidity, like weekly liturgy, leads to deeper understanding of God and faith.
- **Ascetics** love God in solitude and simplicity. These people worship through prayer and quiet time, and the absence of all outside noise and distraction.
- **Activists** love God through righteous confrontation, fighting for godly principles and values. They worship through their dedication to and participation in God's truth about social and evangelistic causes.
- **Caregivers** love God by serving others, and worship by giving of themselves. They may nurse the sick and disabled, "adopt" a prisoner, donate time at a shelter, etc.
- **Enthusiasts** love God through mystery and celebration. These people worship with outward displays of passion and enthusiasm. They love God with gusto!
- **Contemplatives** love God through adoration. These people worship by their attentiveness, deep love, and intimacy. They have an active prayer life.
- **Intellectuals** love God with their mind, and their hearts are opened to a new attentiveness when they understand something new about God. These people worship through intense study, apologetics, and other intellectual pursuits.

As you reflect on these spiritual temperaments, keep a few things in mind: First, most of us are a mixture of multiple temperaments and will benefit from connecting with God through a combination of approaches. Second, much like how our relationships with other people change over time, the ways we connect with God will also change and adjust as we grow. This may lead you to find significance in new rhythms of worship that didn't seem as meaningful in the past. It is also worth mentioning that, while spending time alone with God is a high priority, it does not replace the need to worship with other believers. Remember, it is a "both-and" not an "either-or" proposition.

We all have seasons in life where moving forward in faith feels more challenging—Times where God may seem more distant. In those times it's helpful to look for new ways to experience and spend time with Him. Remember that God loves you and takes great delight in spending time with you: "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (Zeph. 3:17).

Prayer

What a gift to know you, God, and to see that you make yourself known in such creative ways. Open my eyes and heart to fresh new ways of worshipping you. Thank you that you delight in spending time with me. Help me to sense the kindness with which you are drawing me closer.

Application

Look at the list on page 87 and circle the ones that feel most life-giving to you. Which one seems the hardest? Ask God to show you fresh ways of worshipping Him in the time you spend with Him.

For Further Reading:

Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God by Gary Thomas

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

I _____ to you therefore, _____, by the _____
of God, to present your _____ as a living
_____, holy and _____ to God, which is your
_____ worship. Do not be _____ to this _____
, but be _____ by the _____ of your mind,
that by _____ you may _____ what is the _____
of _____, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:1-_____

Day 3 - Work as Worship

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

—Genesis 1:26-31a

The Hebrew word *avodah* is often translated as 'worship,' but interestingly it can also be translated as 'work' or 'service.' Scripture assumes that our work is a part of the way we commune with God and bring glory to Him. As we discussed in Day 1, we are living the abundant Christian life when we are doing everything, including our work, to the glory of God and with an appreciation of His presence. Paul makes this same point in Colossians 3:23-24: *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."*

A lot of people consider certain jobs or professions as 'better' or 'worse' than others, but this isn't the biblical view. God invites and blesses all honest work! In the first two chapters of Genesis, where we see God giving work to humans before sin even comes into the picture, at least three distinct kinds of work are mentioned:

- 1) Leadership and oversight ("rule over the creation," Genesis 1:28)
- 2) Maintenance work ("put him in the garden to work it and take care of it," Genesis 2:15)
- 3) Work in classification and ordering ("he brought [the animals] to the man to see what he would name them," Genesis 2:19).

Regardless of the kind of work you do, this view of work as an act of worship comes more easily for some people than others. Maybe you

love your work, or maybe your first thought Monday morning is how many hours till the weekend starts! Regardless, we all have opportunity to grow in recognizing and responding to God's invitation in this area. It's important to recognize as well that being a student, being a stay-at-home parent, being a caregiver for a loved one, or any other such role is also God-honoring work that brings opportunity to enter into worship.

Throughout scripture we see many different ways of encountering God in our work. One is through the people we interact with. In our neighborhoods and workplaces we have opportunities to interact with people who have a wide variety of beliefs. Here we are, face to face with other human beings who have also been made in the image of God. How do we respond? Jesus said, in responding to a question about the greatest commandment, *"...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:37-39).

Here we are, face to face with other human beings who have also been made in the image of God. How do we respond?

Jesus likened loving our neighbor to loving God! Although we may go through difficult periods in our relationships, we worship God when we celebrate His unique image displayed through each person.

A second way we encounter and worship God in our work is through the work itself. Don't fall into the

trap of thinking only pastors or church staff are engaged in spiritual ministry! God delights in His children using their gifts wherever He places them. We are all in Kingdom ministry, no matter where we work. It is a wonderful practice to go to work each day asking God to open your eyes throughout the day, that He might do His Kingdom work through you.

Think of it this way: If you're a teacher who grades your students fairly (even the annoying ones), or you are in sales and consistently look out for the best interests of your customers, or you're an accountant who balances the books in an honest way, can you see how that would delight God's heart? In fact, Proverbs 11:1 says, *"A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight."*

One further example: Ruth Bancewicz, in *God in the Lab*, sees her work as a scientist as an experience of knowing and worshipping God. Through observing the world in scientific detail, she again and again comes to appreciate the beauty of even ordinary things, which in turn grows her adoration of God. Anyone working in such an investigative field might agree with the view expressed in Proverbs 25:2, *"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out."*

Finally, an integral part of worshipping through work is to experience times of rest. Next week is all about developing a rhythm of Sabbath Rest, so you can plan to explore this topic further.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for inviting me to partner with you in your creative work in this world. Help me to see my everyday work as worship unto you. As I give my time and talents to the job in front of me, help me to see you in all the details, please give me energy and creative ideas, and help me to encourage those working around me. Help me not compare my work with others, but to celebrate the many creative ways you call your partners to accomplish your work in this world.

Application

Think for a moment about going to work today. How would it change the way you see your work if you consider this a part of our worship experience? List some ways it might look different and then ask the Holy Spirit to remind you about these things throughout the day.

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

I _____ to _____ therefore, _____, by the
_____ of _____, to _____ your _____ as a
_____, holy and _____ to _____,
which is your _____ worship. Do not be _____
to this _____, but be _____ by the _____
of _____, that by _____ you may _____
what is the _____ of _____, what is _____ and ac-
ceptable and _____.

—Romans 12:____ - ____

Day 4 - Corporate Worship

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.
—Psalm 100*

Day 2 of this week we talked about private worship; today we will be shifting to look at corporate worship—worship within community. Private and corporate worship are two sides of the same coin: One is not more important than the other, because the rhythm of worship is not complete without both expressions of our relationship with God.

While it's true that corporate expressions of worship are important for our spiritual growth, it's also true that many Christians struggle to enter into a vibrant experience of worship in community. Sometimes we look around and sense we're missing what others are experiencing—which can result in our feeling frustrated or guilty. Why bother?

Part of the answer comes in recognizing that our culture and life experiences may have set us up for unhealthy expectations in this area. Like a fish in water, we can become immersed in a worldview where personal preference comes first, including in our times of worship. Author Paul David Tripp has this to say: *“Corporate worship is a regular gracious reminder that it's not about you. You've been born into a life that is a celebration of another.”* Gathering for worship allows God to be exalted by acknowledging who He is and what he has done for us. We experience a peace and freedom that this world can't offer when we take our eyes off of ourselves and our circumstances in order to see a glimpse of His greatness and beauty.

One of our *Rhythms* authors shares his story:

A while back I went through a lengthy battle with my health that, among other things, prevented me from attending church in person for over a year. I wasn't prepared for how difficult this would be. The more time that went by the more I found myself longing to be in

the presence of other believers—to sing and to hear the singing of others, to be instructed from God's Word, and to hear the prayers and testimonies of others. In many ways it wasn't until it was taken away that I realized how important and life-giving corporate worship can be. —Matt C.

Think about hot coals in a wood fire: As long as they are connected to each other, the heat passes through and they glow bright red. But when you remove one of the coals from the group, its bright color quickly fades and its heat subsides. This is a great picture of why coming together with other believers is so valuable within the rhythm of worship. Church reformer Martin Luther described his corporate experience this way: *"At home, in my own house, there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through."* We are not made to live out our faith in isolation: Whether we recognize it or not, we need one another.

