

FOUNDATIONS

AN INTRO TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



FOUNDATIONS: INTRO TO SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

MATTHEW 7:24-28

Our hope: that you will believe in the Gospel and live in obedience to it as a disciple of Jesus.

From the Video:

Why a Strong Foundation is Vital:

1. **It supports your House just like it supports your Faith.**

- A strong foundation will protect you from the attacks of the enemy.

2. **It resists Movement, and it keeps you from being Shaken.**

- A strong foundation in the Gospel of Christ can keep you from being overwhelmed by the Worries and trials of this life.

"TRULY HE IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION; HE IS MY FORTRESS, I WILL NEVER BE SHAKEN." PSALM 62:2 (NIV)

3. It insulates your home like it Protects your Faith.

- The Gospel can protect you from the temptation of doubt and a loss of faith. **The Gospel is the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.**

"BRING ALL WHO CLAIM ME AS THEIR GOD, FOR I HAVE MADE THEM FOR MY GLORY. IT WAS I WHO CREATED THEM." ISAIAH 43:7 (NLT)

- God is perfect and holy, and He created us for His glory.

JESUS SAID, "THE RAIN CAME DOWN, THE STREAMS ROSE, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE; YET IT DID NOT FALL, BECAUSE IT HAD ITS FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK." MATTHEW 7:25 (NIV)

First: "...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" 1 Corinthians 10:31

Next: We must make a habit of practicing the Spiritual Disciplines.

Finally: We need God's grace to accomplish this. "The needed change within us is God's work, not ours...only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn the kingdom of God; it is a Grace that is given." - Richard Foster

The reality is that even when we submit to the Kingship of Christ, our old self will still try to return.

Justification means God does everything (**Just as if I had never sinned**), and we are now in right standing with God. **Romans 5:1 (NIV)** teaches us, "we have been justified through faith."

Sanctification, we partner with God in bringing about change in our lives (**Growing to become more like Jesus**). This is a process that is worked out in us by God's spirit.

"YET TO ALL WHO DID RECEIVE HIM, TO THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD." JOHN 1:12 (NIV)
We can never grow beyond the Gospel!

LifeGroup Discussion Questions

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When have you spent a lot of time building or making something and the effort was well worth it?

Have you ever spent time on something only to find out later it was in vain?

Looking back on these experiences, what lessons have you learned?

People who place their trust in Christ will build upon the foundation of Him and His Word. This entails a life of dying to self and living for Christ. Spiritual disciplines are a practical way to so order our lives that we demonstrate that our foundation is in Him. Concluding His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus ended with the simple illustration of a house built upon a solid foundation. This is a picture of the Christian life.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 7:24-28.

Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount with a simple illustration. A man with good sense would build his house on solid ground. He would be aware that the most important element in building any structure is the foundation. Without a strong foundation, any structure is liable to collapse. While the foundation is key, we spend a lifetime building upon that foundation to bring glory to God.

How does someone establish his or her foundation in Christ? Practically speaking, what does that look like?

When we think about building a structure on that essential foundation, it is brick by brick. What are some of the “bricks,” or spiritual disciplines, that lead to a life that honors Christ?

Spiritual disciplines are practices and habits that are to be incorporated into the daily life of the Christ follower. Some examples include Bible intake (reading, meditating on, and memorizing Scripture), prayer, worship, evangelism, service, gifts, fasts, silence and solitude, and journal time.

What are some examples of wind, rain, and floods that come into a person’s life? How do spiritual disciplines prepare you beforehand and help when these storms come?

How does someone without Christ deal with adversity? Why might similar “disciplines” in their lives simply not be enough to help?

Both builders had heard the words of Jesus, but what they did with them was very different. One builder acted on Jesus’ teachings, basing his life on a solid foundation that would not collapse. The other man did not live by Jesus’ words. Of course, Jesus was not talking about actual houses, but lives. Every life needs an adequate, firm foundation that will not fail—a foundation rooted in Him and His truth. Each person spends a lifetime building on that foundation. Works that are not rooted in a genuine, saving faith will not help a person in this life or the next.

How is a relationship with God similar to a solid foundation?

On the other hand, what are some examples of sand foundations in this life?

How would you talk about the truth of these verses with someone whose life is not built on Christ?

To hear and then ignore God's words is foolish indeed. Some people who go through life without building their lives on Christ's teachings seem to get along okay. They put hope in other things, but the storms of life will reveal they didn't build on the right foundation.

Jesus lists only two outcomes in this parable. Why is there no middle ground?

As Jesus ended His Sermon on the Mount, why do you think the crowd found His teaching so astonishing?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Christianity isn't just about what we know; it's about what we do with what we know. God instructs Christians to build their lives on Jesus and His teachings, rather than on things that sound good. Your life should give evidence of your walk with Jesus in a personal relationship. Spiritual disciplines help us in this regard. They are rooted in Christ and fueled by His Spirit.

What disciplines best help you maintain a strong, firm foundation in your relationship with Jesus?

Are you putting your trust on foundations made of sand? If so, what steps will you take to build instead upon the Solid Rock?

Who can we pray for right now whose life is built on sand? What can we do this week to help him or her find the Solid Rock?

PRAYER

Ask God to show you ways your group can ensure others build their foundations on His rock and not on the sand. Pray that when the storms of life take us by surprise, we would have the disciplines built into our lives to be able to withstand whatever comes our way and that we might encourage one another to that end.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 7:24-28

7:24-27 The adjectives sensible and foolish describe a person's spiritual and moral state, not his intellect. Whether one is considered sensible or foolish is determined by his response to Jesus' teaching. Since OT writers described God's wrath using the image of a great storm (Isa 28:16-17; Ezek 13:10-13), the storm that destroys the house on the sand is a picture of divine judgment. Hence, the person who hears and acts on Jesus' teaching is prepared for judgment. The one who hears but doesn't act on Jesus' words will be destroyed in the storm of judgment.

7:28-29 Jesus amazed the crowds with an authority that surpassed that of other teachers. First-century Jewish teachers appealed to the authority of their rabbinic predecessors. However, Jesus introduced His teachings with the contrast, "You have heard that it was said... but I tell you" (5:21,27,31,33,38,43). By this Jesus made clear that He had the authority to interpret the law independent from and even contrary to the Jewish oral tradition and the most esteemed rabbis. The words when Jesus had finished are important for understanding the structure of Matthew's Gospel.

PRAYER: **TALKING TO GOD**

MATTHEW 6:5-13

MAIN POINT

Prayer allows us to have a uniquely intimate relationship with God!

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What one word would you use to describe your prayer life right now? Why?

If your prayer life could be different in one way, how would you have it change?

Do you think prayer is important to God? Why or why not?

Most of us live with a sense of guilt about our prayer lives. We recognize that it's important, and yet few of us are really satisfied with this discipline in our lives. Part of that dissatisfaction is the tension about prayer we find in the Bible: Is it more about talking or listening? Verbal or internal? Alone or with others? Praying through a list or what comes to mind in the moment? The answer to all these questions is "yes." Because it's easy to be confused in regard to prayer, Jesus took time to show us what talking to God really looks like.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

WATCH THE VIDEO TEACHING FOR SESSION 2

What was your biggest take-away from the video?

