

TRUST THE PROCESS

OUR DAILY SANCTIFICATION

23 day

Devotional



NORTH RIDGE
Community Church

As we begin the year, it's a great time to evaluate where we stand in our relationship with God. Has it become stale? Are we growing in intimacy with God? Could we say that our lives increasingly look more and more like Jesus? If not, we are missing out on something amazing! Think about it. You were designed to know, love and bring glory to the Creator of the Universe! Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we have the opportunity to know God, to live life with Him, to have His guidance, to experience His peace and to have power over the things that have held you captive. But if we aren't growing in that relationship, we are like a person who lives their lives in poverty while having access to a huge bank account. Why would anyone not want to have an intimate relationship with a loving God that sacrificed so much to know us? Why would anyone want to miss living in the purpose for which they were created?

I think most Christians really do want to know God better. But relationships are work! Wouldn't you say that the most rewarding relationships you have ever experienced have been the ones that you have invested in the most? Wouldn't you say that there have been people that you always wanted to be closer to, but you just never put the time in to get to know them? If you are married or have been, you know that to keep the relationship strong there are things that you need to do on a regular basis to stay close. It's not very romantic to think about, but we must constantly remind ourselves to think beyond ourselves and invest in the relationship. But that is a love that goes way beyond gushy feelings. That is a love that says, "Even if I don't feel like it, I will invest in you today, because you are that important to me." Guess what? You probably will end up having way more "feelings" of love than most people who don't take that approach.

The same is true for what we call "Spiritual Disciplines." They are just relationship habits for your relationship with God. They are the process through which you stay in communication with Him. They are the process through which you learn more and more about Him and what He wants for your life. They are the process through which He transforms you (Sanctifies). The word "Disciplines" indicates that some days you won't feel like practicing these, but because Jesus is so important to you – you do anyhow. Instead of chasing a feeling, you are pursuing God, and in the process you find that you will experience more passion, more peace, more love than you could have ever experienced otherwise.

Here's one important disclaimer: Spiritual disciplines are a means to an end, not the end. They help you grow closer to the Lord and more like Him. The goal is not to just do them and feel more spiritual because you did them.

So, join us on this journey! Let's do this together. We have to do it together. Because we are in the "body of Christ," there are both personal and interpersonal disciplines that are essential to our growth. Let's become a family that is not just leading others into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Let's be a family that is always pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus. We can't share what we aren't experiencing.

Jim Richmond
Lead Pastor of the North Ridge Network

DAY 1

Purpose of Spiritual Disciplines

In the past, how have you felt about Spiritual Disciplines such as Bible reading and study, prayer, worship, evangelism, and fasting? Be honest.

What is the main purpose for the Spiritual Disciplines?

1 Timothy 4:7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. (NIV)

Who do you know that you would consider spiritually mature? Are there spiritual disciplines that you have observed them practicing regularly?

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16 below. What does this say about the importance of holiness in believers' lives?

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (NIV)

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 2

The People of Spiritual Disciplines

According to the two passages below, is discipline something that you can do alone? If not who else do we need?

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. (NIV)

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NIV)

How do you feel you are doing in involving these two other parties in your spiritual growth?
What needs to change?

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 3

The Path of Spiritual Growth

Read through the passage below and answer the questions:

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. (NIV)

Have you ever felt that you are not able to become a spiritually mature person? You've always thought that was for someone else. What does the passage say about that?

What does it mean to make every effort to add to your faith?

What is important about the things he says we should add to our faith?

What is the result if we do add them and what does he say will be the result if we don't?

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 4

Hearing God's Word

How comfortable are you with learning from God's Word on your own? How well do you feel like you know the Word of God and what it says about everyday issues?

Luke 11:28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (NIV)

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (NIV)

Colossians 3:16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (NIV)

Jesus said people would be blessed if they do what two things?

Hebrews 13 talks about your spiritual leaders teaching you. Why is it so important to not only know how to study the Word for yourself, but to also have leaders who are teaching you? Why is it important to have a relationship with the people who teach you? (Interesting passage for today's world where you can literally listen to an infinite number of teachers online)

What does Colossians say our relationships with one another should look like when it comes to the Word of God?

What are you doing to make sure you are regularly hearing God's Word from teachers you know?

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 5

Reading God's Word

Read the passages below and answer the questions:

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

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (NIV)

Matthew 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (NIV)

Mark 12:9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. (NIV)

According to these passages what priority did Jesus put on people knowing the Bible for themselves?

According to what God says through Paul in 2 Timothy 3, what does the Bible do in our lives?

How did Jesus use the Bible in key moments in His own life?