When you remove one of the coals from the group, its bright color quickly fades and its heat subsides.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says, *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."* While there is a bit of a mystery to this, God is present in the midst of His followers in a special way when we come together. C.S. Lewis echoes this: *"It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men."* What would happen if we approached worship expectantly, believing that God is in our midst and has something in store for us when we gather?

It's been said that worship is one of those activities that we get to participate in here on earth which we know will also continue for eternity in heaven. Revelation 7:9-10, in a vision of the future Kingdom of God, states, *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* This is a picture of eternity: We will be together with people from every background and culture, united through God's love. Why wouldn't we want to begin to have a taste of that now?

Corporate worship provides a witness to a watching world. Timothy Keller says, *"We are called not simply to communicate the gospel to nonbelievers; we must also intentionally celebrate the gospel before them."* When we come together as a community of faith, diverse yet

united in celebration of who God is, it creates a compelling picture. In a world where people are often divided, where prejudice and hurt run deep, we become ambassadors for the transforming power of God's Kingdom, examples of what His grace can do.

Prayer

God, what a gift to celebrate your goodness and the power of the Gospel with others. Help me to make the value of corporate worship a high priority and help me to bring a right heart and attitude each week. This time is about you, may you be lifted up and celebrate in the praises of your people.

Application

This week before you attend the worship service, take time before the service to pray the prayer below. Imagine God seated on the throne during the worship time and how it would feel to have all his people celebrating his love and patient pursuit. Listen carefully to the words you sing. If you find yourself wanting to be critical, set the thoughts to the side, and ask God what he would have you dwell on. Don't let the enemy steal away any of this time together.

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

_____ to _____, _____, by the
_____, to _____ your _____ as
_____, and _____ to
_____, which is _____. _____
not _____ to _____, but _____
_____ by _____ of _____,
that _____ you _____ what is _____
of _____, what is _____ and _____ and _____.
_____ 12: _____ - _____

Day 5 - Baptism and Communion

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

—Matthew 3:13-17

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

—1 Corinthians 11:23-26

As we come to the end of our week-long focus on the rhythm of Worship, there are two important topics still to address. Yesterday we explored the significance of God's people gathering for times of corporate worship. Today we will look at two practices that often take place during such times: Baptism and communion.

Sometimes called church 'ordinances' or 'sacraments', these two practices offer powerful symbols of our relationship with God and the truth of the gospel message. Both were practiced and affirmed by Jesus; however, baptism and communion are not requirements for salvation. Rather, they are a response of faith designed to point to Christ's work of salvation in our lives.

Baptism

Baptism is an outward, visible symbol of an inward, invisible commitment to Jesus Christ. This is best illustrated in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come."* Baptism allows us to celebrate the new identity we have through faith in Jesus.

Baptism is also intended to be a public confession, a tangible picture for us and others of our decision to follow Christ. It is first and foremost identification with Jesus Christ and is intended to symbolize what

has happened to us spiritually through our faith in Christ's death and resurrection. It is an act of obedience in response to faith in Christ and demonstrates five things:

1. A New Direction (Repentance)
2. A New Purpose (Mission)
3. A Clean Heart (Forgiveness)
4. A Sign of Unity (Family)
5. A Picture of Christ's Work (Salvation)

The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means "to dip" or "to submerge." There are multiple ways to be baptized, but at our church we perform baptism by immersion. We do this for a few different reasons. First, being baptized in this way is what we see practiced in the New Testament: This is how John the Baptist baptized Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17) as well as what we see throughout the book of Acts (Acts 8:36-38, 16:13-15, 16:27-24). In addition, physically being lowered into the water creates a powerful visual symbol of our identification with Jesus' death and burial, as well as our death to sin's power over our hearts. Being raised back up out of the water symbolizes our new spiritual birth as a result of Jesus' resurrection. What a privilege!

Deciding to be baptized is an important step in the life of a follower of Jesus. At our church, it is done after coming to faith, and represents a commitment to walk with and live for Christ. For many, baptism is a powerful moment to look back upon whenever life is challenging. It also invites support and accountability from the community of faith.

Communion

While baptism is a one-time event for those who follow Jesus, Communion is something believers are invited to practice regularly. Also known as the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, Communion was established by Jesus as a remembrance meal for His disciples (Matthew 26:26-29). The Bread, which represents Christ's body broken for us, and the Cup, which represents the New Covenant made available by Christ's shed blood, offer a vivid picture of God's grace made available to us when we trust in Jesus.

Sharing this meal with others builds unity, as together we anticipate His return (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). During communion, we have time to reflect on Jesus' work on our behalf and to give thanks for what He has done. This time also provides an opportunity to acknowledge and confess sin in our lives and receive forgiveness. How frequently the communion meal is shared varies from church to church. At Westminster Chapel, we share communion the last Sunday of each month, as well as on other special occasions.

Before closing, it is important to point out that both baptism and communion are more matters of the heart than ritual. The mechanics of these practices are not nearly as important as the fact that these practices of surrender and identification with Jesus' death and resurrection allow us to enter deeper into the awe and wonder of all God offers. They are vital expressions of worship to enjoy, expressing our lives as children of God.

Prayer

Thank you for the reminder of your sacrifice each time I take communion. We get so busy and can easily take for granted or forget your costly sacrifice for us. I am so grateful for the way we can celebrate your life, death, and resurrection through baptism and communion. I pray more people would come to understand your good news of salvation and long to be baptized.

Application

If you haven't been baptized or haven't partaken in communion, talk with your leader about any questions you have and consider what might be holding you back.

RHYTHM 5 MEMORY VERSE

_____ , _____ , _____

_____ , _____

_____ , _____

_____ , _____

_____ . _____

_____ , _____

_____ , _____

_____ , _____

_____ .

_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus partner with God's Spirit to experience each moment as an opportunity to worship.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Explore your Spiritual Temperament.** Look back at the list on pg. 86. Choose a style that speaks to you and put it into practice over the course of several days. See where it leads you!
- **See God in your Work.** Whether your work is in a coffee shop, school, home, or anyplace else, start your day with a simple prayer: "Lord, let me see you today." When He shows up, take a moment to thank Him for it.
- **Get Baptized!** If you haven't been baptized, talk to someone about it. For many people, baptism is a step that marks a growing commitment to walk with Jesus through life.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You are sharing in God's Story, recognizing where He is at work in your life and the world, and the ways He invites you to partner with Him. God's Word and Prayer support this by helping you to recognize His voice and truth, opening the way to a greater Experience of Freedom in Christ (Rhythm 4).

Worship (Rhythm 5) is the natural outflow and expression of the growing awareness of who God is, who He made you to be, and the power He displays in your life. Worship is not one-size-fits-all, but unique to every person.

You'll know growth is happening when you find yourself more and more experiencing moments of your day as acts of worship. Worship becomes a heart language you share with the God who made you and loves you more than you'll ever fully understand.



R H Y T H M S I X

SABBATH REST

Because Jesus Himself is the spiritual rest for His people, I express trust in His provision for my life through a regular rhythm of Sabbath Rest. Some practices that help guide me are:

- Creating Space for Sabbath Rest
- Trusting in God's Larger Story
- Experiencing Sabbath in Community
- Finding Rest in Solitude
- Entering into Sabbath Practices

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

—Hebrews 4:9-10

Day 1 - Creating Space for Sabbath Rest

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

-Matthew 11:25-30

*Stop striving and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth.*

-Psalm 46:10

In cultures around the world, it's often assumed that becoming an adult and being overloaded with responsibilities go hand in hand. It's almost like, if you're not stressed about all that's going on in your life and in the world, you're not trying hard enough! This message is reinforced at work and school, at home, in the media. Every day, TV news headlines announce something new we "need to be concerned about." But where is this mindset getting us? Is it leading us towards the abundant life God promises, or someplace else?

Typically, churches aren't any better at calling us to genuine rest than any other part of society. There's always one more class we ought to attend, one more social need we ought to make a top priority, one more volunteer role we ought to help fill. Even though the Bible calls us the 'Body of Christ,' on a practical level it seems too many churches operate under the same cloud of fear and guilt as everywhere else in our world. This is definitely not the irresistible experience of life in community that Jesus died to bring us.