From the Video -

"I CALL ON YOU, MY GOD, FOR YOU WILL ANSWER ME; TURN YOUR EAR TO ME AND HEAR MY PRAYER." PSALM 17:6 (NIV)

Prayer is admitting that life is better when God is in control!

"DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD." PHIL. 4:6 (NIV)

When we give ourselves over to His will, we are then able to be used by God to make a difference in the world.

1. Authentic prayer is God-focused!

"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." MATT. 6:5 (NIV)

2. Authentic prayer is when we cast worries-pains-heartaches at His feet.

"ARROGANT FOES ARE ATTACKING ME, O GOD; RUTHLESS PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO KILL ME— THEY HAVE NO REGARD FOR YOU. BUT YOU, LORD, ARE A COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS GOD, SLOW TO ANGER, ABOUNDING IN LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS." PSALM 86 (NIV)

Remember: our attitude is far more important than our articulation.

2 Ways to Pray:

1. Modeling the Lord's Prayer

"THIS, THEN, IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY: "OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD. AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE." MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NIV)

Eyes: Focused on God

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"

Heart: Cares of this World

"Your kingdom come, your will be done...give us our daily bread"

Mouth: Confess our sins

"Forgive us our sins"

Head: Remember His power

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil"

2. Prayer Layups (throughout the day)

a. Pray for wisdom

"IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU." JAMES 1:5 (NIV)

b. Pray to resist temptation

"GET UP AND PRAY SO THAT YOU WILL NOT FALL INTO TEMPTATION." LUKE 22:46 (NIV)

c. Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit

"IF YOU THEN, THOUGH YOU ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM?" LUKE 11:13 (NIV)

Prayer Exercise:

Let's pray! Use the following prompts to help get your prayer juices flowing:

Eyes: Focus on God

Write down some attributes of God that come to mind

Heart: Cares of this world

Write down some of the needs you have. Include both spiritual and physical needs

Mouth: Confess your sin

Write down the things the Holy Spirit brings to mind, so He can forgive you

Head: Remember His power

Write down when God has been faithful to lead you in the past.

LifeGroup Discussion

As a group, read Matthew 6:5-8.

What are the pitfalls of prayer Jesus gives us in these verses?

Why is it important Jesus gave us these pitfalls before teaching us the pattern of the rhythm of prayer?

Jesus knew that we could easily fall into a couple of pitfalls when we pray. As we pray, we might begin to pray in a hypocritical fashion, trying to impress others with our prayers. Or we might try and manipulate God with our prayers, as if we prayed in a certain way we can assure that God will do what we want. Having explained these pitfalls, Jesus moved into a model of what it looks like to talk to God.

As a group, read Matthew 6:9-13.

Jesus first of all told us to pray intimately, knowing that God is our Father. Why is it important that this intimacy is the governing aspect of the whole prayer?

What obstacles do you have in your own thinking and experience to approaching God as a Father who loves you?

How does knowing that He is your Father change the way you pray?

The way we interact with our earthly fathers has formed, whether we know it or not, our view of God as our Father. A big part of relating to God in prayer is beginning to believe that He is a Father who loves us. This frees us from having mechanical and rehearsed prayers. We can approach Him with confidence because we know He loves us.

Do you struggle with praying for God's name to be hallowed? What's different about that kind of prayer and the way you usually pray?

Along with praying reverently, we must also pray submissively as we ask God's kingdom to come. Is it difficult for you to pray for God's kingdom to come? Why or why not?

When we pray, we must recognize that God is worthy of our worship and our submission. He should be the center of our prayers, not ourselves. When we pray for His name to be hallowed and His kingdom to come, we are consciously placing Him at the center of our lives.

The next phrase, a prayer for our daily bread, is a call to pray practically and persistently. Why did Jesus tell us to pray specifically for our "daily" bread?

We must also pray obediently and cautiously when we pray for forgiveness and for God not to lead us into temptation. What are some ways you need these attributes to be integrated into your own prayer life?

Even though we have the freedom through the gospel to approach God with confidence, we must also pray with an eye on our own weakness. In prayer, we align ourselves to God's will, and one of the most difficult ways to do that is through forgiving others. In addition, we must also be cautious in our prayers. We must recognize our own weakness and pray that God will lead us through trials so they would not become temptations.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Think back to all those characteristics of talking to God. Which is the most challenging for you right now? Why?

What is one practical way the nature of your prayers needs to change?

What about when we pray together as a group? What are some ways we can align our prayers with the pattern Jesus put before us?

PRAYER

Using Jesus' prayer as a guide, lead your group to pray through these characteristics as you close your group.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 6:5-13

6:5. The second example is about whenever you pray, indicating Jesus indeed expects us to pray. He often prayed early at the beginning of the day. At times, He prayed all night, especially before major decisions or significant events. Jesus cited three kinds of prayer to avoid. First, don't pray as those who loved to be seen praying in synagogues and on street corners. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout.

6:6. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people's responses won't distract us. Thus, in secret we can focus on the Father. The greatest reward for praying may be simply having a personal conversation with God; He whom we cannot see sees us and hears us as well (v. 6). Jesus even provided a model prayer to show us how to pray. It begins with a focus on God and His purposes before moving to our personal requests.

6:7. A second mistake when praying is to babble like the idolaters. Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless words, especially when the words are mechanical. The word translated babble appears only here in the Bible (Matt. 6:7). Because of the word's sound, the basic meaning has been suggested as "to stammer"; that is, to repeat words. A derived meaning came to imply going on and on without thinking. This is reflected in various ways such as "use vain [or meaningless] repetitions," "heap up empty phrases," and the like. Prayer that is babble is prayer in form only; it has no substance. Jesus said idolaters prayed that way. Layering on words doesn't impress God, nor do prayers offered with the mind in neutral and the heart in gear, focused elsewhere.

6:8. Third, we need not feel compelled to inform God of endless details about our needs. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him. This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

6:9. By commanding His disciples to pray like this rather than simply "pray this," Jesus demonstrated that this prayer was offered as a model rather than a mantra to be recited. Your name be honored as holy suggests that Jesus expected His disciples to live righteous lives that honor rather than profane God's name (5:16; Lev 22:31-32). This is an important precondition for successful prayer.

God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us. At the same time, He is in heaven, which tells us He is greater than we can comprehend; so we approach Him as our Father with due reverence. The first-person plural pronoun *Our* implies that Jesus intended this prayer to be a model for corporate prayer, i.e., a prayer for when disciples gather as a group. This confirms that Matt. 6:5 was not intended to prohibit disciples from praying together publicly in the synagogue or other gatherings but instead prohibited prayers that were motivated by religious showmanship.

The first request is that the Father's name be honored as holy (v. 9). One's name in biblical thought stood for the person. The Father's covenant name is Yahweh (Exodus 3:14). This petition is that God will help all people everywhere to recognize the Lord God Almighty as He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and honor Him accordingly (see John 6:44).

