

A pair of hands is shown holding a mound of dark brown soil. A small green plant with three leaves is growing out of the soil. Several light brown seeds are scattered on the surface of the soil. The background is a blurred green field. Overlaid on the image are four curved arrows: a yellow one at the top pointing right, a green one on the right pointing up and right, a blue one at the bottom pointing up and right, and a red one at the bottom left pointing right. The text "your next step with GOD'S WORD" is centered in the upper half of the image.

your next step with
**GOD'S
WORD**

This guide belongs to

If found, please contact

(phone number or email)



plant this seed & let it grow!



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your next step with
**GOD'S
WORD**



God designed seeds to detect when they are surrounded by the right conditions for growth. There's a principle hidden in their nature that can tell when the soil is good, and when the soil is bad. For the seed to burst into life and for the plant to flourish, it must be met with the right kind of surroundings. So, here's the principle: *growth requires a receptive, nutritional environment.*

And the same can be said for our growth in Christlikeness.

The purpose of the Church is to "grow up in every way into... Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). But isn't it interesting that this growth doesn't always feel predictable? Why do some people walk away from a Sunday morning service, a group meeting, a Bible study, a service project, a mission trip, or an encounter on the street completely changed, while others walk away from the same setting with hardly any impact on their lives? For sure, there is a mystery to the way that the Holy Spirit works and produces growth—yet a part of that mystery is influenced by our cooperation. **So, if the Spirit is at work "planting seeds" of spiritual growth in us, then why do some seeds sprout and bloom while others seemingly remain dormant?**



the heart of the matter

Proverbs 4:23 says, **"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."** Whatever we do in life, it's all impacted by our hearts. From the sacred moments of worship to the mundane parts of everyday living, everything we do is formed by the state of our hearts including how and whether we connect with God and grow in Christ. In order for the Holy Spirit to grow us, His work needs to be met with a heart ready to serve as a receptive, nutritional environment for spiritual growth. *But how can we be sure that our hearts offer that kind of environment?*

Fortunately, Jesus tells a story in the Gospel of Luke that addresses just these types of questions: "The Parable of the Four Soils". In this parable, Jesus depicts a farmer who is hard at work sowing seeds in all kinds of ground—though only some of the seeds grow to the point of fruitfulness. **As Jesus explains the parable, He shares that the seed is the Word of God, which is sown into the soil of our hearts.** It's God's Word and our devotion to His Word that produces the fruit of spiritual growth; but this happens only if our hearts are ready to receive it.

So then, if we're going to grow in Christlikeness, we need to learn how to cultivate the right kind of "soil" in our hearts. We need to learn how to receive the Word, how to hear the Word in a way that it doesn't allow it just to go in one ear and out the other, become some sort of stuffy head-knowledge, or otherwise fail to produce Christlikeness. If we're going to grow, we must take our next step with God's Word!



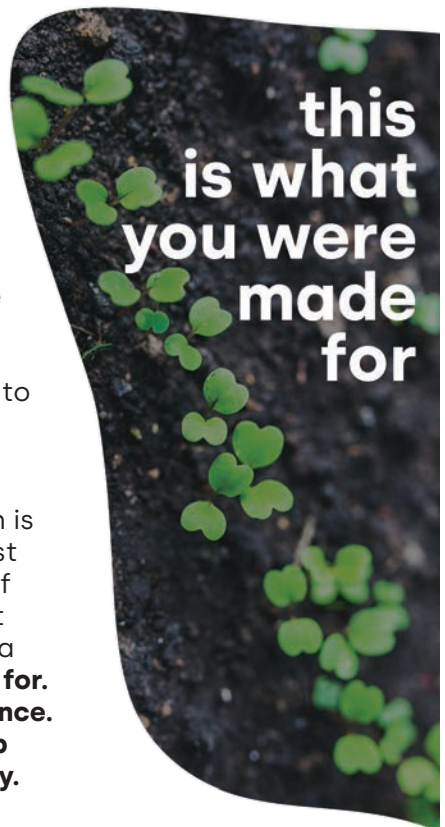


a note to the reader: where is your starting point?

If you're exploring Christ, I invite you—keep digging in! But eventually, you will need to decide for yourself if becoming a Christian (literally, a “little Christ!”) is the endeavor to which you want to commit yourself. To help you decide, you can read about Jesus Christ in the Gospels, hear about Him on Sunday mornings as we gather to worship and receive teaching from God's Word, or ask questions about Him by getting together with one of our Pastors. **This is the most important decision you'll ever make, so take it seriously!**

If you're growing in Christ, figuring out where you are in this process can be a little tricky. But that's exactly why you have this Excursion Guide in your hand. This whole guide and this whole excursion is built to help you figure out where you are in your growth toward becoming more and more like Jesus, and then to help you discern what your next step is on your journey to being Connected to God through the Word.

So, let me encourage you. now: take it seriously! Being a Christian is the greatest undertaking, greatest journey, the greatest adventure of your lifetime, but understand that it is going to happen one step at a time. **This is what you were made for. It's too important to leave to chance. Therefore, let's take our next step together, right now, and every day.**



what is this excursion?