That's partly why this rhythm of Sabbath rest is so important. Like the smell of a barbeque that drifts down the street and makes your mouth water, the experience of God's rest is a tempting preview of life in His Kingdom. It's a little bit of heaven—the Bible says that there will be no more mourning, or crying or pain there (Rev. 21:4)—that we get to taste now! If this is true, it's not surprising that the world and the spiritual powers of evil would try to bury us under a pile of worries. Satan doesn't want anyone getting the idea there is something more out there for us.

Jesus calls all who labor and are heavy laden to come to Him. He will give us rest! That is the invitation of Matthew 11:25-30: Jesus waiting, offering rest to each of us. All the responsibilities—all the hardships—He wants to carry for us. Doesn't that sound amazing? This is the heart of the rhythm of Sabbath rest.

Before we go any further into this topic, it's important to take stock of where we are. Probably each of us is in a slightly different place, depending on a number of factors: that's okay. None of us have arrived at perfection, and we won't until we see Jesus face to face! In the meantime, we're here to help each other. So, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being in a place of perfect peace and contentment, and 1 being as stressed-out and burned-out as humanly possible, where are you right now? Where were you six months ago? Take a moment to think about this.

Now, what if six months from now, you could see that number move higher, towards increased peace and contentment? Sounds good, right? This rhythm of Sabbath rest is one of the key practices to help make that happen. No, it's not one more to-do on your list. But it will take effort. Anyone with a stress-filled life who has taken a vacation knows this: Just getting on a plane headed for a tropical paradise doesn't mean that the concerns that fill your heart and mind are instantly transformed. It's often a few days into the vacation, maybe even a week, before people start to truly relax. Usually just in time to get back on the plane and head home again!

Like the smell of a barbeque that drifts down the street and makes your mouth water, the experience of God's rest is a tempting preview of life in His Kingdom.

Sabbath rest is similar—The practices we will unpack this week may not bring instant results. It takes unlearning some of the ways we've adapted to cope with life, and unburdening some of the burdens Christ never intended us to carry. The good news is God's Spirit will help us in the process, because we're taking steps towards who God created us to be. People at rest will transform their families. They'll transform their schools and workplaces. They'll transform their churches, in order to bring that aroma of Kingdom life to those who don't yet know what they are missing.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for desiring peace and rest for us. In this busy world, I want to make time to better understand Sabbath and all the good you have for me in slowing down and keeping my heart and mind focused on you. Please help me to carve out space to make Sabbath a priority, learning to trust you more.

Application

As you rated your place of peace and contentment, what number are you presently? What is one step you might consider so you can make more space for sabbath?

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

So then, there remains a _____ rest for the _____ of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his _____ as God did from his.

—Hebrews 4:9-10

Day 2 - Trusting in God's Larger Story

And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. [...]"

And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over till the morning." But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. [...]"

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'" So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.

—Exodus 16:14-15,19-20,22-27

The passage above comes from the years that the people of Israel spent in the wilderness, on their way to the land that God had promised to them. Sunday through Friday each week, God provided a miraculous bread called manna to eat—which was really important in the middle of a barren desert! The experience of receiving manna not only kept the people on their feet for forty years, it also provided a powerful lesson in trust. God helped them see what it means to be in personal relationship with Him, the one who creates and sustains all things. The lesson the Israelites received is relevant for us as well. Today we'll draw out a few details that apply to the rhythm of Sabbath rest.

The first is that for five days a week, the people were to gather only what they needed for that day. The manna God provided each morning only lasted about twelve hours; if the people tried to keep any till the following morning they were in for an unpleasant surprise! This daily need to gather manna gave a rhythm and structure to the Israelite's time in the wilderness, and it also put them in a position of dependency and trust. This couldn't have been easy for them! You can picture some of the people

saying, “Okay, the manna came today, but what about tomorrow? To be honest, I’m not too comfortable trusting my security to someone else... I prefer to be in control.” Sound a little familiar maybe? The desire for certainty in life is as old as humanity. Jesus too recognized and spoke to this way of thinking when he said:

“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear? These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

—Matthew 6:31-34 (NLT)

Notice in this passage that Jesus doesn’t put us down for having needs! He’s not saying we should strive to disconnect ourselves from daily concerns in order to reach some higher spiritual plane. It’s just the opposite: God knows your needs already, Jesus says, and God is good. He loves you. Yes, having worries about the future is part of being human. But we can trust those worries to God, and live today in the gifts and opportunities He gives us—for today. Trust comes alive day by day, moment by moment.

Sabbath rest is an expression of our choice to trust God with our lives, needs, and responsibilities.

The second observation from Exodus 16: While five days a week the people were to gather only enough for the day, Fridays were different.

Each Friday they gathered for both the current day and for their day of Sabbath rest, which was Saturday. Once again, you can imagine someone saying, “Wait, I don’t understand. On Monday I tried keeping the manna overnight and I am still cleaning little worms out of my tent! Now on Friday storing the manna is suddenly okay? No—I’m just going to do what I’ve been doing. I’ll stick to what I know.” But Saturday morning, there was no manna to be found! Because God wanted the day of rest to be truly restful, he invited them to trust His timing.

There is yet another invitation to trust that’s taking place here, one that goes to the heart of our rhythm of Sabbath rest. It’s this: We are *not defined by the work we do*. That is true no matter how and where you invest the hours of your day. There is a bigger story happening! It’s God’s story, and He invites us to be a part of it. Sabbath rest is an expression of our choice to trust God with our lives, needs, and responsibilities. To trust that you are worth something even when you’re doing nothing.

As you look at your calendar and think about fitting in time with God and a space for Sabbath, remember the heart of what the Sabbath practice is. It is remembering we are finite, and we desperately need God. It's an invitation to pause, stop what we are doing, reflect on God's goodness, and to be thankful. American culture places importance on being self-sufficient; we're taught, "the early bird gets the worm." Sabbath is a response to slow down and reflect on God's sufficiency and not our own.

Prayer

Lord, I want to praise you for your good plans for this world, for your people, and for me personally. Thank you for gently leading me as a Good Shepherd to places of greater trust in your provision and protection. Thank you that it isn't all up to me, and that I can truly rest in you. Holy Spirit, help me to trust more in the story being told through my life, and to lay down more of my need to be in control. Bring me to a place of surrendering more of myself to you, knowing you are enough for me.

Application

Pull out your calendar and consider where you can find a day to take a sabbath (even if just a few hours, starting small is just fine). Again, consider inviting a close friend or family member to do this alongside of you. If this isn't possible, consider talking with someone who can help you look at the calendar and help you to evaluate where you might be too busy and what things might you pull from your calendar to make the space. If it's not about space/time-talk with someone about what might be holding you back from this practice.

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

So then, there _____ a _____ rest for
the _____ of God, for _____ has entered God's
_____ has also rested from his _____ as God did
from his.

—Hebrews 4:9—

Day 3 - Sabbath Rest in Community

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

—Hebrews 4:1-2

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

—Hebrews 10:24-25

Yesterday we looked at the experience of the early Israelites with Sabbath rest. One point we haven't made yet is that their rhythm of rest took place within community. It was a shared experience.

Why is experiencing Sabbath rest in community important? Several reasons come to mind:

For one, we have already discussed how busy life can be. If we're on our own, isolated from other people who are growing to listen and love like Jesus, it's easy to let the urgency of life's daily demands take up more space than necessary. Accomplishment and accumulation are very attractive, so collectively pausing together reminds us Who our provider truly is, and gives us an opportunity to thank Him for all He has given to us. As we hear others praising God, we are drawn back to what really matters in life from a Kingdom perspective.

In Week 5, we looked at some of the great opportunities for growth that happen when we worship together with other believers in community. Experiencing a collective rhythm of Sabbath rest complements this: It says that we are a people who trust Jesus when He said on the cross, "It is finished." He accomplished for us what we could never accomplish for ourselves, and together we proclaim and live out that life-changing truth.