6:10. Your kingdom come could be translated “Your reign come.” The kingdom has come in the hearts of all who have submitted to Jesus as Lord. It also is coming as more people yield their hearts to His reign. The kingdom will not have come fully, though, until Jesus returns and establishes it absolutely and forever. This petition asks the Father to bring people under His reign.

To pray for the Father to see that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven frightens some people. They fail to distinguish between what God desires and what He permits. He desires all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9), but He permits many to turn from Him. He desires all of us to keep His commands, but He permits our disobedience and the destruction it causes. We live, therefore, in a world cursed by sin. Even so, the Father weaves even sin’s consequences into a pattern that ultimately will achieve His good will (Romans 8:28). Heaven is the only place free of sin and its painful effects. We should daily pray for the future consummation of God’s rule in which He will reign fully and completely over the world.

6:11. The prayer’s focus shifts from God’s eternal purposes to our temporal needs. We are to request what we need to sustain life, such as daily bread (Matthew 6:11). Daily may be understood as “for today” or “for tomorrow,” in either case pointing to immediate need. Daily bread was the amount of bread necessary to survive for a day. The request is reminiscent of Proverbs 30:8-9. Jesus wanted His disciples to live in a state of constant dependence on God and His provision. This prayer reminds us that our Father ultimately is our Provider. As a wise father, God provides what we need, not necessarily what we want.

6:12. We also are to ask for forgiveness. Debts are sins viewed as obligations to the Father. The Greek grammar indicates that the disciple prays for forgiveness from God only after having first expressed forgiveness to others. We dare not take lightly the rest of the verse: as we also have forgiven our debtors (see also vv. 14-15). At least two biblical teachings about salvation seem in conflict with the words forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven (v. 12; see also vv. 14-15; 18:21-35). (1) Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-10). That rules out earning forgiveness by forgiving. (2) Faith in Christ brings forgiveness and eternal security (John 10:27-29).

6:13. The final petition has puzzled many believers—Do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. (“Evil one” also can be translated “evil”; the essential meaning is the same.) We know God is good and does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13), so how are we to understand this? The overall meaning is obvious: the prayer is for the Father to keep us doing His will rather than being led astray by Satan.

BIBLE:

HEARING FROM GOD

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

From the Video:

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 (NIV)

3 Common Frustrations:

1. We don't understand the structure of the Bible.

- The Bible is a collection of 66 books.
- The Bible is divided into 2 major sections.
- The Bible was written in a variety of styles.

2. We don't understand the story of the Bible.

- The Bible is the story of salvation.
- The Bible is God's faithful plan to rescue a fallen people.
 - Part 1: Genesis 1-11 tell us about the need for salvation.
 - Part 2: Genesis 12-Malachi tell us about the channel of salvation.
 - Part 3: Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John tell us about the gift of salvation.
 - Part 4: Acts tells us about the spread of salvation.
 - Part 5: Romans-Jude tell us the instruction of salvation.
 - Part 6: Revelation tells us about the completion of salvation.

3. We don't understand how to study the Bible.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.” Psalm 1:1-3 (NIV)

The R.E.A.P Bible Study Method

R = Read
E = Explore
A = Apply
P = Pray

Tip 1: Start with a Bible reading plan.

Tip 2: Read with a journal.

Tip 3: Ask the right questions.

1. What is the context?
2. What does this passage say about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit?
3. What does this passage say about people, life, or faith?
4. How does this ancient truth speak to our modern times?
5. How can I practice this truth in my everyday life?

Practice – Use the 5 questions that will help you hear from God as you read the following text from James. Try to make 5-7 observations about the text, a couple of application points, and then spend some time praying over those application points.

JAMES, A SERVANT OF GOD AND OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, TO THE TWELVE TRIBES SCATTERED AMONG THE NATIONS: GREETINGS. CONSIDER IT PURE JOY, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE TRIALS OF MANY KINDS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE.

LET PERSEVERANCE FINISH ITS WORK SO THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE, NOT LACKING ANYTHING. IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU. BUT WHEN YOU ASK, YOU MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT, BECAUSE THE ONE WHO DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, BLOWN AND TOSSED BY THE WIND. THAT PERSON SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO RECEIVE ANYTHING FROM THE LORD. 8 SUCH A PERSON IS DOUBLE-MINDED AND UNSTABLE IN ALL THEY DO. JAMES 1:1-8 (NIV)

R - E - A - P

LifeGroup Discussion

Only through the study and application of God's Word do we learn how to live for God and share His love with the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you could learn how to master one field of study, what would it be and why?

How are the teachings of the Bible distinct from all other teachings we receive?

In your own words, what is the purpose of the Bible? Why is studying it important for the Christian?

How have you seen the Bible be the catalyst for life-change in your life and in the church?

In our information-driven culture, people want to know more about everything. People are interested not only in gaining new skills to use in a rapidly changing work environment but in learning more to grow personally. Unfortunately, many people lack a spiritual hunger for God's Word, and many who do have the desire to study the Bible haven't developed the discipline to make Bible study as profitable and life transforming as it can be.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Foundational to the study of Scripture is the belief that the Bible is inerrant, that it is the perfect, inspired Word of God. The apostle Paul encouraged the younger disciple Timothy with this truth in his second letter.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17.

In his encouragement to Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus, Paul instructed him to hold firmly to what he had learned in Scripture, which he had studied since he was young. The task which God had for Paul and Timothy was rooted in the authority of the Scriptures. Because the Bible is our primary tool for growing as Jesus' disciples, it is crucial that we believe the Word of God is totally accurate, free of error, and inspired by God Himself.

Verse 16 teaches us that all Scripture is God-breathed. What does this imply?

Why is the divine inspiration of Scripture important? What would change if you didn't believe Scripture was divinely inspired?

Paul reminded Timothy that Scripture instructs Christians on how to believe, grow, and serve the Christian community. Paul appealed to Timothy concerning the inspiration and usefulness of Scripture in daily life. He first noted to Timothy that Scripture is inspired by God. The complete contents bear God's stamp of approval.

What words in these verses emphasize the importance of studying Scripture?

In what areas of your life has Scripture proven profitable? How? Have you noticed a change in these areas when you haven't been actively studying God's Word?

What does Scripture equip us to do? How does this work?

The Bible is a guide that teaches us how to grow in our faith and how to live as disciples. It's profitable for teaching, so it's profitable for learning. Rebuking and correcting also make it useful for prevention—there's no need to be rebuked or corrected if you never did something in the first place. "Training in righteousness" points us to Christ; we can't be righteous apart from Him. The Bible, when actively read, provides us all we need to mature in our faith, a process that God designed to happen in the community of His church. The writer of Hebrews also affirmed the power of God's Word to make Him known and shape the behavior of His people.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 4:12-13.

In this section of Hebrews, the writer was making the point that his readers needed to give close attention to obeying God's Word. In these two verses he stated the reason.

What similarities do you see in this passage and the passage from 2 Timothy 3?

How is the Word living and active?