*The **Your Next Step with God's Word Excursion** is a seven-week study designed to help you discover how you can grow in your connectedness with God as you become more like Christ.*

An excursion is a teaching series to help all of us, as a church body, to focus on a specific area and to take a next step together—that part about being together...it is vital to the process.



We need accountability, support, and encouragement if we hope to make it very far. So, commit to it now:

"I'm going to join a group, and I'm going to be honest with my group about where I am in my growth."

Without being judgmental, we are going to ask each other what's going on in our walk with God every week as a group, and then invite each person to share how things are going as it becomes clear what the next step is in becoming like Christ for them personally. *Scan the QR code to find a group!*



discussion questions



We believe that the adventure of becoming like Christ is best lived in community. We have various opportunities throughout our church to **Deepen** our roots in groups—including LifeGroups, Men's Groups and Women's Groups. During this Next Step Excursion, all of these groups will gather to unpack and apply the teaching from Sunday morning. Normally, weekly questions are available in the Open Door App or in an email sent to LifeGroup leaders. But during church-wide excursions, they are available in this booklet, along with other helpful tools and resources. **Use the questions as a loose guide for your discussion as you seek to make God's Word practical in your lives!**



action items

"Do the Word" Weekly Challenge Adventures, by nature, require action. You can spend hours of time watching other people's adventures, but to live the actual adventure, you have to put action behind it. Each week there are practical action items provided in the form of challenges to help you get started on this adventure. These challenges can be worked through alone, but it is recommended to find a trusted friend to review and discuss what you are learning.

adventure gear

These portions provide additional teaching and food for thought concerning your journey with Christ and how to take your next step. In the Great Commission, Jesus Himself makes it clear that we are not simply to keep His Word, but also to share it with others. **All Christ followers are called to “sow the seeds” among the people around us.** Therefore, each week, we will also give you a simple task to do



devotions

Living **Devoted** to God's Word is an essential part of following Jesus. Discussing how God is moving in your heart and mind as you meditate on His Word is one of the greatest ways to engage Scripture!



During this seven-week excursion, we invite you to commit to being in God's Word every day, and to hold those in your Group accountable to do the same. To sign up to receive our church devotions in your email, text DEVOTIONS to 440.323.4644. For more explanation on how to have daily devotions, visit opendoor.tv/devotionals.

include your entire family!

For the first time ever, we intentionally included our Kids and Students in the Next Step Excursion. As such, your children will learn about the same stories and main topics during their ministry programs. That way, **you can learn and grow together as a family.** You will also find student-specific discussion questions in this guide that may help you to engage your kids in the conversations. Have fun!

what's your next step?

Take the **Next Step Survey** (text “SURVEY” to 440.323.4644) to discern your current spiritual health and determine your next steps for becoming like Christ! For more information on the survey, see **Appendix A**; for profiles of the different stages of growth, see **Appendix B**.

NEW!!

Open Door Merch Now Available:

opendoor.tv/shop



Text "**MERCH**" to
440.323.4644

All proceeds go to Local and Global
Outreach partners.





week one

PREPARING FOR GOD'S WORD



“There is literally nothing more important you could do today than to spend meaningful time alone with God. [Yet] it seems like the people in America would be content to take a selfie with Moses. Don’t they know they can go up the mountain themselves?”

— **Francis Chan**

discussion questions



1. **Icebreaker:** Share a time when you remember being either over-prepared or under-prepared.
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. If you were totally convinced that God wanted to speak to you today, what would you do to get ready to hear what He has to say?
4. Is there anything that you like to do to prepare for your time in the Word? What difference do you notice when you prepare for your time versus when you don't spend time preparing?



5. **Read James 1:19-25.** What is the main point of what James is saying? If James were standing among you right now, what questions would you ask him about this passage? Based on these verses, if James were going to recommend something to you about how you prepare to approach God's Word, what do you think he would say?
6. **Read James 1:21 again.** According to James, what are some of the things that get in the way of humbly receiving the Word? How do those things "get in the way"?
7. What have been some of the biggest barriers to humbly receiving the Word in your life? Is there anything that has helped you to overcome those barriers?