Why is it important that you not just hear others teach the Bible, but you also are feeding yourself from it?

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 6

Studying God's Word

Joshua 1:7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (NIV)

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, 2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

How does God say Joshua will be successful to accomplish all that God is asking him to do (that's the success that is referred to)?

How can we be sure we are correctly interpreting the Bible?

How does the Psalmist say we can avoid following the way of sinners?

What's the difference between just reading and meditating?

"The basic difference between Bible reading and Bible study is simply a pen and paper (or some other means of preserving your thoughts)." Donald Whitney

Keep a journal and when you read a passage (even if it's on the Bible app), write down what God has shown you and what you are going to do about it.

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 7

Applying God's Word

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 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. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. (NIV)

According to both of these passages, what are a couple of dangers of just learning the Bible but not actually applying it?

Why is it so important to intentionally apply what we are learning from the Bible?

In order to apply the Bible, you first have to understand what the passage meant in the context of its time and to its original audience. Then you can take the principle (not necessarily the exact situation) and apply it to similar situations in your own life. For instance, we don't face the question of whether or not Christians should eat meat offered to idols in pagan temples, but we do face situations where Christians who feel they are at peace with more freedom in grey areas could cause a weaker Christian to stumble.

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 8

Scheduled Prayer

Luke 5:15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (NIV)

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (NIV)

What do you find interesting about the transition between Luke 5:15 and Luke 5:16?

If Jesus needed to set aside time to be alone with the Father and pray, what does that say about your need for it?

What point is Jesus making in the Matthew 6 passage? Is He saying we should never pray in public?

What else do you learn about prayer from these passages?

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 9

Constant prayer

1 Thess. 5:16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

John 15:4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (NIV)

How is it possible to follow 1 Thess. 5:17? What do you find significant about the fact that “pray continually” is grouped with “rejoice always” and “give thanks in all circumstances”?

What does it mean to remain in Jesus? How can we do that? Notice the goal of remaining in Him.

If you don't regularly have a habit of scheduled prayer, you will probably struggle to pray all throughout the day. These two habits go hand in hand.

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 10

How to pray

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ 14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (NIV)

In this passage, Jesus is literally teaching His disciples how to pray. Not that we are supposed to pray this prayer word for word on a regular basis, but that we should look at the parts of the prayer to see what types of things we should talk to God about.

With that in mind, what are the different types of things Jesus includes in His prayer?

What else do you learn about prayer from what Jesus says here?

Some have observed that Jesus models the ACTS model of prayer here. A = Adoration: This is praising God for who He is. C = Confession: Confessing the ways you have fallen short of God's holy standard, and taking an assessment of how you are dealing with those who have sinned against you. T = Thanksgiving: Thanking God for all the ways He has worked in your life and for the blessings He has given you. S = Supplication: No one really uses this word anymore, but it works out well for the acronym! It just means letting God know what is on your heart. This would be where we would put "prayer requests." Why might it be important to put that one after all these others?

Take some time to pray through these four categories today.

DAY 11

Normalizing Fasting

Fasting is essentially giving up food (or something else) for a period of time in order to focus your thoughts on God. While fasting, many people read the Bible, pray, or worship.

What has been your impression of fasting? Have you ever done it? If so, for what purpose? If not, why not?

Matthew 6: 16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (NIV)

What do you learn from this passage about wrong motivations to fast? Does Jesus seem to assume that fasting will be a regular part of a person's relationship with God?

Read Matthew 4:1-11 and consider the surrounding context.

How important was fasting to Jesus? What was about to change for Jesus at this point in his life (What's different about the chapters that follow this versus the events of the previous chapters)?

Matthew 9:14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” 15 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (NIV)

In what time period did Jesus say His followers would need to fast?

Take some time today that you would typically be eating or doing some other activity (that may have too much of your focus) and pray, read the Bible, be still and listen to God.

DAY 12

Reasons to fast

Take a look at these passages and see if you can determine some reasons that people fasted in the Bible.

Joel 2:12 "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (NIV)

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (NIV)

Esther 4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (NIV) You may need to read the whole chapter to see what is going on here.

Ezra 8:21 There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. (NIV)

1 Samuel 7: 6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord." Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah. (NIV)

Matthew 17: 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (NASB 1995)

Are there reasons in your life that you feel should cause you to fast in order to turn more of your focus on God?

Take some time today that you would typically be eating or doing some other activity (that may have too much of your focus) and pray, read the Bible, be still and listen to God.