How is the Word of God sharp like a two-edged sword? What is an example from your life when you've experienced the Bible in this way?

What does God's Word have the power to do in our lives, according to this passage? How have you seen this to be true in your life?

The living God speaks His living Word. God's Word is not confined to a distant past but comes to us now with freshness, power, and clarity. God's Word judges the ideas and thoughts of the heart. It reaches into the center of a person's being and correctly perceives motives and intentions. God's Word lays bare any faithlessness, disobedience, and indifference or complacency in advancing toward spiritual maturity. Bible study is one of the main ways God speaks to Christians. It is the way we learn about God and His will for our lives. Bible study provides the spiritual food for growing believers into Christlikeness.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is one thing that distracts you from daily studying the Word of God?

What habit or routine needs to change for you to make the study of the Word a priority?

How does your knowledge and understanding of Scripture impact your interactions with nonbelievers? Are you prepared to share the truth of the Word of God at any time? What can you do to be better prepared?

What do we lose if we choose to only study Scripture on our own, rather than being an active part of a biblical community where we can be taught the Word of God? What do we lose if the opposite is true?

What can our group do to be a community deeply rooted in the teaching, studying, and memorizing of Scripture?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to increase our appetite for His Word. Pray that our group will be better students of God's Word, not just to increase our knowledge but to conform us to His image. Also pray that we will have the boldness to share the Word with other people in our lives.

COMMENTARY

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

Verses 16-17. The Bible is God-breathed or inspired by God. Paul did not discount the role of human instruments in producing these books (see 2 Pet. 1:21), but God's role was primary. Inspiration is defined as "the act of God by which He superintended/ guided the human authors of the 66 books of the Bible so that using their own individual personalities they composed and recorded without error, His revelation to man in the words of the original." (Daniel Akin, Christian Theology: An Overview)

Paul identified several ways the Bible is useful or profitable for believers. "Teaching" refers to the Bible as the basis of sound doctrine. Because of the prominence of heresy among his readers, Paul emphasized the importance of sound teaching. "Reproof" may refer to both exposing the errors of false teachers (doctrinal) and also showing someone the error of his or her ways (personal). Either way, the Bible shows us our wrongs and leads us to forgiveness and peace. "Correction" suggests that God's Word helps people restore their doctrine or practice to a right state they had forfeited. "Training in righteousness" means the Scriptures act as a disciplinarian that leads people to a holy lifestyle. If Timothy would nurture his life in the Scriptures, he would be complete and equipped for every good work. He would be both prepared and qualified for every task God assigned him.

The Greek word rendered "competent" (v. 17) has the sense of being capable, proficient, or able to meet all the demands placed upon a person. In the Bible it carries the force of a person who, through diligent study of Scripture, has progressed spiritually to being able not only to discern the will of God but also to abide in it consistently. As a result, the complete Christian is fully engaged, either as layperson or leader, in serving God. Whatever God calls complete Christians to do, they are ready to follow God's commands because of their dedication to the study of the Word and their obedience to God's teaching.

HEBREWS 4:12-13

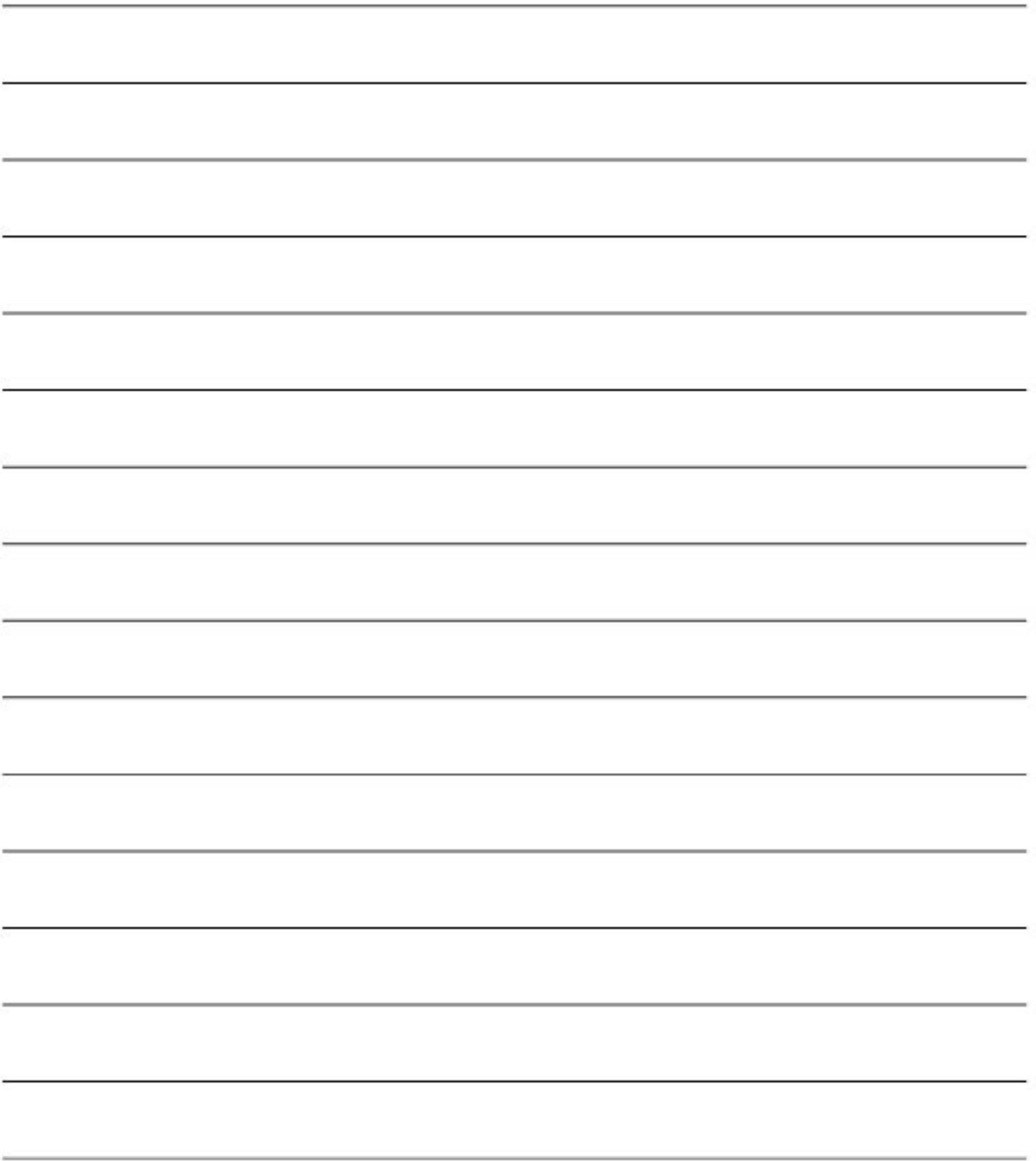
Verse 12. In the larger context of this passage (3:7–4:13), the writer is warning against neglecting God's word by failing to obey Him. He used the example of the exodus generation of Israelites. They refused to believe and obey God and therefore not were not permitted to enter the promised land (3:18; 4:6). We must be faithful to hear and obey God's word. The consequence of disobeying God's word is judgment.