In the Pacific Northwest, it's not hard to find well-intentioned people who believe they get all the rest and refreshment they need by experiences in nature, such as hiking, boating, or biking. Some consider this their weekend ritual; some might go far as to call nature their church! God created so much beauty to enjoy and He delights in us appreciating the beauty and finding rest there, but as we see in the Scriptures above

and all throughout God's word, communities gathering for worship is part of His perfect plan.

We are called to the rest and encouragement that come through gathering together with other believers. But our lives are often so full that, even if we do attend church, the most we hope for is to gain a little spiritual 'boost' that quickly disappears afterwards. In such times we have lost the vision of why we are called to meet together: to celebrate Jesus and the rest He offers us. This happens best in engaged community, where we know others and are known. Especially in this time of pandemic, it is often so much easier to engage passively online. Online tools are great, but are best used to facilitate real-world connections.

So why would God encourage us to gather as a community and Sabbath together? As stated in the verse above, we are encouraged by others when we meet. When we rest in community, we get to tell the stories of how God has worked in and through us during the week. We are renewed by these stories, by singing together and by hearing God's Word together. Together, we remember who God is and all He has done for us.

This is the message of Hebrews, given to people who were weary from the struggles they faced. As we saw in Week 1, the author of the letter

says to them, *Meet together! Encourage each other. Motivate each other towards love: love of God and people, instead of things and accomplishments. In doing so you reveal who God is.* We gather as a group of very different people in personality, background, interests, and perspectives because of the transformation, encouragement, and purpose God's Spirit brings when we come together.

When we rest in community, we get to tell the stories of how God has worked in and through us during the week. We are renewed by these stories, by singing together and hearing God's Word together.

This rhythm of rest in community is also an antidote to the pressure to over-commit towards needs within the church. It provides the peaceful space we

need to in order both to recognize those opportunities God is genuinely moving us towards, and to entrust all the other needs to Him without feeling guilty. When all of us are using our serving gifts from a place of rest and trust in the story God is telling, we allow more room for the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work. Of course, there are times when God calls us individually and corporately to urgent action. But a community

of people living on the edge of burnout is never His design. Our service within the church and within our community is all the sweeter and more powerful when we are people who also take up the invitation to rest.

Prayer

God, thank you for your creativity expressed in the diversity of ways you have made us. Help me to see more and more the beauty of gathering together with people who are uniquely gifted and think differently than I do. Thank you that by the power of the Spirit, we come together as your body to worship You and rest in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. Please help me to hear your voice in the areas you have gifted me in order to serve the church body; and when there are seasons of rest, help me to trust You to fill those same needs.

Application

Next time you are attending a worship service or small group, pay attention to how God has created people with unique gifts. Let the other person know how you see his or her gifts helping the body and how much you appreciate him or her. Then as you lift your voice in praise alongside others who are different than you, thank the Spirit for the unity that comes from worshipping and celebrating together.

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

_____, there _____ a _____ for
the _____ of _____, for _____ has entered
God's _____ has also rested from _____ as
God did from _____.

— _____ 4:9 — _____

Day 4 - Finding Rest in Solitude

*This is what the **Sovereign** Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:*

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength."*

—Isaiah 30:15a

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

—Mark 6:30 -32

SOVEREIGN (adjective)

This word points to the biblical truth that God holds supreme authority. He is the 'almighty' and works all things according to his perfect will (Ephesians 1:11). God is creator and ruler of the universe (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

Why is it that some people get so uncomfortable in silence? Could it be because there are aspects of our lives we are unconsciously trying to distract ourselves from: Truths about ourselves or our relationships we don't want to face, ways we feel we've blown it or that we have been let down in some way? Distracting ourselves with noise and busyness creates the illusion that we've put those things out of our lives for good, but they are never really far off if we haven't brought them to Jesus.

One of our *Rhythms* authors shares his story:

I grew up in a household where the TV was always on. Even now, when we have guests over, I often turn on music or a sporting event in the background. It can be hard to live without noise. Now there are earbud headphones that we never have to take off; there are even apps on our phones just for creating artificial noise! We live in a connected and wired society, where information and entertainment are almost always within reach. The idea of unplugging and experiencing silence before the Lord can feel daunting.

When I was in college, I had a professor who asked us to practice solitude. He invited us to find a quiet place and pray for thirty minutes with no plan or expectation; just be silent. My eyes got big. I didn't know how to do that! I remember sitting silently, trying to be present to God. It was excruciating the first time, but with practice I began to see the benefits of increased peace and clarity, along with decreased stress and worry. -Josh D.

It's often in silence and solitude that we find the space for God to work. There is no challenge or fear that we face that is too great for Jesus to handle. Sabbath rest can be a perfect place to bring the confusing or

painful parts of life to Him, finding the strength He brings through our quietness and trust (Isaiah 30:15).

Look at Jesus. Many of His most significant moments were preceded by moments of solitude, including the choosing of his disciples (Luke 6:12-16), the time he miraculously fed 5,000 people (Matthew 14), and of course, his last night in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42). As we see in Mark 6, Jesus sometimes would choose solitude with God in prayer before sleep:

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.

—Mark 6:45-48a

Before this moment on the water, the disciples had just returned from ministry. Jesus brought them to a desolate place to rest for a while. People

Jesus told His disciples to prioritize time away to rest alone. He then did it Himself.

showed up ahead of them, and that is when Jesus fed the 5,000. Immediately after feeding the five thousand, He took the space to go pray by Himself. He didn't return to the disciples till about 3-6 AM. Jesus told His disciples to prioritize time away to rest alone. He then did it Himself. As you read Scripture, you see numerous times where Jesus

does this. He prioritizes it. Yes, Jesus is still present to those who need Him, but He also takes the time to be in solitude.

Disconnecting and resting can be hard to do with technology. When your next experience of Sabbath comes, try turning off your phone and disconnecting from email. You could even make a tradition out of it—hold a disconnecting ceremony! But be careful not to fall into legalism: Sabbath is made for our good, not the other way around (Mark 2:27). For example, in your rhythm of Sabbath rest, it may make sense for you to watch a movie or play video games with friends or family. However, it will take a measure of discipline to keep connection and refreshment as the central focus.

Prayer

God, thank you for pursuing me to know you more. You know every part of my life. Give me the courage to rest with you in the quiet. Search my heart and know my anxious ways. Please bring your truth and healing to these anxious ways as I take time to listen to you. Thank you for the abundant life you are inviting me to live as you Shepherd me by these still waters.

Application

Find a quiet space and set a timer for 5-10 minutes (longer if you are already comfortable with solitude). Invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart, is there anything he wants to show you. Have a journal and pen nearby to write down anything you hear from God. Tell someone in your group what you heard during this time of solitude. Telling someone will encourage the person and it deepens the truth in your own life.

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

_____, there _____ a _____ for
the _____ of _____, for _____ has
_____ God's _____ has _____ from
_____ as God did _____.
— _____ :9- _____

Day 5 - Entering Into Sabbath Practices

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

—Mark 2:23-28

For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

—1 Samuel 16:7b

To enter into a meaningful rhythm of Sabbath Rest, it's helpful to start with the end in mind. What do we hope for, and what specifically is God inviting us to experience? Plus, will we make space for investing the necessary time and energy? If new rhythms and practices don't find space on the daily calendar, we won't make it very far.

Of course, it is one thing to schedule this time, and it's another to consistently keep it. There is an aspect of discipline in growing to be like Jesus, and enjoying a meaningful rhythm of Sabbath Rest is no exception. The Apostle Paul speaks of his approach to spiritual discipline by comparing the Christian life to that of an athlete in training: *"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. [...] So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified"* (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). It takes self-control to be able to experience Sabbath rest—to say no to both good things and bad things in order to take up God's invitation to rest in Him.

Now let's look at some common questions:

What does a Sabbath look like from a practical point of view? The Bible isn't overly specific on this, but a few things can be said for certain:

- **Sabbath centers on your relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** Meaningful connection and communing with God is at the heart of this rhythm.

- **Sabbath rest is special.** Find ways to set the time apart and remind yourself that you have stepped out of the normal flow of life. Light a special candle, play some special music, maybe go to a special place. (See pgs. 138-139 for more helpful tips.)
- **Sabbath rest is restful.** If you come to the end of your Sabbath time feeling drained or discouraged, reflect on possible reasons this may be happening and make an adjustment.