Student-Specific Questions

1. How do you hear God's Word?
2. What are the different kinds of soil and what do they represent?



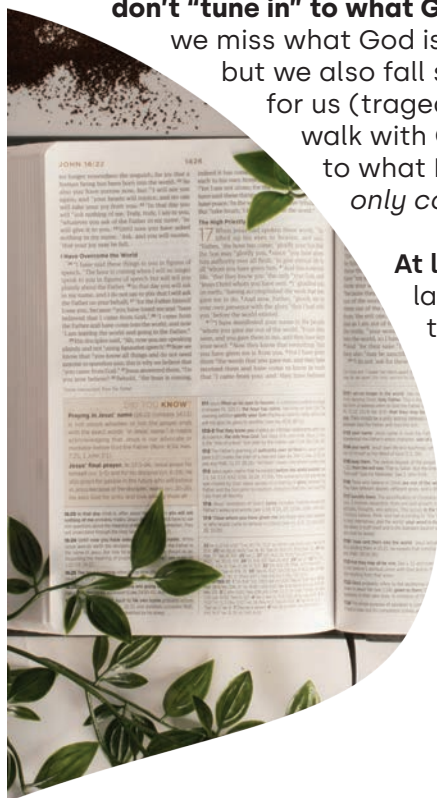


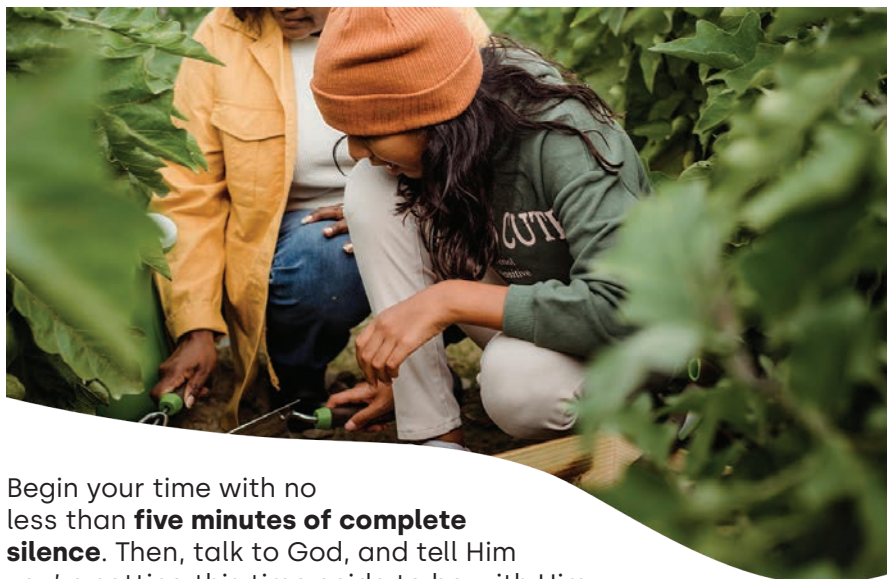
"DO THE WORD" weekly challenge

Over and over again throughout the Scriptures, and especially from the Old Testament prophets, we read that many people "have ears to hear, but do not hear" what God is saying to them (Ezekiel 12:2). It's almost as if there is a double tragedy taking place here. God has made us with ears, giving us the ability to hear! We are expected to hear what God has to say because God made us for relationship with Himself. **And yet, even though we have ears to hear, how often do days and weeks go by where we don't "tune in" to what God is saying to us?** So not only do

we miss what God is saying (tragedy number one), but we also fall short and forsake God's intention for us (tragedy number two). If we're going to walk with God, we need to learn to tune in to what He is saying. *However, tuning in only comes with practice.*

At least once this week, set aside a larger chunk of time than normal to pause, pray, and read Scripture. This isn't a competition, so don't try to spend six hours on this unless your normal devotional time lasts for five hours. But as you're deciding on the time, remember: It's not convenient now; so, if you're waiting for it to be convenient, you'll never start exercising this spiritual hearing muscle.



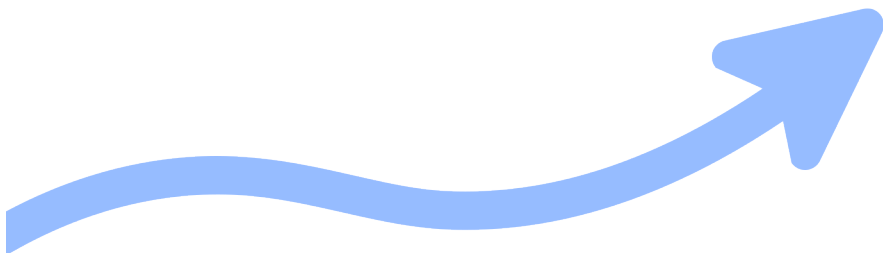


Begin your time with no less than **five minutes of complete silence**. Then, talk to God, and tell Him you're setting this time aside to be with Him. Decompress. Other things can wait.

After your time in silence, write a letter to God expressing your desire to hear from Him. Acknowledge any fears or reservations you may have about taking your next step with God's Word, about trying to hear what He has to say to you, or about this excursion in general. Thank God for the fact that we have His Word written down, preserved through the ages, and passed along faithfully for us to read today.

Spend a few minutes slowly reading **Scripture**. Write down anything that sticks out to you so that you can circle back to it later.