In the Greek text "living" is the first word in verse 12, making it emphatic. The living God speaks His living word. God's word is not confined to a distant past but comes to us now with freshness, power, and clarity. That word is effective or energetic, powerful. His Word causes things to happen. Additionally, the word of God is active, an emphasis virtually identical in meaning with the term living. God's Word is not something we passively hear and then ignore. It actively works in our lives, changes us, and sends us into action.

What did the writer mean by God's word being a sharp two-edged sword that pierces into the depths of people's beings? One view is that he meant the word's thoroughness. The living word permeates every aspect of a person's being. It affects the whole person. A second view is that the sharp sword penetrates and divides the whole person similar to the way a surgeon's scalpel lays bare the organs inside a person. This view emphasizes judgment. God's word judges the ideas and thoughts of the heart. It reaches into the center of a person's being and correctly perceives motives and intentions.

In light of verses 12-13, the latter interpretation seems to be the writer's meaning. He well may have meant that God's word lay bare in the Hebrew believers any faithlessness, disobedience, and indifference or complacency in advancing toward spiritual maturity.

Verse 13. The activity of God's Word is an extension of the activity of God Himself. The word of God exposes our innermost thoughts and intentions. The Greek word translated "exposed" literally means "to grip the neck," "to bend the neck back" to make bare the throat. We get the English nouns trachea and tracheotomy from the Greek verb. The term was used of wrestlers who seized opponents' necks and bent their heads back, exposing their throats. Basically, the word means "to lay bare to view." It conveys the idea of uncovering something. Here the term emphasizes that God's sovereign power brings a person's whole being into full view in God's eyes. Those who dare to examine their lives in the light of God's Word discover their true moral and spiritual condition.



COMMUNITY: BELONGING TO GOD'S FAMILY

ACTS 2:41-47

From the Video:

God designed you and I for Community!

"THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT GOOD FOR THE MAN TO BE ALONE. I WILL MAKE A HELPER SUITABLE FOR HIM." GENESIS 2:18 (NIV)

"TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE, BECAUSE THEY HAVE A GOOD RETURN FOR THEIR LABOR: IF EITHER OF THEM FALLS DOWN, ONE CAN HELP THE OTHER UP. BUT PITY ANYONE WHO FALLS AND HAS NO ONE TO HELP THEM UP. ALSO, IF TWO LIE DOWN TOGETHER, THEY WILL KEEP WARM. BUT HOW CAN ONE KEEP WARM ALONE? THOUGH ONE MAY BE OVERPOWERED, TWO CAN DEFEND THEMSELVES. A CORD OF THREE STRANDS IS NOT QUICKLY BROKEN." ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12 (NIV)

Community is something we need!

"AND LET US CONSIDER HOW WE MAY SPUR ONE ANOTHER ON TOWARD LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS, NOT GIVING UP MEETING TOGETHER, AS SOME ARE IN THE HABIT OF DOING, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER—AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY APPROACHING." HEBREWS 10:24-25 (NIV)

1. Christian Community is a different kind of community.

THEREFORE CONFESS YOUR SINS TO EACH OTHER AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE." JAMES 5:16 (NIV)

CARRY EACH OTHER'S BURDENS, AND IN THIS WAY, YOU WILL FULFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST. GALATIANS 6:2 (NIV)

2. The heart of healthy community comes down to attitude and actions.

We must actively choose to love our brothers and sisters in Christ!

3. Community and the Church

You cannot commit yourself to Christ and not commit yourself to HIS Church!
The Church = The Bride of Christ/The Body of Christ.
The Church is not a building; The Church is people.

4. Your next steps for Community:

1. Make Church attendance a priority!
2. Get in a LifeGroup.
3. Serve & Volunteer
4. Build Open & Honest relationships

LifeGroup Discussion

God's plan for making disciples involves a community of believers who are there for each other.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Whenever you need someone else's help, do you know who you would turn to?

Why that person? What is it about them or your relationship with them that leads you to count on them in a time of need?

We are constantly living in community with others, but that is all the truer when we are in a time of need. The early church, from its outset, became the center of community for its members, primarily because individuals were there for one another when they were in need.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 2:41-42.

Imagine our church had a 3,000-member increase in one day. What would some of the logistical and relational challenges be?

Why was belonging to a community of believers so important to these first Christians? What made these believers want to get together?

There are four purposes of the church here in Acts 2. What are they?

The church is devoted to the apostle's teaching, devoted to fellowship, devoted to breaking bread, and devoted to prayers.

Why are these four areas vital to the church?

What role did getting together for fellowship play in unifying the early church?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 2:43-47.

Why did the early church experience fear? Discuss.

Do you have the same awe and reverence for God? Why or why not?

As the new believers began to join the early church, we learn that fear came over everyone. This type of fear carries a unique connotation. It is a healthy fear, a reverent fear of God. Accordingly, this fear arose as many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. These actions were performed to demonstrate God's hand in the organization of the church.

According to these verses, what are marks of a healthy church? What attitudes accompanied these actions?

What did the people demonstrate by selling their possessions and by their unified commitment to the church?

Which of these actions—fellowship, worship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism—do you more naturally gravitate toward? Why is the balance of all five important for the individual Christian and the church as a whole?

How are we, as growing disciples, strengthened by doing each of these things together (worshipping, connecting, serving, and going)? What might happen if we tried to live out these values on our own?

What impact do you think the early church's community had on its rapid growth (v. 47)? What does the world learn about God through healthy Christian community?

For first-century Christians, what was the draw of becoming part of a local body of believers? Is it the same draw today? Why or why not?

What are some of the unique challenges we face as we practice biblical community?

The unity of the church was a testimony to God's presence, and "every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved" (v. 47). The early church was a growing church. They first had a reverent fear for God that guided them in their daily living (see v. 43). Next, they made loving other believers as themselves a priority for their fellowship, even to the point of selling private property to provide for members in need (vv. 44-45). They followed Jesus' great commandment to a "T." As a result, God honored them for that by blessing them with new members every day.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Would people outside of our church say we model the characteristics of the Acts 2 church? Where do we excel, and where might there be room for improvement? What can our group do to help?

What are some of the unique challenges we face as a church to engaging deeply with each other? What could each of us do to make our church a closer community?

In what ways has our discussion challenged your view of church membership? How will you approach church differently moving forward?

PRAYER

Ask God to bless the church with a unity born of genuine love that Christians have for one another. Ask God to build up the faith of each person so that he or she may love God with all his or her being and that each might truly demonstrate love for one another. Thank God for His commitment to growing disciples. Pray that God would continue to challenge our view of His church and our role in it.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 2:41-47

2:41 The Jerusalem church experienced tremendous numerical growth in those early days. Jesus' followers numbered about 120 in Acts 1:15, but about three thousand souls were added after Peter's sermon. The new Christians had accepted Peter's word and were baptized.