Why can't I escape the feeling that rest is lazy? Both inside and outside the church, we are all conditioned to find our value in what we do. But this is part of God's perfect design: Rest not only shows us who we are, it also is a foundation that makes our works of service even more fruitful! When we engage with needs in the church or in society from a place of rest, powerful things can happen.

Does Sabbath need to be a whole day? Remembering that Jesus is our Sabbath, that He is Lord of the Sabbath, provides us great freedom. Some people carry their expression of Sabbath Rest in meaningful ways throughout the week. For many people, setting aside specific time to practice Sabbath during the week may be the best approach. It's something each of us needs to arrive at in prayer, asking God what step He invites us to take. If you are super-overloaded these days, maybe you need to start small. The main point, though, is that it be restful time to recharge and to experience God's goodness. If that means there is work God is calling us to in that time, we still do it, but we do it with a heart of resting in Jesus. We know we are finite; we need to rest, recharge, and spend time with God.

Here is one couple's story:

For my wife and I, Sabbath is a literal day of the week, which is usually Saturday. We will often sleep in, and then light a special candle that helps remind us this is no ordinary day. We love breakfast, so we make a big breakfast. You may say, isn't that a lot of work—on the day of rest? Remember, ultimately our rest is found in Jesus, so even cooking can be restful when we experience His presence in it. Now, if you hate cooking it may be a different story!)

We spend the rest of the morning praying and reading our Bibles. Around noon, we take our dog to the dog park, which for us, is enjoyable. Sometimes we go disc golfing with friends, or take a drive. We have even started to go on hikes, which initially I was skeptical of as a restful activity. Yet, it has quickly become one of our favorite Sabbath activities. We will play board games, make dinner, and maybe even take a nap. Sometimes we go to other people's houses, or they come over, but rest and community are at the heart of the day. We are keeping our eyes on the Lord. -Josh D.

Going to the dog park or playing frisbee golf may not sound restful to you. Maybe for you, it's gardening or working on a car. The Mark passage above highlights that the day of Sabbath is meant for us. It is to be a day of rest, and there is nothing restful about making sure you rest perfectly or "in the right way. " However your rhythm of Sabbath Rest expresses itself, you are affirming in the process a thankfulness and trust towards God, that He is in control of your minutes, hours, and days.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you that in you I find rest. Thank you for the gift of Sabbath, time to rest and reflect on all you have done for me. Help me to continue to enter in with thankfulness, seeing this time as a wonderful gift. I thank you for your grace and your love that you show me everyday.

Application

If you haven't yet practiced Sabbath, try spending a morning or an afternoon and then journal about how the time went for you. If you already have a regular Sabbath rhythm, try taking time at the conclusion to reflect on what God may have said to you and write it down somewhere.

RHYTHM 6 MEMORY VERSE

_____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____
_____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____
_____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____
_____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____.
_____ : _____

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus find true rest in God's love and His abundant provision for their lives—rest that changes how they live.

RHYTHM



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Unplug.** Noise is often the enemy of peace and rest. To the extent you are able, turn off devices and disconnect from media as a first step to carving out time for a Sabbath experience.
- **Light a Candle.** Somehow, the simple act of lighting a special candle you designate as your 'Sabbath Candle' can help you focus your heart and mind on the rest God invites you to experience.
- **Sabbath Together.** Find another person, or several people, who will commit to an experience of Sabbath together. Maybe it's a family member or friend, maybe your small group. Coordinate your Sabbath experience with one another (see pgs. 138-139 for ideas).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You are sharing in God's Story, recognizing where He is at work and the ways He invites you to partner with Him. God's Word and Prayer support this, helping you to recognize His voice and truth, and opening the way to a greater experience of Freedom in Christ.

Worship (Rhythm 5) is the natural outflow and expression of a growing awareness of God's person, presence, and power. As we embrace a life of worship, we recognize its we are not defined by what we do. We enter into the Sabbath Rest (Rhythm 6) that God has prepared for His people.

You'll know growth is happening when you find yourself more at peace in regular moments of stillness. Being becomes more central to your identity than Doing, and thankfulness flows more naturally in every circumstance.



R H Y T H M S E V E N

STEWARDED GOD'S GIFTS

R H Y T H M S N A P S H O T

Because I am called to partnership with God in seeing His creation flourish, I steward that partnership by cultivating a gospel-centered perspective on:

- My relationship with God and others
- Meaningful spiritual community
- My unique S-H-A-P-E
- My resources
- Engaging with social issues

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

“The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’”

—Matthew 25:23 (NLT)

Day 1 - Stewarding my Relationships

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*

—Psalm 24:1-2

*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and
the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the
earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted
as head above all.*

—1 Chronicles 29:11

SOVEREIGN (adjective)

While not actually appearing in the English Bible, this word points to the biblical truth that God holds supreme authority. He is the 'almighty' and works all things according to his perfect will (Ephesians 1:11). God is creator and ruler of the universe (Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary)

Stewardship is recognizing that all we have and all we are begins with God. He is **sovereign** and I am not. So all that we do, we do for His glory: whether that is eating, drinking, going to work, going to school, paying taxes... everything in life becomes an opportunity to affirm that we are citizens of God's Kingdom, first and foremost.

When we define the concept of stewardship as the careful and responsible management of all that God has entrusted to our care, it might be natural to start thinking about how we order priorities in life. In any given moment, we could probably make a case for everything to be the highest priority. And if everything is a priority, then nothing is!

J. Grant Howard, in his book *Balancing Life's Demands*, said, "Everywhere we turn there are choices to be made. Obligations that pressure us. Opportunities that entice. We are infiltrated by feelings of guilt because we cannot possibly respond to all the options." That sounds pretty accurate to my experience! Somehow, we need to rethink what it means to prioritize in a meaningful way.

And so, where do we find an entry point into this spiritual rhythm of Stewarding our Partnership with God? It all comes down to relationship. Consider the Great Commission from Matthew 22, which we first looked at in Week 5. The Pharisees were trying to trip Jesus up by asking Him which commandment was the greatest:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

—Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus answered them with a 'both/and' instead of an 'either/or' when He stated, "and a second is like it". The word in the Greek translated as like here is a word that means "of essential likeness". Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and loving people (including yourself) both carry in them the same essence: They are part of the same picture. Let's take a deeper look at this for a few minutes.

First, how do we steward well our love for God, put into our hearts by His Spirit? The answer is to enter into regular rhythms of living a Kingdom-centered life; just like the rhythms that make up this guide! To be clear, the seven rhythms of *Rhythms of a Transformed Life* are by no means the only valid, beneficial spiritual practices within the Christian faith. However, we believe that building these or similar rhythms into your life will help your relationship with God flourish.

Maybe this is a good moment to take a pause: Here we are in the last week of our *Rhythms* study.

How is your application of the prior six rhythms going? There's a good chance you can recognize a few areas that may need adjustment. Don't feel guilty about that! This is a journey. Take this opportunity to look for ways to invest in any prior rhythms God might put on your heart. You're welcome to pause right here and jot down any steps you feel led to take.

Loving the Lord your
God with all your heart,
soul, and mind and
loving people (including
yourself) both carry in
them the same essence.

Now, for the second part of the picture: How do we steward well our love for others? Again, the rhythms of practice here, as well as the experience of community you're hopefully building by meeting in a small group, are central once again. For example, it's often when we're not spending time in God's Word, or in prayer, or when we fall out of a rhythm of Sabbath Rest, that we open the door to being more critical and short-tempered towards others. Last week we looked at Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11

to enter his rest as we partner in his work. Resting in Jesus while partnering in the things that are on his heart: That sounds like a perfect basis for loving other people and loving myself as well. We'll look more at these elements over the next several days.

Prayer

Father, Son and Spirit, thank you that we are made in your relational image and that you invite us to know you and each other at a more intimate level. Help me to value and steward the relationships you have put into my life well, as worship. If there is anything getting in the way of healthy relationships with others, please give me your love and wisdom to repair those relationship for your glory and my good. Thank you that you care about the details of the relationships in my life and that you want to help me live at peace as far as it depends on me.