DAY 13

Worship

"Worship is focusing on and responding to God. To worship God means to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as He is worthy. He is worthy of all the worth and honor we can give Him and then infinitely more. Notice, for instance, how those around the throne of God in Revelation 4:11 and 5:12 address God as "worthy" of so many things. The more we focus on God, the more we understand and appreciate His infinite worth. As we understand and appreciate this, we can't help but respond to Him." Donald Whitney, Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life Study Guide

If worship is focusing on God and His worthiness, why is the Bible so important to that?

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NIV)

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (NIV)

Acts 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (NIV)

Luke 4:16 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. (NIV)

What do you learn about worship from these passages?

We've already seen that Jesus worshipped privately regularly. These passages show public worship. We cannot grow in our relationship with God without public worship together with other believers.

Write out a prayer based on what God has shown you today:

DAY 14

Worship

If worship is focusing on and responding to God, what does that look like? When you think of worshipping God, what actions do you think about?

Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (NIV)

Based on these passages and the ones you have already seen in this study guide, what are some worshipful responses to God's worthiness?

If a person does these actions, does it automatically mean that he/she is worshipping? Why or why not?

Matthew 15:8 “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.” (NIV)

How can we avoid insincere worship?

Take a moment to meditate on how great, good and loving God is (maybe read Psalm 23) and respond by singing, praising Him in prayer, writing out your praise, kneeling before Him, thanking Him or even thinking through how all areas of your life can bring worship to Him.

DAY 15

Submission to others

"Every discipline has its corresponding freedom...The purpose of the disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the discipline. The moment we make the discipline our central focus, we turn it into law and lose the corresponding freedom." Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

There is no discipline where this feels less true than the discipline of submission. When we think of submission, we think of restricting our own freedom. However, the Kingdom of God often seems to function in exactly the opposite way we would expect. To submit as a Christian Discipline is to place the needs of others above your own. Submission is about getting rid of the spirit corrupting desire to always get your way.

*Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (NIV) * This passage is followed by showing how Christ modeled this, feel free to read more*

Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (NIV)

Matthew 10:39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (NIV)

Mark 9:35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." (NIV)

How does practicing the other disciplines show submission to God?

How do we practice this in our home?

How can considering the needs of others first become more of an ongoing habit and mindset?

Take some time to ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you ways that you may need to break a "me first" attitude.

DAY 16

Submission to authorities

This is an area where many of us struggle as well. We are fine with submitting to authorities God has placed in our lives, right up to the point that it actually feels like submitting. We talk about having people who will hold us accountable, whether that is a small group (kind of a collective authority that we have attached ourselves to), a ministry leader, or Pastors. But when one of those parties steps in and warns us that we might be making some decisions that will hurt our testimony and probably hurt the people around us, we tell them to stay out of our business and often begin to talk about “church hurt.” Let’s see what the Bible says about it...

Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (NIV)

1 Peter 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” (NIV)

1 Thess. 5:12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. (NIV)

Ephesians 4:11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)

According to these passages, what roles do spiritual leaders play and what response does God want from you?

Why do you think this is so important to God?

How should this change our attitudes toward spiritual accountability?

Spend some time in prayers asking the Holy Spirit to show you if you are resistant to accountability?

DAY 17

The heart of serving

I think we can all agree that we can't become more like Jesus while not prioritizing the things that were most important to Him. We've seen that Jesus prioritized time with the Father. He prayed. He fasted. He submitted to the Father's will. He knew the Word inside and out by age 12. But to Jesus, serving was a major part of His focus.

1 Samuel 12:24 But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. (NIV)

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. (NIV)

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

Mark 10:43 Not so with you [you shouldn't be trying to put yourself first]. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (NIV)

What should our motivation be for serving?

When we are serving others, who are we really serving?

Why do you think serving is important to our spiritual growth? What non-Christlike characteristics does it deal with?

Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to investigate your motives for serving, or your motives for not serving.

DAY 18

Using our gifts to serve

Imagine a person who can play any instrument by ear beautifully. Now imagine they never play any music. We would all say that is tragic. We would all say that if this person is designed with such an amazing talent, he or she should be using it. The same is true for all believers. God has gifted every believer with what we call “spiritual gifts.” That’s the supernatural ability to serve in a particular way. It only makes sense that you will not develop spiritually into what God is calling you to be without utilizing the gifts that God has given you.

1 Corinthians 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines... 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (NIV)

1 Peter 4:10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

List everything you can learn about spiritual gifts from these passages?

What questions do you have?

Do you know what spiritual gifts you have? How are you using those gifts on a regular basis?