2:42 Luke reported four distinctive practices or activities in the Jerusalem church. First, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Eventually, the church experienced persecution, and some church leaders left Jerusalem. The original apostles, however, continued to minister in this church (8:1). Reviewing the sermons and teaching reported in the opening chapters of Acts reveals the major doctrinal themes important to the early church. The apostles could report their own experiences with Jesus during his earthly ministry as well as explaining Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Biblically based preaching and teaching are still fundamental to church life. Second, the church experienced fellowship. Fellowship translates the Greek word *koinonia* and means "participation" or "sharing." Third, they shared the breaking of bread. Although some Bible students think this could be sharing a common meal, many scholars believe this is Luke's way of referring to the Lord's Supper. The disciples had celebrated a meal with Jesus in the upper room in Jerusalem. Fourth, the church devoted themselves to prayers. The early Christian movement was bathed in prayer. Jesus' disciples had asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus had established Himself as a consistent prayer, so His followers should pray as well.

2:44-45 One of the most amazing characteristics of the Jerusalem church was its sharing its material possessions with the needy. The Christians voluntarily shared with anyone who needed help. As part of their fellowship, the early church practiced a community of goods for a short time. Distribution to members of the faith community took place according to individual need. This practice did not last long, likely because it was logistically difficult and fraught with potential abuse (see ch. 4-6).

Later, Luke noted that these church members were "of one heart and soul" (4:32). No one remained needy for long because the church responded quickly and generously to need. The money was brought to the apostles, who were in charge of the distribution (4:34-35). Luke highlighted the role of Barnabas in this generosity (4:36-37), but he also noted the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their actions (5:1-10).

2:46 Although these believers understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Jewish hope for the Messiah (2:36), the members of the Jerusalem church were primarily Jewish in background. They still went to the temple complex. They would not participate in the sacrificial system any longer, since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They may have wanted to demonstrate the continuity between their Jewish heritage and their new faith in Christ. Also, they may have found opportunities to witness to their Jewish friends and relatives.

Besides gathering together in the temple complex, these Christians broke bread from house to house. Quite likely this means they gathered regularly in houses for worship and the Lord's Supper. Christians did not typically build church buildings in the early centuries, so they met in homes. When they gathered in homes, these disciples expressed gratitude for their shared meals. These gatherings were marked by a simplicity or "sincerity" of heart. They did not need to put on airs; they genuinely worshiped God.

2:47 One result of the early church's worship and witness was having favor with all the people. In these early days the people of Jerusalem were generally open to the Christians. Later on, the Jewish leaders tried to restrict their public preaching (4:1-22).

The early church was an evangelizing church. Luke recounted that every day the Lord added to those who were being saved. He did not say how this took place, but it appears that evangelism took place primarily through the gathering of Christians in the temple and in individual houses. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were at the heart of early Christian preaching, which called for immediate response from anyone who listened. Such enormous numerical growth eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish leaders.

FOUNDATIONS: PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

MARK 10:45 ; JAMES 2:17

From the Video

1. Finding our **REASON** to serve.

We move from being a **Consumer** to an **Investor** when we serve.

Serving is a **tool** that **GOD** uses to make us better!

MARK 10:45 (NIV) "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."

JAMES 2:17 (NIV) "IN THE SAME WAY, FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ACTION, IS DEAD."

2. Finding our **PLACE** to serve.

EPHESIANS 2:10 (NIV) "WE ARE GOD'S HANDIWORK, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED IN ADVANCE FOR US TO DO."

The Greek word - poiēma (poy'-ay-mah). Can be translated into English words: handiwork, workmanship, creation, or even masterpiece.

"Can you be anything you want to be? I don't think so. But can you be everything God wants you to be? I do think so. And you become that by discovering your uniqueness." – Author Max Lucado

3. Using the **S.H.A.P.E.** Profile to help identify a place to serve.

S = Spiritual Gifts

1 PETER 4:10 (NIV) "EACH OF YOU SHOULD USE WHATEVER GIFT YOU HAVE RECEIVED TO SERVE OTHERS, AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD'S GRACE IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS."

Question: What is my spiritual gift?

Note: Spiritual gifts are always used for the benefit of others

Scripture reading about Spiritual Gifts: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28- 30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:9-11

H = Heart

COL. 3:23 (NIV) "WHATEVER YOU DO, WORK AT IT WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AS WORKING FOR THE LORD, NOT FOR HUMAN MASTERS."

Question: What am I passionate about doing?

People: I love to be with or work with-

Kids - Teenagers - Young Adults - Adults - Singles - Elderly - Other

Causes: I feel strongly about-

Abortion / sanctity of life - Abuse / violence - Addiction recovery - At-risk children & youth Bereavement / grief

Counseling - Crisis pregnancy / abstinence - Disabilities / Special Olympics - Disaster relief - Divorce recovery

Education / public schools - Elder care - Environment - Evangelism / discipleship - Financial management

Health / fitness - HIV/AIDS - Homelessness / housing - Intercessory prayer - International affairs / global needs

Jobs / economic development - Justice / legal system - Marriage / family / relationships - Missions – general

Parenting / foster care / adoption - Poverty / hunger - Public housing / low-income neighborhoods

Prison ministry/families of prisoners/former offenders - Racial reconciliation / multicultural relationships

Ministering to my co-workers/classmates/other contacts - Ministering to my neighbors / community

Prostitution / sex trafficking / slavery - Shut-ins / hospitalized - Worship

Activities: Thing I love to do-

Sports - Movies - Music - Gardening - Quiet evenings at home with the family - Going out with friends

Being outdoors - Video games - Reading - Exploring new technology - Other

A = Abilities

"I [God] have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts." Exodus 31:3 (NIV)

Question: What am I good at doing?

God gives everyone natural abilities and talents!

3 Steps to engage your abilities for God.

a. Estimate your abilities. b. Dedicate your abilities. c. Cultivate your abilities.

ECCLESIASTES 10:10 (NIV) "IF THE AX IS DULL AND ITS EDGE UNSHARPENED, MORE STRENGTH IS NEEDED, BUT SKILL WILL BRING SUCCESS"

LUKE 12:43 (CSB) BLESSED IS THAT SERVANT WHOM THE MASTER FINDS DOING HIS JOB WHEN HE COMES". LUKE 12:43 (CSB)

P = Personality

LUKE 10:39-40 (NIV) "MARY SAT AT THE LORD'S FEET LISTENING TO WHAT HE SAID. BUT MARTHA WAS DISTRACTED BY ALL THE PREPARATIONS THAT HAD TO BE MADE."

Question: How am I wired?

Understanding how God has designed your personality can help you find a fit that just feels right. However, if God calls you to do something, His promise is He will equip you for that task!

E = Experience

PHILIPPIANS 1:12 (NIV) "NOW I WANT YOU TO KNOW, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THAT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME HAS ACTUALLY SERVED TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL."

Question: What has my life prepared me to do?

Your past experiences have helped to shape you into who you are right now!