Then, before you wrap up your time, **ask God to begin to soften your heart**, to give you eyes to see, ears to hear as you seek your next step with God's Word.



adventure gear



There is no one right way to prepare to hear God's Word, but there are some key ingredients. In what follows, you will find eight practical suggestions for preparing yourself to meet God as you engage with Scripture. These are published by the Center for Scripture Engagement on BibleGateway's website. You can follow the URL below or scan the QR code to find the full article!



biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/main/getting-started



suggestions

- **Choose a time**

Set aside a specific amount of time in your weekly calendar to engage the Bible. Just as in any relationship, you have to spend time with God to know Him. This is probably the biggest downfall for more people than anything else in the whole process of Scripture engagement: We just don't make the time. As the saying goes, "We don't plan to fail, we fail to plan." Make time because of the joy that comes when you actually get to come close to God (Psalm 84:2, 10). Setting up time to meet with God is not a "should and ought," it is an "I get to!" And with that said, you should also...

- **Choose a good time**
Choose your time with the Bible during a “prime time” of your day—not when you are the most exhausted or distracted. God calls us to give him our “first fruits,” our best, not our leftovers.
- **Get rid of distractions**
Get rid of as many things as you can that usually distract you. Be honest here. What is likely to take your mind away from engaging the Bible? Our world seems to be designed to distract us from focusing on almost anything, but with diligent effort, you will grow in your attention to the Bible.
- **Quiet your heart**
Take the first minute or two of your time with the Bible and just think about what you're going to do. You are coming to God's Word to meet God himself.
- **Pray**
Briefly ask God to teach you, to meet you, and to bless your time in his Word. Ask for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the passage for you (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Commit to God that, with his strength, you will obey what you read.
- **Start**
Check out the many different Scripture engagement practices described on this website (biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement). Choose one and get going. It is better to start small and continue the practice than to start with huge goals, get disappointed, and stop. Something is better than nothing!
- **Keep moving**
If you get distracted or tired, don't worry or criticize yourself. Guilt won't keep you motivated for very long. Simply bring your mind back to the passage and start reading again.

Have you completed the “*What's Your Next Step*” Survey yet?
See Appendix A (page 129) for more details!



daily devotions



Reading God's Word

Sunday, September 22

2 Corinthians 7:5-16; Psalm 73

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

- *2 Corinthians 7:10*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I thank You for the gift of your grace. I thank You that You have given me a new mind: a mind that has been changed from tears of regret and shame to tears of joy in knowing salvation through Jesus. Let me live today fully alive, not regretting my past, but forever grateful for my eternal future in and with You. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Monday, September 23

2 Corinthians 8-9; Psalm 74

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

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. - *2 Corinthians 9:7*

Praying God's Word

Lord, You have given me all I have. My very breath comes from You. The blood coursing through my body, awakening my mind to your presence and Your voice is a gift from You. The dawn and the first birdsong are from Your hand. The moon glowing across Lake Erie and the stars poking their sleepy heads from the blanket of night are but one of a billion gifts from You. Father, we need Your heart. You loved us so much You gave us Your son. Convict us, embolden us to become a people who give extravagantly and give cheerfully as You have so graciously given to us. Amen.

Reading God's Word

2 Corinthians 10-11; Psalm 75

Tuesday, September 24

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. - *2 Corinthians 10:5*

Praying God's Word

Lord, in Jesus' name, I reject any thought that is not from You. In Jesus' name, I break all agreements that I am condemned. In Jesus' name, I reject any idea that I am alienated from You, and I trust in the promise that You are with me always. In Jesus' name, I kneel before You as a son/daughter: adopted, redeemed, chosen, blameless, holy, set apart, and more than a conqueror. Father, we grab and smash and reject and cast off ANY AND ALL thoughts that are not from Your loving Son, Jesus Christ. He is Lord and ruler of our minds and we humbly and boldly command all thoughts within them to become obedient to Him. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Wednesday, September 25

2 Corinthians 12-13; Psalm 76

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. - *2 Corinthians 12:9*

Praying God's Word

Lord, Your Word is truth. But this is hard. Help me to live in this paradox. Help me to cast off my wisdom and understand that You have chosen the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. Jesus, let me follow Your pattern of a complete emptying out of your power so true power could be displayed in what the world saw as weakness. Allow my love to be a cruciform love. One that is willing to be stripped of all I am so I no longer live, so that Your image and Your love can resurrect through me and that all may know who you are. Amen.

Reading God's Word
Catch-Up Day; Psalm 77

Thursday, September 26



**PREVIEWING
GALATIANS**

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you? To act
justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with
your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty
deeds. - *Psalm 77:12*

Praying God's Word

Lord, where do I start? How can I begin to even grasp all that
You have done? Skin... you made it waterproof! Fingerprints...
no two are the same! Tarantulas and tornados. Great white
sharks and the laws of gravity. From the desert to the dinosaur
and the mountains to the moon, Your works are beyond words.
And greatest of all, the work of salvation... our redemption... our
adoption as sons and daughters through faith in the finished work
of Jesus. I kneel today and sit in silent meditation and gratitude
for all You did to bring me, to bring us, back to Your table and Your
home. I love you Jesus. Amen.