Application

What relationship(s) do you feel you are investing in well? Listen to God if there is anything else he would like for you to know about those relationships. What relationships are a struggle for you? Ask God what He might have to say to you about these relationships. If you desire, talk to your leader for some ideas to help you as well.

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

“The _____ said, ‘Well done, my _____ and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this _____ amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s _____ together!’”

—Matthew 25:23 (NLT)

Day 2 - Meaningful Spiritual Community

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

—Ephesians 4:15-16

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

—Genesis 4:8-9

Last week we discussed the importance of experiencing Sabbath rest as a community. Today we return to that idea from the perspective of Stewardship. What would it look like, when we come together as a community of people on spiritual pilgrimage, to believe deep down that God is present—and where God is present, anything can happen!

In too many churches (including Westminster Chapel) the experience of spiritual community often boils down to, "Did _____ meet my expectations today?" Fill in the blank as you like: the taste of the coffee, the music, the message, the temperature of the room. Is this all we hope for from life in Christ: To have our expectations met?

Jesus calls us to so much more. He calls us to build genuine, caring spiritual community together. That means each one of us playing a part. Back in Week 1 we talked about having a "two-baskets" philosophy of life (pg. 18). When you don't show up with your empty and full baskets, others suffer for it. When others don't show up, you suffer for it. In the Body of Christ we need one another.

Colossians 3 expands on ways we live in spiritual community. This passage goes to the heart of Stewardship:

Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentle-

ness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

—Colossians 3:10-17 (NLT)

Verse 13 above mentions "making allowance for each other's faults." It's worth noting that experiencing peace in spiritual community does not

In the Body of
Christ we need
one another.

mean we never enter into conflict with one another. In Week 4 we talked about authenticity, and sometimes being authentic means being "our brother's keeper" and working through hard things together. But we do it in humility and directly, recognizing our shared journey of growth and trusting the Holy Spirit as the One who brings transformation.

To finish off today's topic, Steve shares another personal story of finding and experiencing spiritual community:

The first time I attended Westminster Chapel was at summer camp in seventh grade. Twin brothers who were Christians had reached out at school and invited me. Our camp speaker was one of Westminster's Outreach Partners, Nelson Reed. He spoke powerfully from Romans 12 of how all of us are necessary within God's plans, and of the care and nurturing these relationships require. His message was particularly impactful to me, as my self-esteem was at its lowest, and my loneliness was great. Romans 12:4-5 became the first verses I ever memorized: "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." The two brothers who had invited me to summer camp lived this out: they had seen something in me and chose to respond in friendship. And this friendship had their relationship with Christ at its core. —Steve P.

Prayer

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, thank you for helping me gain a picture of perfect community. Thank you that you show me what working together in love looks like. Help me to see and celebrate the way you have created people in my community different than me. Help me stay curious and open to hearing from others before I quickly share how I think things should go. Please clarify in each situation how to love well in community. If someone complains to me, help me to hear well and direct them toward the bigger picture over and above personal preference. As your Church, we need your help in this.

Application

Reflect back on the last month. How often have you praised something in your church community, out loud to someone? How have you in your mind or out loud, told someone or some group how they could do things better? Next time you are about to speak authentically to create a better community, take pause and ask yourself if you are doing this in love.

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

“The _____ said, ‘Well done, my _____ and
_____ servant. You have been _____ in handling
this _____ amount, so now I will _____ you
_____ more _____. Let’s _____ together!’”

—Matthew 25: _____ (NLT)

Day 3 - Understanding my S-H-A-P-E

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

—Psalm 139:14

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...

—Romans 12:3-6a

Our lives are defined in many ways. We have desires that motivate us and experiences that shape us. We have individual personalities that determine how we interact with this world, as well as natural abilities that help us contribute. As believers, we also have the Holy Spirit within, giving us purpose to accomplish the will of God and power to do so through supernatural gifts.

Wouldn't it be great to align these different facets of our makeup to serve God with purpose? How wonderful to make a difference and experience the value of who God created us to be by cooperating with how we were made, and moving wholly in one direction! Today we're going to dive into one such framework for thinking about these different aspects of who we are, using the acronym S.H.A.P.E.

S: Spiritual Gifts

H: Heart

A: Abilities

P: Personality

E: Experiences

S = Spiritual Gifts

When you first invited Christ into your life and the Holy Spirit came to make His home with you, God's Spirit brought into your life certain abilities that we call spiritual gifts. In his book SHAPE, Erik Rees defines spiritual gifts as God-given special abilities, given to every believer by the Holy Spirit, to share His love and strengthen the church. Spiritual gifts are different from natural abilities, and different from personality (more on these later).

When we as believers share these giftings with one another, we are knitted together into a community that reflects God's character to the rest of the world. Spiritual gifts serve many purposes within the Body of Christ:

- To equip believers. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- To edify the church. (Ephesians 4:12, 16)
- To establish believers. (Romans 1:11)
- To encourage believers. (Romans 1:12)
- For effectiveness in the church. (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- To enlarge the church. (Ephesians 4:16)
- To exalt Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:11)

There are all sorts of tests you can take online to discover what your gift(s) may be.* As you start to discover your gifts, share your discoveries with others, humbly inviting their observations. Understanding our gifting allows us to steward our lives well and allow our gifts to further God's Kingdom.

H = Heart

God designed our hearts as an integral part of our spiritual journey. He is delighted when we walk with Him in the strength of the heart-felt passions He built into us. So an important part of stewarding your life is to ask yourself the question, What is it that I truly care about? Now, it might not be as easy to answer this question as you might think! If your answer includes the titles of any TV shows or gourmet pasta dishes, try digging a little deeper.

The truth is, throughout life the deep desires of our hearts can get buried. We've talked about the ways this happens in a number of other weeks. Part of spiritual growth is uncovering those hearts desires that God has built into you, allowing them to lead you to meaningful relationships and opportunities for growth and service.

A = Abilities

Each of us has been wired with certain talents and abilities. These are God-given abilities that were woven into us while we were still in our mother's womb. Whereas spiritual gifts present themselves upon our inviting Christ into our lives, our natural abilities are present at birth. If discovered and worked at, they have the potential to produce extraordinary results.

Abilities were created by God and should be used for His glory. Feedback from others can help us recognize these talents inside of us. Of course, it's never right to consider our abilities as something that makes

us 'better' than others, or causes us to look down on people for how they were created. Paul addresses this when he says, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Corinthians 4:7, NIV). God works through a diversity of abilities in this world, not just the flashy ones.

P = Personality

Our personality is built of the individual traits we are born with, the differences that make us unique. Researchers have found 17,953 words to describe the way people are psychologically different from each other, words like shy, trustworthy, kind, conscientious, and confident. Once again, there are a number of tests and inventories available to help you recognize category of personality (see further reading).

Each opportunity to serve in God’s Kingdom uses different traits and gifts. Paying attention to these can make a big difference in the sustainability of our service. Otherwise it’s easy to get roped into serving a need without taking into consideration our individual make-up: Fitting a square peg into a round hole is bound to be uncomfortable, unfulfilling, wearing. Knowing we are designed with a purpose in mind and recognizing that we are uniquely created helps us recognize places to invest. Matching our strengths to the task rather than our weaknesses energizes our service and helps us give our best. As we discussed last week, it’s in a rhythm of experiencing God’s Sabbath Rest that we often come to recognize those steps of service He’s inviting us to take.

S: Spiritual Gifts

H: Heart

A: Abilities

P: Personality

E: Experiences

E = Experiences

We are shaped by the totality of the experiences of our lives. Many of these circumstances, both good and bad, came to us far outside of our control. To us they may seem random, yet we serve a God who is able and ready to redeem all of these experiences, good or bad, for the sake of those He loves and according to His will. Here is one of our authors' story of how God brought good from a negative experience:

I survived my parents’ divorce during my junior high years, which led to a brief period of homelessness. I was an extremely late bloomer and lacked friends. Yet, through it all, my family came to know Christ. Those darkest days became a wealth of empathy in me for struggling teens. In adulthood, I left my career to serve youth by entering into

full-time ministry, where I have had the privilege of seeing others in pain come to a saving faith. —Steve P.