Additional Scripture reading: 2 Cor. 1:3-5

LifeGroup Discussion

Following Jesus requires that we obey what God teaches in His Word.

INTRODUCTION

How do we use our gifts to serve?

Is there anything unique that being part of your particular family entitles you to (i.e., your dad is a dentist, so you get free dental work, your son works at the movie theater, so you get discounted tickets, etc.)?

These days, many people believe they are inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment for no particular reason. How does an attitude of entitlement cause problems?

Do you think there's such a thing as spiritual entitlement? Explain.

In today's passage, Jesus used the issue of entitlement to teach us something about what it means to really follow Him. Belonging to His family isn't a matter of physical kinship. Further, a mere profession of belief—even if it is orthodox and sincere—is not enough. A "hearing" faith is not a saving faith. A saving faith is a doing faith; it flows from a vital relationship with Christ, whose transformation of our lives overflows into our actions.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 10:42-45.

In Mark 10:32-34, Jesus taught his disciples that He was going to go Jerusalem where He would be delivered over to the religious leaders who would crucify Him. Rather than considering the selfless nature of Jesus' sacrifice, James and John responded to Christ's teaching on His death and resurrection by attempting to secure for themselves a place of honor in Christ's kingdom (Mark 10:35-37). In response to James and John's selfish request, Jesus called His disciples together and taught them about life as His followers. He drew a sharp contrast between pagan Gentile practices and what He expected from His people. In doing so, He redefined true greatness.

How was "greatness" most commonly demonstrated or pursued in Jesus' culture?

How is "greatness" defined in our culture today?

What does Jesus say about true greatness?

Jesus perfectly modeled the true standard of kingdom greatness. No one is greater than He is, yet He came to serve. Selfless ministry to others' needs marked His entire ministry. Not only did Jesus come to serve others, but also to give His life as a ransom for many. We need to redefine greatness according to Jesus' teaching.

In what ways are Jesus' words here counter-cultural both today and in Jesus' day? What does this say about the condition of the human heart and our natural assumptions about service?

Have a volunteer read Ephesians 4:11-13.

To whom did the Lord Jesus Christ give these gifts? What do these gifts have in common?

Every Christian is called on to be a witness for Christ, but some are especially capable in this area. In a local congregation, gifted evangelists will encourage other believers in how to reach persons for Christ. Pastors and teachers provide leadership for local congregations. The word “pastors” is literally shepherds, referring to the need for God’s flock to be tended (see 1 Pet. 5:2). One way that shepherds tend is by feeding the sheep (teaching the Word).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 2:17.

What connection can be made between Luke 8:21 and James 2:17?

James went so far as to say that faith without works is dead. What did he mean by this, and how do you react to that statement?

Have you ever been guilty of “talking a good game” of faith while being reluctant to follow through with concrete actions? Describe the situation.

How do James’s words here help us guard against spiritual entitlement?

The kind of “faith” that does not demonstrate itself with action is meaningless—inwardly lifeless and outwardly unproductive. If all we do is talk about having faith, we do not have saving faith. We can know and use all the right religious words, but without compassionate actions, our words count for nothing. Our words are not enough. Effective faith is always validated by the works of love that flow from it.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How can we demonstrate authentic humility as we serve others this week?
What's one way you can humbly and selflessly serve others?**

As you are challenged to actively serve as a part of the Christian community, how might you keep your motives for serving in check?

Is it difficult for you to let someone else serve you? Why or why not?

Who has God placed in your life for this season? How can you humbly serve them?

What can you do to more consistently serve in the church and in the community?

How can we as a group intentionally encourage one another with this effort?

What are some specific gifts God has given you that you may not be currently using to serve God or to serve others?

PRAYER

Thank God for His grace that saves you. Acknowledge that you can't earn His favor. Ask Him to help you hear and do His Word.

COMMENTARY

MARK 10:42-45

This passage is part of Jesus' response to a question from James and John. Incredibly, James and John, brothers who were part of the disciples' inner circle, came to Jesus with an open-ended request. They requested places of honor in Jesus' coming kingdom. The place on a ruler's right was the place of highest honor, and the place on his left was next in prestige. Both were positions of power. When the remaining 10 disciples learned of the exchange between Jesus and the brothers, the 10 became angry—perhaps because they thought James and John had taken advantage of their relationship with Jesus to grab prized places in the earthly kingdom they expected Him to establish. They well may have wanted the coveted positions.

In sharp contrast to Gentiles' standard of greatness, Jesus' followers were to adopt a different and higher standard. Jesus indicated that greatness has a place in God's kingdom. The ambition to attain greatness can be healthy and laudable. His followers should want to be great—great servants! The Greek term rendered servant means "one who ministers or waits on" someone in the sense of waiting tables. It presents the idea of performing menial, personal ministry to others.

Jesus continued with a second surprising condition. Whoever wanted to rank first in God's kingdom had to be a slave to others. A master owned a bondsman outright, and the slave had only the rights the owner granted.

JAMES 2:17

2:17. Verse 17 concludes the matter. Good wishes consisting of mere talk are empty of all reality and lifeless. Offering only good wishes to the cold and the hungry serves to depress further those who are starving and chilled. They need more than good wishes. They need practical help.

A faith not accompanied by action, that is faith alone, having no works to distinguish it, is dead. Anything with life produces fruit. The living are the acting, creating things that reveal their nature and character. Faith in Jesus produces actions revealing the nature and character of Jesus. The dead lie still doing nothing. So, faith that lies still, inactive, proves it is dead. True faith brings salvation and life, not death.

FOUNDATIONS: SHARE: **INVITING OTHERS TO KNOW GOD**

MATTHEW 28:16-20

From the Video

MATTHEW 28:18-20 (NIV) THEN JESUS CAME TO THEM AND SAID, "ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME. 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, AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE."

Jesus...

1. Gives us AUTHORITY.

- To share the Gospel boldly.
- He also equips you with the power to overcome the enemy.

2. Commands us to GO.

- To ALL the nations.
- Sometimes, the nations are right where you are.

3. Commands us to make DISCIPLES.

- "You can't lead someone where you haven't been before."
- To make disciples you must be a disciple.
- To be a disciple you must become a learner of the truths of God's Word.

4. Commands us to BAPTIZE.

- Baptism is a public announcement of your faith in Jesus.

5. Commands us to **TEACH** them to **OBEY**.

- He didn't say force them to obey.
- The goal of following Jesus is to be so close to Him people don't see you - they see Jesus.

6. Share your **STORY**.

- Sharing your faith in Christ can happen through actions, speech, love, etc.
- When you share your story, it allows people to see the power of God.

7. Romans "**Bridge**" Illustration:

- Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We're all sinners. God is perfect.
- Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; while we were still sinners Christ died for us."
- Roman 10:9-10 "If you declare with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."
- Romans 10:13 "For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

LifeGroup Discussion

Christ commissioned every follower with the task of making disciples.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Brainstorm a list of reasons people go to church and functions of the church, both appropriate and off base. Why does church have such a broad appeal to people?

What is the most important reason for being a part of a church?

What is the most important role of the church in the world?