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. - *Galatians 2:20*

Praying God's Word

Lord, zero me. All you. I don't want to read these words. I don't want to have Galatians 2:20 be my Instagram post, a bumper sticker, or a bracelet I wear. I don't want this to be something I quote or recite. I do not want one moment of my day today to be breathed by me. Only YOU. I do NOT live. You do. Period. YOU are the one who is alive in me. YOU are the one who is allowed to speak through me. YOU are the one who dictates my steps and my thoughts and my courage and my call. Today, now, I no longer live. Christ... Jesus... lives in me. Have Your way. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Saturday, September 28

Galatians 3:1-4:20; Psalm 79

Memorizing God's Word

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. - *Micah 6:8*

Meditating on God's Word

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - *Galatians 3:28*

Praying God's Word

Lord, in a world divided, may we see like Jesus. Make us one. In a church full of a thousand denominations, Lord, may we learn to worship like Jesus. Make us one. In a nation where so many flags are ripping us apart instead of pulling us together, may we stand under His banner of love. Make us one. Jesus, even as I say these words, something very sinister in me is laughing and whispering "how naïve, how cliché." I reject that voice. It's not yours. I reject the lie that unity is unachievable. It's Your heart. It's Your prayer for us. So therefore, it is mine. As You said in John 17, do whatever it takes in me to help us become one as You and the Father are one. Amen.

week two

RECEIVING THE WORD



"An honest man with an open Bible and a pad and pencil is sure to find out what is wrong with him very quickly."

— **A.W. Tozer**

discussion questions



1. **Icebreaker:** Tell a story, funny or serious, about a time in your life when you tried to plant or grow something.
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. **Read Luke 8:13 and Acts 17:11 together as a group.** Notice the word "receive" in both passages. This word comes from a Greek word that means "to welcome." How does it change your perspective to think of "welcoming the Word" in your life?
4. Make a list with the group of all the things you might do to prepare your house to welcome company. What are some similar ways you might prepare your life in order to welcome the truth of Scripture?
5. As we think about the rocky soil, we see two defining characteristics in Luke 8:6: a presence of rocks and a lack of moisture.
 - What do you think Jesus would consider to be the "rocks" that **hinder** the Word of God from taking root? What are some of the rocks in your own life, and what would it look like to sift them out of your heart?
 - **What spiritual conditions lead to a dried-up and thirsty heart?** Have you ever experienced one of these desert seasons in your life? If so, what were the things that brought refreshment back to your soul?
6. **Read Hebrews 12:1-3**, and then end your time by praying for each other that, in the well-watered and the desert seasons, God would give you the perseverance of Christ.

Student-Specific Questions

1. Do you enjoy reading the Bible or listening to it being taught? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been joyful about your relationship with God? If yes, do you still feel that way? If not, **what made that change?**
3. What are the things in your life that may be causing you to give up or stop growing?
4. Are there difficult situations, bad habits, or unhealthy relationships that are getting in the way? *Ask God to help you see what those things might be and how to grow through them.*



"Some people like to read many chapters every day. I would not dissuade them from the practice, but I would rather lay my soul asoak in half a dozen verses all day than rinse my hand in several chapters. Oh, to be bathed in a text of Scripture, and to let it be sucked up in your very soul, till it saturates your heart!"

—Charles Spurgeon

"DO THE WORD"

weekly challenge



dig deep for your "rocks"

Continue to be *"quick to listen, slow to speak"* (James 1:19) when it comes to the Holy Spirit. Every day, start by asking God: "What are the rocks you want to dig out of my life?". And then listen. This will require the art of being still and knowing He is God. You may want to fast from food or media one day, three days, seven days, however long it takes to hear the Holy Spirit speak clearly about the rocks hidden in your soil. **Soul searching is what the Holy Spirit does best, but only when we let Him.**



confess and restore relationships

The difference between the good soil and the rocky is seen by what you do. Inaction and complacency are the trademarks of rocky soil. So, if there are grudges you're holding, or unforgiveness that's festered, do not let apathy dictate the soil of our heart! Jesus said to *"leave your gift in front of the altar"* if you remember an offense someone has against you (Matt 5:24). Jesus knew that unforgiveness would be a solid rock obstructing our hearts from receiving the Word! So whether it's something you've done to another person, or something done to you, don't let the rock of unforgiveness remain in your life! Act with urgency and dig it up.

soak your soul in Scripture

Many times, the "dry and weary land" comes as a result of rushing through (or skipping entirely) the watering process of reading God's Word. We may find ourselves asking, *"Why don't I sense God's presence? Why does my walk with God feel stale?"* And yet, we are neglecting the most important tool of the Holy Spirit to draw us near – soaking our souls in Scripture. This can't be done in a few minutes, or while we're multitasking with other things. **So, find an hour in your day, whether it's getting up earlier, using a lunch break, or setting aside time before bed, and get alone with God's Word.** Putting it on your calendar is a great idea! Spend the first half of this time reading slowly and deliberately through a passage of Scripture. Use the second half of this time to journal, pray, and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is speaking. The key element here is unhurried. Soaking in Scripture isn't quick. It isn't easy. **But it is always worth it.**

practice spiritual breathing

Charles Spurgeon, talking about the rocky soil of Luke 8, said, *"We need the Holy Spirit; and if the Lord does not water us daily from the living springs on the hilltops of glory, we shall certainly die. So take heed, brothers and sisters, that you do not lack the moisture of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence."*

At Open Door we talk about the discipline of spiritual breathing – learning dependence upon the Holy Spirit as often and as necessary, as our dependence on oxygen. We breathe in, we breathe out. And when our breathing stops, so does our life. This is true of us physically, and it is true of us spiritually.