It is not hard to draw direction from good experiences and fond memories. But difficult hardships can often leave us bitter, scarred, and distracted from the potential good that can come from them. Forgiveness, prayer, and biblical counsel can help us heal. As we take our eyes off our situation and seek God's perspective, our experiences can be used to benefit others. Don't let your experiences, no matter how great or how humbling, keep you from reaching out to others. God's power is given to each of us through grace.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the way you created me uniquely and have shaped my life. Help me to better understand how all these areas work together for you Kingdom Glory. Help me to celebrate the way you have uniquely shaped others and how we together then make up your body.

Application

Go through each of the areas of SHAPE and write down what you know about yourself in each area. Ask your leader for more resources for any area of SHAPE.

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

"The _____, ' _____, my _____
and _____ servant. You _____
in handling this _____ amount, so _____ I will
_____ you _____ more _____. Let's
_____ together!'"

—Matthew 25:____ (NLT)

Day 4 - Stewarding Resources

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [...] Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

—Genesis 2:15,19

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him."

—Psalm 24:1 (NLT)

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

—Luke 6:38 (NIV)

Stewardship is found early in Scripture—all the way back in the garden of Eden, before sin ever entered the picture. Adam was tending the garden as a reflection of his relationship to God and his environment. He was a steward of all that God had given him to tend. In fact, being deceived, the first failure of stewardship is demonstrated by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3). Coveting and control begin to devolve into believing a lie most of us are blind to today—the belief that we are the masters of our ship.

As was mentioned in Day 1, a biblical understanding of stewardship begins with the belief that everything is God's, and we are called to act on His behalf. We, who are created in God's image, also get to share in His activities and join His work. We were designed to walk the garden with our Creator in cooperation and shared celebration. That's amazing!

It's also important to acknowledge that requests to give financially are often abused in this world, including in churches. Where money enters the picture, breaches of trust are always a possibility, unfortunately. If you have experienced one of these situations, it's natural to be sceptical when the topic of giving comes up. My only encouragement is this: Don't allow human failures to close you off to ways God may be inviting you to grow in partnership with Him.

You might also be wondering, How much should I give? In the Old Testament system of **tithes**, God's law required Jewish people to give set percentages in support of the priests, annual festival costs, and aid to

TITHE (noun)

The word 'tithe' comes from an Old English word meaning *tenth*. Giving a tenth of income was a common practice in the ancient world, and was formally included in the Levitical code during the Israelites' time in the wilderness (Numbers 18:21).

poor families. All told these amounted to 20-30% of their income, and additional freewill offerings could be made on top of that. In the New Testament, we do not see the same strict system of percentages at set times, though Jesus did affirm the value of such giving (Matthew 23:23). As with other aspects of the New Covenant Jesus introduced, the question of how much to give becomes much more a matter of the heart.

The Lord desires and values hearts that overflow with gratitude and thanksgiving to Him who saved us and gives us all things, knowing our needs before we even ask (Matthew 6:8). Such a heart gives generously, willingly, and cheerfully in response to the love and grace that abound in Christ (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). Is this amount the same as the set percentages in the Old Testament? For some people, the answer may be Yes. But the better standard is the one already quoted to start today's topic:

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

—Luke 6:38 (NIV)

These concepts are easier said than done! Finances are a hard subject to come to grips with, much less discuss openly. Maybe it is due to the allure of control and perceived freedoms that come with financial abundance. Or perhaps it's because worldly wisdom insists we are entitled to the full fruits of our labor, the lifestyle we were born into, or the community standard of where we live.

A godly view of stewarding resources, on the other hand, is very countercultural. If we believe that all we see and all we have begins and ends with God (Psalm 24:1), and we know we're His children (1 John 3:2), then we don't need to hold our possessions with tight fists. What would it look like for you and me to have more of an open-hand attitude, allowing God to add and take away as He sees fit, trusting that He is good?

Now, for some people, it might take a while to get to the place of giving towards Kingdom work as generously as you'd like. Maybe you have debt or other financial obligations. There are a lot of good resources available to help you take small steps towards financial freedom (Dave Ramsey's material is one approach, for example). But waiting for a future 'someday' to start giving towards God's Kingdom is not the best strategy, because someday never comes! Instead, consider starting today. It's okay to start small, but make it an amount that you'll actually feel in some sense: Maybe you'll have to cut back on some discretionary spending or reexamine your cable TV package. Let King David serve as your example when he said, *"I'm not going to offer GOD, my God, sacrifices that are no sacrifice"* (2 Samuel 24:25, MSG).

On the other end of the spectrum, maybe you've been giving generously to God's work for a long time. The Lord bless you in this! But would you also pray and ask if there is some way He's inviting you to refresh and revitalize your giving experience? Then keep your eyes open for the Kingdom opportunities he may bring. Our steward of resources is an important part of the life-changing invitation to partner in God's work that He holds out to each of us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many ways you have provided for me in the past. Please help me to see resources from your perspective. When I worry about resources, help me to turn toward you. I need your healing concerning finances in the area of _____. I am grateful for the way you multiply resources to bring Your Kingdom to fruition. Help me to continually be in line with the way you want me to partner with you.

Application

Take five minutes and thank God for all He has given to you today and then spend a few moments listening if he has something to say about your resources. If you find it hard to hear, talk to a friend or pastor about it, someone who can help you along the journey toward seeing God as good and the one who resources you to be his partner to a world that needs Him.

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

"The _____, ' _____, my _____
and _____. You _____
in _____ this _____, so _____ I _____
_____ you _____ more _____. _____
_____!"
— _____ 25: _____ (NLT)

Day 5 - Engaging with Social Issues

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

—James 2:15-17

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

—John 4:7-15

Throughout its history, the church has been marked by faithful devotion to Jesus and by love and care for those in need. It's no coincidence that these two things go together! Even now, as we go deeper into this Rhythm of Stewardship, devotion to Jesus and His message helps us see what it means to love and care for our neighbors.

This world is certainly a confusing, polarizing place. It's always been that way, of course, but with the access to information and opinion that technology brings, there is more potential than ever for people to be divided in their social views. Now, having different views and opinions is totally okay! In fact, if you ever find yourself among people where everyone is supposed to think, feel, and believe the exact same thing, your first question should be, 'Can you direct me towards the nearest exit?'

The purpose of today's discussion is not to tell anyone what they ought to think about a particular social issue. Rather, let this topic and your conversation bring you back to the foundation of the values we all share as followers of Jesus, and from this let's pray and ask Him to show His love through us.

Jesus is the ultimate model of what it looks like to steward our engagement in challenging spaces. We see this throughout the New Testament, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than John 4, which tells of His conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well.

Some of this passage is quoted at the start of today's reading; it's well worth reading the whole interaction in your own Bible if you haven't done so recently. For now let's draw a few observations from the passage and then apply them to how we engage with today's social issues.

- **Jesus always looked to see where God was working.** The easy path to Jesus' destination went around Samaria, but He had eyes to see places God was inviting Him to enter and engage.
- **Jesus crossed cultural and social barriers.** By custom, Jews didn't normally associate with Samaritans, and for a rabbi like Jesus to hold friendly conversation with a strange woman was almost unheard of! He had no regard for artificial barriers that divide communities from one another. Jesus was *for* people, no matter who or where.
- **Jesus took time to see life through another's eyes.** He didn't start with labels or stereotypes; Jesus met the woman where she was and stayed long enough to truly listen. He valued her story.
- **Jesus brought transformation.** The Samaritan woman's life was transformed, along with the entire town of Sychar, because Jesus partnered with God in a work for which the time was ripe.

Now let's apply these observations to ways we can steward our own engagement with current social issues:

- **Will we look to see where God is working now?** God's Kingdom is always on the move! The open doors of today and tomorrow may not be the same as those of ten years ago, or even ten days ago. Walking with Jesus means being nimble in recognizing new opportunities God brings our way.
- **Will we engage across barriers?** Is there any person or group of people you've decided in your heart are beyond God's love? If so, you have yet to fully embrace the mind of Christ in this area. It was not for no reason that Jesus was labeled a 'friend of sinners' (Matthew 11:19); He was a bridge-builder towards all kinds of people.
- **Will we invite a true Jesus transformation?** In Week 1 we saw that God is always at work through His Spirit, and being *for* people means being *for* the ways God is already inviting them to enter into ultimate peace and healing. God is calling us to partner with Him in the work only He can do! That is the pathway to true and lasting transformation—for ourselves, our friends, our community.