If you don't know, you can use this tool to help: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/bhpub/edoc/DOC-Spiritual-Gifts-Survey.pdf>

DAY 19

Stewardship

According to Jesus this is one of the most important areas of spiritual growth. Our practices in this area can lead us to a deeper worship of God or to more worship of possessions, prestige or pleasure.

Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
(NIV)

For our habits to lead to more godliness, it all starts with having the right perspective on money. Read the passage below and write out what you learn about the perspective God expects us to have when it comes to “our” money:

Matthew 25:14 Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more." 21 His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" 22 The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more." 23 His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" 24 Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you." 26 His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (NIV)

Write out your notes and spend some time asking God to reveal where your heart is on this issue. Also, if you took God’s perspective on money, how would that change the way you use money?

DAY 20

Generosity

One of the greatest reasons God wants us to manage the resources He has given us well and take an eternal perspective when it comes to money is because He wants us to live a life of generosity.

Philippians 4:14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

The Philippians had help fund Paul's ministry. What does he say in verse 18 about how God's sees their offering?

Were you already familiar with verse 19? How does seeing the context change what you thought it meant?

2 Corinthians 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (NIV)

What does "decided" mean? Would you say that you have been purposeful to decide on your generosity?

Have there been times that generosity brought you joy? Why do you think God loves a cheerful giver?

What is God's purpose in helping you abound?

Take some time to pray through your plan for generosity.

DAY 21

Silence and Solitude

Silence and Solitude are complementary disciplines. Taking time to be alone and quiet can help us hear from God more clearly.

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (NIV)

Matthew 14:23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone. (NIV)

Luke 4:42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. (NIV)

Psalm 62:1 Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. 2 Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken... 5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. 6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. (NIV)

Psalm 46:10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (NIV)

Why is it important to be quiet and alone in order to grow in your relationship with God? From these passages, what types of things happen during silence and solitude?

Practically speaking, what would silence mean for you? Does it just mean that you should be silent? What about other noise in our lives?

How might you be regularly cluttering your thoughts and leaving no room for God to speak?

Take some time today to shut down and get alone with God to hear from Him.

DAY 22

Sharing your story

What is the #1 thing Jesus asked of His disciples? If you said, “Fish for men,” you would be right. That was His main purpose for asking His disciples to become followers. *Mark 1:16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 18 At once they left their nets and followed him. (NIV)*

80% of self-professed Christians do not regularly share their faith. But sharing what Christ means to you with others is a key part of your spiritual growth. We always think of it as just helping others start a relationship with Christ, but we don’t realize it’s a key to our own growth.

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (NIV)

This is one of the last things that Jesus tells His disciples before He goes back to heaven. It obviously contains the charge for all of us that are believers to share the hope we’ve found in Jesus with others. But notice what it says in verse 20. There is a promise there. Is this promise dependent upon anything in the immediate context?

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (NIV)

Luke 10:1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road... 17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” (NIV)

Jesus did a similar thing with His 12 disciples and now He’s doing it with the 72. These are brand new disciples. They have not heard Him teach hours and hours of truth. They weren’t in Rabbinical schools. They weren’t Pharisees. They didn’t know the Old Testament Scriptures inside and out. But they had met Jesus. He had changed their lives, and they knew there was great power in His name! Why would Jesus send out people who were this new to following Him? What if they get asked questions they don’t know the answer to? What if they face something they aren’t qualified to handle (I don’t know, like a demon, for instance)? How do you think this grew their faith?

Write out your story. How did you meet Jesus and how has He made a difference in your life?

DAY 23

Investing in others

Let's take one more look at "The Great Commission." *Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (NIV)

What is Jesus commanding of us here?

Many of us would look at this passage and say that this is a passage about evangelism. But it's important to understand that it is bigger than that. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples." In the American church over the last several decades, we have separated evangelism and discipleship. And frankly, we have suffered for it. It has caused us to push people for "decisions" instead of walking with them until they become "disciples." This is why so many people that make a decision or get baptized can't be found a month later. Jesus wants us to see leading a person to Christ and leading a person on to spiritual growth until they are leading a person to Christ as one process. That means that we are "discipling" anyone who is interested in taking a next step, even if they aren't a believer yet! We are walking with and pouring into anyone God puts in our path that is open to knowing more about our Savior. We are praying every day about the people around us and what the next step is for them spiritually. And we are watching to see when those people are responding to the work of the Holy Spirit and stepping in to join where He is working.

What scares you about leading someone else spiritually, at any stage (Lost, just starting to grow, or been saved for years but still isn't leading other people)?

Why do you think investing in other people spiritually would grow you?

Can you identify situations around you where you might have opportunities to invest in others spiritually?

Pray and ask God to show you what opportunities are around you.