The moment we stop living with, relying on, and breathing in the Holy Spirit, we begin to die spiritually.

Spiritual breathing is listening to, receiving, and absorbing the presence of the Spirit (inhale), and then responding to Him in the prayer He inspires (exhale). So, as you read the Scriptures this week, breathe in the truth He breathes out, then breathe out the prayers He prompts in your heart. **This is God's watering process for our dry and thirsty souls.**



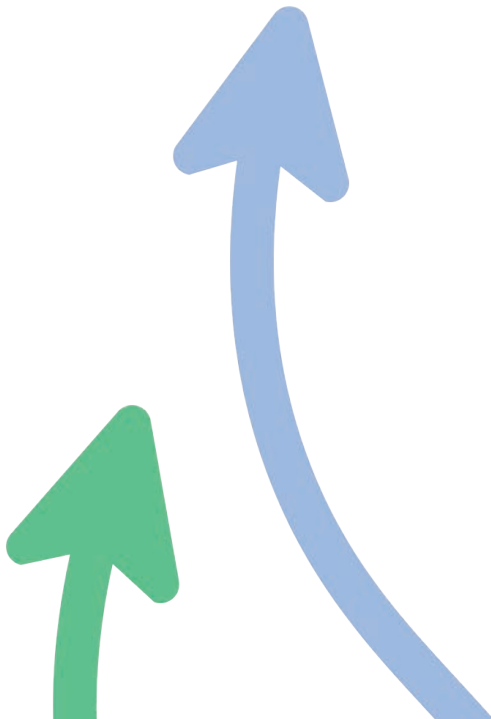


adventure gear

know your beliefs

Complete the **Know Your Beliefs Survey**.
How well do you know your Bible and
some of the core doctrinal areas?

Scan the QR code to complete this short
personal assessment. All individual
results will be kept confidential.



daily devotions



Reading God's Word

Galatians 4:21-5:12; Psalm 80

Sunday, September 29

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we might be saved. Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. - *Psalm 80:7*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I need You this week. Help me to keep my eyes on You and walk in the freedom of Your grace. Keep me from temptation and the bondage that sin can have on me. Amen.



Reading God's Word

Galatians 5:13-6:18; Psalm 81

Monday, September 30

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.
- *Galatians 5:16-17*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I truly want to do what is pleasing in Your sight, but my flesh drags me down time and time again. Keep my eyes on You. I know that You can remove my burdens and set me free. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Tuesday, October 1

Catch-Up Day; Psalm 82

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*



**PREVIEWING
EPHESIANS**

Meditating on God's Word

The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. - *Psalm 82:5*

Praying God's Word

Lord, You are the creator and the ruler of all things. The possessions, fashions, politics and all things of this world are temporary. Keep my trust and eyes on You. Not the 'gods' of this world. Open my eyes to those that are hurting around me. Jesus, I want to be Your hands and feet today. Amen.

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: - *Ephesians 1:1*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I want to know You like Paul knew You. Could I ever write a letter and honestly say it is from a servant of Jesus Christ? I want to be identified not by my job title or other labels this world puts on me, but as being and belonging only to You, by the will of God, faithful in Christ Jesus. Amen.



Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- *Ephesians 2:10*

Praying God's Word

Lord, what have You prepared for me today? Lead my steps today. I know You have a plan for my day and my life. I know You have given me the abilities to carry out those plans. I give my day to You, living surrendered to you. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Friday, October 4

Ephesians 3:1-4:16; Psalm 85

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, Lord, and grant us your salvation. - *Psalm 85:4-7*

Praying God's Word

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, Amen.

Reading God's Word

Saturday, October 5

Ephesians 4:17-6:9; Psalm 86

Memorizing God's Word

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, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. - *Psalm 1:1-2*

Meditating on God's Word

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.
- *Ephesians 6:7-8*

Praying God's Word

Lord, help me to be a servant of You by serving others. Give me the energy to work hard in all I do. May my work be an act of worship to You. Help me to work hard at loving my family, work hard in my job, and work hard at serving others. Amen.

week three

OBEYING THE WORD





"We can play pretend and try to set up an aquarium-type existence, devoid of interaction with anything or anyone who might challenge or upset us, but that's not the world Jesus came to save."