Prayer

Lord, help me to see people through your eyes. Forgive me for getting caught up in times with my own life and not looking where you might want to use my time, talents or treasures to bring about flourishing in areas where it is needed. Help me to rely on you as I enter into these places, bringing your light into an often dark world that can feel overwhelming at times. May your Kingdom come and your will be done! Thank you that you allow me to partner with you in this process.

Application

Take the following areas to prayer and ask Jesus, where in your life, God is already at work and inviting you to join Him. Is there a social barrier that might be holding you back? Ask God for a way through this barrier and to help you grow in this area. Is there someone today that God will put in front of you that He wants you to look through their eyes to see something you haven't seen before? Pray for the eyes to be open and ready to go where ever he is asking to see this creative work and transformation.

RHYTHM 7 MEMORY VERSE

“ _____ , ‘ _____ , _____
_____. _____
_____,

_____. _____ ! ”
_____ : _____ (NLT)

THE INVITATION

Growing followers of Jesus take up the call to contribute to the flourishing of our world for the sake of **God's Kingdom**.



THREE WAYS TO START

- **Listen.** Before you jump into doing, listen to the prompting of God's Spirit in your heart. Listen to the people in your life. Listen to those who are different from you. Start to see where God is inviting you to a step of stewardship.
- **Learn Your S-H-A-P-E.** Exploring the specifics of your Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences (pgs. 124-127) will open up your perspective and lead you to engage in new ways.
- **Team Up.** Pursuing a meaningful rhythm of stewardship is often easier (and more fun) when we do it alongside others. Share a social issue or a place of service with your small group. Invite them to partner with you.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You are sharing in **God's Story**, recognizing where He is at work and the ways He invites you to partner with Him. **God's Word** and **Prayer** support this, helping you to recognize His voice and truth, and opening the way to a greater experience of **Freedom in Christ**.

Worship is the natural outflow of a growing awareness of God's person, presence, and power. It helps us enter into His **Sabbath Rest** (Rhythm 6), which is grounded in who we are in Christ.

Stewardship (Rhythm 7) brings things full circle: We take up our place within God's Story as brothers and sisters to Christ Himself, working to see His Kingdom come and His will be done on earth.

You'll know growth is happening when the outflow of your heart leads you to places and relationships where you have an opportunity to listen to others and love them as Jesus would love them.

Sharing Your Story

Holly Pankratz: My five-minute Jesus Transformation Story

I grew up hearing about Jesus from a young age. My dad's life was radically changed at 25 when he met someone who showed him the love of God and connected him with a local body of believers. He faithfully brought us to church each week, which provided a good foundation for me to understand the sacrifice of Jesus for my sins. I was grateful as a young girl to sense the love and care of Jesus through the ups and downs of growing up.

It wasn't until I was in college that I understood that Jesus wanted me to be a follower—a disciple of His. Another student approached me and asked if I wanted to meet weekly with her and study the Bible and learn how to share the good news of Jesus with others. This was an important time to have someone speaking truth into my life, as so many around me were searching for answers and ways to find fulfillment—some good, some bad. Once again God placed a safe community of people around me to understand that it was in Him that I found fulfillment.

Fast forward to being married with three kids and sensing a nudge to go back to school. I didn't research much about graduate programs but chose a school close to me. I think if I would have known what I was about to experience, I would have run fast the other way, but God knew where I needed to be. I spent four years in a unique community that encouraged me to look at how I tended to judge others and opened my eyes to see how Jesus went to those on the margins, the ones who were hurting and brought good news. I was also invited to address my own brokenness at a far deeper level and therefore more deeply understood the healing transformational power of Jesus love.

Now each week, I get the front row seat to people bringing their hurts and brokenness into the light so that Jesus can heal and restore. It is a continual reminder for me to listen to the Spirit and trust God's leading and timing. It requires me to continue to ask Jesus to search my own heart and see if there is any anxious way in me and heal me so that He can pour through me to others.

And finally, it is in going through these rhythms in community that I am also learning more deeply the gift of seeing how people look at things differently. I see the power of God's word, prayer, addressing strongholds, taking the gift of sabbath and examining how I am stewarding the gifts He has given me. It's a continuing journey of transformation.

Joining God's Story in the Community

How well do you see your neighbors? Try this exercise: Say out loud the names of the people living in the 8 houses closest to you. Maybe you can name a lot. Maybe it's only a few.

Now, add some detail: For the names you know, speak some facts about their life and history. For example, "Chris teaches math at Sammamish High School." How did that go?

Finally, name some of your neighbors' hopes and dreams for the future. What excites them? What worries them?

By this point, you've probably recognized some gaps in what you know about the people God has placed close to you in your neighborhood!

One of Jesus' central commands was that we "Love our neighbors as ourselves." Loving where we live means seeing our neighborhoods as Jesus sees them, recognizing and sharing in the stories God is telling through their lives.,


The following chart below is a great way to take steps of connection with the 8 neighbors who live closest to you. You can fill in this chart or create your own that you post somewhere in your home.

Fill it step by step with the following information:

a= Your neighbors' names

b= Your neighbors' life + history

c= Your neighbors' plans, hopes and dreams*

a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.
a. b. c.	 Your Home	a. b. c.
a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.

Adapted from Adapted from *The Art of Neighboring* by J. Pathak & D. Runyon

Ways to Practice Sabbath

Josh Deshazer

Sabbath Day with Dinners

A sabbath day can be practiced as a group, a family, or individually. For group sabbath day experiences, it's great if you are able to spend the entire day together. However, for some this may not be practical, so the experience can also be divided into an initial individual portion followed by a group meal at the end of the day.

Preparation

1. Decide if you want to do an Evening to Evening Sabbath (For example, Friday evening-Saturday evening) or a whole day Sabbath (For example, all day Saturday).
2. Find a day that works for your group to practice Sabbath.
3. For Evening to Evening, plan to have a Sabbath Dinner to kick off Sabbath all together. If doing an All-Day Sabbath, plan a dinner for the evening.
4. For the meals, distribute responsibility between people so it may be more restful. For example, the person hosting might not cook, or everyone prepares the meal and cleans up together.
5. Consider providing candles to everyone to light during their practice of Sabbath as a helpful way to remind and set apart the time.

Sabbath Guide

The heart of Sabbath is finding our rest in God, and I find the best way to do that is to frontload the beginning of the Sabbath with intentional time with God and let the rest of the day flow out of it.

Tips:

- Come up with three things you enjoy doing and find restful. And three things you want to avoid on Sabbath.
- Try to avoid working, sometimes putting on Auto-Replies for emails can be helpful. As well try to avoid things that may add stress, like shopping or chores.
- Try to spend extended time in Scripture, Prayer, and Worship. If you spend five minutes reading your Bible, try to extend that time, or if you don't consistently open your Bible, spend a couple of minutes doing that. This is a great space to practice some of the Experiences you have learned in Rhythms so far.

- I find it's okay and can even be beneficial to create a rough schedule of when you are going to do some of these things. For example, after you make breakfast, you plan to spend time with God, and then after lunch, plan to spend time doing some of the things you enjoy.
- If you can Sleep in! Part of practicing Sabbath is taking the day slowly and avoiding a hurried pace.
- I would suggest for the first couple of times you practice Sabbath, you avoid using technology for the day to create some space in your life that may feel different than other days. If you find your missing some technology that is restful for you, you can add that back in in the later weeks.
- Lastly, have fun with it! Sabbath is a day of rest and is hopefully a day you enjoy! In that, feel free to give yourself grace to learn this practice as it can often be more difficult than we expect.

Sabbath Retreat - Day Schedule

- Sleep in!
- Make Breakfast Together
- Spend time with God through Scripture, Prayer, and Worship.
- Make Lunch together
- Enjoy free time to enjoy community, or things that you enjoy, art, disc golf, exercise, board games, reading, hiking, etc.
- Come together for a Sabbath Dinner
- Have a fun closing game or activity

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