The world needs to know who Jesus really is and what the benefits are of putting faith in Him. Jesus gave us—His church—the responsibility to make those truths known. God could have chosen to work in the world independent of His people, yet He chose to engage us in accomplishing His will. As the church, we represent God to people who need to know and understand Him. The potential impact of obedience to that calling is world changing. This study will challenge you to allow Jesus to work through you as you “go and make disciples.”

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 28:16-18.

Why did Jesus lead His command with a statement of His authority?

In what is His authority rooted?

In this familiar passage, known as the Great Commission, Jesus first reminds us that everything He commands us to do is through the authority He was given from God the Father. God doesn't make promises He won't keep and doesn't give commands we can't obey. If He tells us to go and make disciples of all nations, then it must be possible to reach the world by obeying His commands.

What do you think it means to have all authority “in heaven and on earth”?

What does the authority of Jesus do to the confidence level of His disciples?

Jesus told His disciples He had received all authority “in heaven and on earth.” Jesus’ resurrection validated His teachings and deeds and proved to the disciples all authority over everything rested with Him. Then the disciples knew the true nature of Christ. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Daniel had prophesied that the Messiah would be given “authority to rule, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve Him” (Dan. 7:14). The scope of His authority encompasses everything in heaven and on earth.

Why is it important that we understand the authority of Jesus? How does this truth impact our mission?

To carry out the Great Commission Jesus was about to give, the disciples had to clarify their belief about Him. They had to believe deeply that this One standing resurrected before them was more than just a man. He truly was God in flesh, God in power, and God in authority. As Jesus’ disciples today, we have been given the same command of discipleship, and understanding and believing in the authority of Jesus must precede our obedience.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 28:19-20.

Let’s take a minute to reflect upon the magnitude of this passage. After each of the following, discuss 1) what each command means, 2) how the church can follow, and 3) what role you personally have in obeying: go; make disciples; baptize them; teach them; remember His presence.

Each one of these commands is an important component of the Great Commission. If you remove any one of these, then reaching all nations with the gospel of Christ is compromised. It is vitally important that the church actively participate in all five of these commands on the macro level. In addition, we as individual believers must help our local church fulfill this commission on the micro level. Each church, and thus every member of those churches, shares in the responsibility of taking the good news of Jesus to the world.

In which of these five areas are you most involved?

In which area would you like to get more involved?

Why is it important for every believer to get involved in the Great Commission?

What happens when you don't own your part of the effort?

The Great Commission reminds us that we truly can take the gospel to the nations. But to have that worldwide impact, we must first acknowledge that the world needs to know who Jesus is and commit to telling them. If we do this, not only will our personal faith grow, but the Christian faith will expand around the world.

How does Jesus' promise of His presence (v. 20) influence our attitude in making disciples?

How is Jesus with us today? Read John 14:25-26 to help you answer.

Jesus' authority and presence empowered His disciples then and still empowers followers now to fulfill His commission. Jesus' first disciples did not evangelize, and disciple based on their strength. Jesus empowered them with courage, love, and joy. In the same way He empowers all believers.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What truth did you learn about Jesus this week? About the church?

What does God desire for you personally and the church corporately to do in response to that truth?

How is the church impacted by Jesus' involvement with it?

PRAYER

Close in a time of prayer for the burden of responsibility that comes with knowing the Great Commission. Pray that everyone will take this charge seriously and see it as a vital role they have in being Jesus' church and allowing Him to work through them.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 28:16-20

28:16-17. Some time during the forty days of Jesus' post-resurrection stay on earth (probably soon after they heard the news that Sunday), the eleven disciples and many more of Jesus' followers proceeded to Galilee, where Jesus had instructed them to go (26:32; 28:7, 10). Here Matthew's focus was back on the eleven, the foundation stones of his church. Jesus had apparently specified a particular mountain as their meeting place. At the end of the journey, presumably on the designated mountain, they saw him. Imagine their joy! It was only natural that they worshiped him. But some doubted (the word doubt means "to duplicate," "to be of two minds," or "to waver, hesitate"). All wanted to believe, but their faith was weak. Some experienced the internal tug-of-war between "two minds"—the one wanting to follow their fledgling faith and the other wanting to follow "reason." Even those presented with clear evidence for the truth can still have doubts. But the word some implied there were others who believed everything they saw. These were the followers of the Messiah-King who would continue on into Acts, willing to take any risk in obedience to their master. This was true faith in action, living on the edge of "risky" obedience.

28:18. Matthew noted that Jesus came near or approached. Here was no case of mistaken identity. The disciples could look Jesus in the eye and see that this One was the same Person whom Pilate had arrested. They could hear the voice clearly and know it was the voice they had listened to for several years. Jesus' claim made the need for decision even clearer: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." The kingdom Jesus talked about (4:17) had been established. The King had received authority to reign. This kingdom far exceeded the size of the Roman Empire. Only God could make such a declaration. Only One who ruled in heaven as well as on earth could claim such power.

28:19-20. On the basis of His authority, Jesus issued the Great Commission. Disciples had to accept the authority if they were to accept the commission. The commission is intricately formulated in the Greek. Stated somewhat literally as translated from the Greek language, the Great Commission reads as follows: "Therefore, having gone, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep (or to persistently obey) as much as I commanded you. And look here, I am with you all the days, until the completion (or perfection) of the age." The introductory "therefore" connects the Great Commission to Jesus' authority established in verse 18. The phrase "having gone" assumes obedience to the Commission. This phrase is not so much a call to go as it is a command to do certain things on the way. Disciples who recognize Christ's authority have one major task. The only imperative verb form in these verses formulates that task. Disciples under Christ's authority disciple the nations. That is, they share the gospel and help believers grow in Christ. Building the church by discipling the nations expands the disciple's journey. It sends them to the nations. Here is the universal nature of the gospel made explicit and clear. Disciples under Christ's authority must leave their comfort zones and the people with whom they feel at home. They must expand their horizons to incorporate every nation of people on earth. The church must devise plans and strategies to use the talents, gifts, energies, and resources of every one of its members. Every member must be on the move, discipling the nations.

In addition to going, discipling involves two other actions. The first is baptizing, which is to occur only after a person has acknowledged Jesus, the risen Savior, as his or her personal Savior. Baptism incorporates the new believer officially into the church. Baptism is also one means of making a public confession of faith. Baptism pictures or symbolizes what Jesus did and what the new Christian is doing. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried in the tomb. God raised Him from death to life. Baptism also pictures the believer's having died to sin and being raised to a new life in Christ, a life that is eternal through the ages.

The second action in discipling is teaching. This instruction reaches back to the earthly ministry of Jesus. It takes every parable, every sermon, every word Jesus said and teaches them to the church. It seeks to develop Christlike individuals. The teaching ministry begins with the New Testament accounts of the life and death of Jesus Christ. It expands to the rest of the New Testament and then incorporates the Old Testament as the foundation of who God is and what God planned long before He sent Jesus to fulfill Old Testament prophecies. This entire Word of God is the curriculum each disciple is charged to teach to new believers.



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