— **Brant Hansen**



discussion questions

1. **Icebreaker:** Before we get all serious about the thorns in our lives, why don't we share some not-so-serious thorns in our lives. What are some small or insignificant things (at least in your opinion) in your life that are thorns to you or those around you?
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. What has been your favorite moment with God this week?
4. What was your most difficult question when you completed the "Know Your Belief" survey in week 2?
5. What seems to choke scripture out in your life the most? In other words, **what is it that seems to win more frequently than obeying God's Word?**
6. What would your spouse/parents/family/friends/etc. say is a thorn they see in your life? If they are in the group you're in right now, are you willing to allow them to share what they see?
7. Just like in our actual gardens and lawns, when we see weeds and thorns, we act. Whether that is pulling them or using weed killer, we don't let them just linger and grow. What are actions you can take in your life to get rid of the **weeds and thorns** choking our God's Word?

Student-Specific Questions

1. What do you believe are the biggest “weeds” in your life? **What seems to always sprout up**, no matter how hard you try to pull it from your life?
2. What do you believe is the **hardest** thing about obeying the Word of God?
3. In Matthew 28: 19-20, we are instructed to make disciples of all nations. Do you believe that you are making disciples of all nations? All different types of people? Even people you don't like or get along with?



"DO THE WORD"
**weekly
challenge**



Read Psalm 139:23-24.

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

Repeat this daily and truly allow God to examine your heart and show you your thorns. Either self-reflect or share what God is showing you.



"The child of God must be completely obedient to the Word of the Lord. The driver on the highway is not safe when he reads the signs but when he obeys them."

—AW Tozer



we all need somebody to lean on!

- **Take some time right now to think about those in your life.** Think about your family, your friends and your church body. *Now, write down 3-5 names of those you trust the most.* If you can't think of that many, maybe consider adding your campus pastor or ministry director.
- Now that you have done that, **reach out to all of them.** Not just one of them, all of them. Whether it is an email, phone call, text, or maybe even breaking bread together, it is crucial that you get in touch with each person whose name you have written down.
- Finally, **tell those people what the thorns are in your life.** This will only make a difference if you are completely vulnerable and transparent. We were never created for isolation; we must invite people into our mess to help us clean up and stay clean.

Need help with your thorns? Here are a few resources of which you may want to take advantage.

- Celebrate Recovery, GriefShare, & DivorceCare (visit opendoor.tv/events for details)
- Groups, ie. LifeGroups, Men's & Women's Groups, Student Ministries (text GROUPS to 440.323.4644)
- Christian counselors in the area
- Prayer (text PRAYER to 440.323.4644)

daily devotions



Reading God's Word

Ephesians 6:10-24; Psalm 87

Sunday, October 6

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*

Meditating on God's Word

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. - *Ephesians 6:10*



Praying God's Word

Lord, You equip us to live the Christian life, but we need to 'put on' the armor to defend ourselves and remain strong with *truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, your Word and prayer*. As we step into our day may we have a readiness to be strong in your power, living fearlessly and victoriously in You! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Monday, October 7

Catch-Up Day; Psalm 88

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*



**PREVIEWING
PHILIPPIANS**

Meditating on God's Word

O Lord, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.

- *Psalm 88:1-2*

Praying God's Word

Lord, the psalmist cries out in distress, becoming engulfed by a lifetime of troubled circumstances. It is difficult to relate to this level of ongoing despair; however, none of us will escape times when our faith is challenged and questioned. At times like these, do we look to our circumstances, or do we look to You? I choose you! 'Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.' (Psalm 42:11). Amen.

Reading God's Word

Tuesday, October 8

Philippians 1:1-26; Psalm 89

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*

Meditating on God's Word

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

- *Philippians 1:6*

Praying God's Word

Lord, this is such good news—that You will continue to work in me! May my love for you abound in knowledge and insight. Fill me with the fruit of righteousness, which is only possible because of my relationship with You. Walking in the light of Your presence is a rich blessing and I will declare Your great love courageously today! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Wednesday, October 9

Philippians 1:27-2:30; Psalm 90

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*

Meditating on God's Word

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. - *Philippians 2:4-5*

Praying God's Word

Lord, if we do not care well for ourselves, we will not be able to unselfishly focus on the interests of others. Strengthen us in our inner parts, so we may wisely identify the balance between personal needs and the needs of others. May we be open, and surrendered, to receive divine guidance. Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12) Amen.

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*

Meditating on God's Word

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. - *Psalm 91:1*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I feel so loved and protected by You! When I visualize statements like; 'safeguard for you,' 'took hold of me,' 'everything under his control,' 'rest in the shadow,' 'my refuge,' 'cover you,' 'under his wings,' 'shield and rampart,' my response is simply to thank You that I am Your child. I rest in the shadow of Your presence today! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Philippians 4:4-23; Psalm 92

Friday, October 11

Memorizing God's Word

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.

- *Matthew 28:19-20*

Meditating on God's Word

Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - *Philippians 4:6*

Praying God's Word

Lord, there is heightened anxiety all around us with daily concerns, as well as uncertain futures. You know. You care. You listen. Guard my heart so as I pray for myself and others, I will be reminded that peace comes from a surrendered heart, and mind, focused upon You. Amen.



Memorizing God's Word

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.

- Matthew 28:19-20



**PREVIEWING
COLOSSIANS**

Meditating on God's Word

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. - Psalm 93:1

Praying God's Word

Lord, we began our devotions this week with a challenge to 'put on...' As we reflect upon the last few days, what exactly did we put on? How did we prepare for our day? Were we ready to give an answer for the hope within us? (1 Peter 3:15) Did we clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? (Colossians 3:12) We can begin again today to 'put on' (What do you need?), to become armed with godly strength.



week four

PERSEVERING IN THE WORD



“Regarding God’s Word, let us love it and live in it and eat it and drink it and lie down on it and walk on it and stand on it and swear by it and live by it and rest in it.”

— **A.W. Tozer**



discussion questions

1. **Icebreaker:** competition challenge - have a staring contest in your group and see who wins. Everyone must participate! Who perseveres the longest?
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. **Persevere (verb):** *To keep at something in spite of difficulties, opposition, or discouragement.* (Merriam-Webster)
Tell a story in your life about you or another person when you saw them or yourself apply this definition to a journey in God's Word.

4. **Read Joshua 1:8.** How did this challenge from God to Joshua bear fruit in his life (see *Joshua 24:15*)? What does it mean to “meditate” on the Word? How does our world approach meditation?
5. Discuss the differences.
6. Psalm 63:6; 77:12 (MSG) “If I’m sleepless at midnight, I spend the hours in grateful reflection.”; “Once again I’ll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders; I’ll ponder all the things You’ve accomplished, and give a long, loving look at Your acts.” **What does this teach us about persisting in the Word of God?**
7. Share with one another a favorite passage or text that has been a mainstay in your life and gotten you through difficult times. How did the Word of God enable you to persevere through your circumstances?
8. How does persevering in the Word actually help you to know God better?
9. Spend time praising God for the provision of His Word, and also pray for anyone in your group who is struggling and needing encouragement from the Word to endure a current situation.

Student-Specific Questions

1. Ultimately, what does God want from you when you read His Word?
2. How do you learn to hear from God?

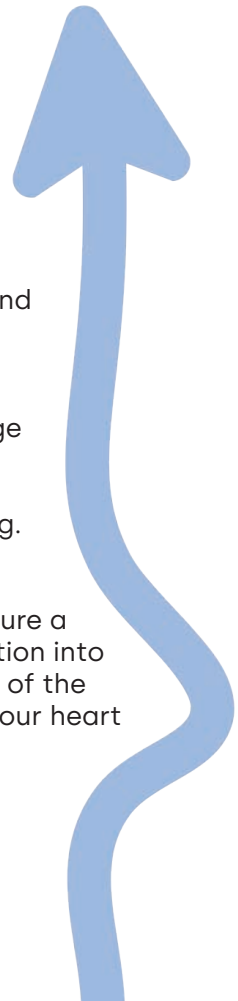




"DO THE WORD" weekly challenge

Try an old (or perhaps new to you) method in order to persevere in the Word: *Lectio Divina*. The following is a form of prayer and study that has helped the church for the past 1,500 years to seek God using His Word (especially when the majority of people could not read and only heard a brief passage every week). So, the church developed this method.

- Silencio – **quiet**: prepare the heart. Come into God's presence, slow down, relax, and release the chaos and tension in your mind to Him.
- Lectio – **read the Word**: take a passage and read it out loud, linger over the words so they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase hits you, stop, ask God what He's saying. Listen, wait, and write down your thoughts.
- Meditatio – **meditate**: Read the Scripture a second time out loud. Listen for a God's invitation into this Word from Him. Reflect on the importance of the words that stand out to you. Ponder them in your heart - what is God inviting you into?



- Oratio – **respond**: Pray. Read the scripture a third time. Now is the time to have an open dialogue with God about it. Be truthful and authentic. Tell Him your feelings, where you feel resistant - talk to God about it all.

- Contemplatio – **contemplate**: Rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the Word to sink deeply into your soul. Surrender. Before you move on, consider a reminder that can help you dwell on this Word today (e.g. note card, post it note, calendar reminder).



“Our desire to know more, read more and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal.”

—Richard Rohr

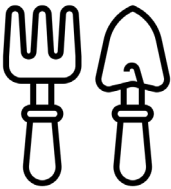
(Adapted from the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Calhoun, pages 188-189)

adventure gear



- **Try setting up some fixed times in your day to pray and ponder a scripture.** Daniel prayed three times a day as a habit (Daniel 6:10), David prayed seven times a day (Psalm 119:164), and Jesus (along with most devout Jews of the first century) had fixed times in the day to focus their attention on God—morning, mid-day, evening, eating, sleeping, and many more! What are fixed times of the day that you could use God's Word and to pray? (A great book that explores this is *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* by Tish Harrison Warren)

Here are some passages you could begin with, but don't just recite them. Make them your own!



Matthew 6:9-13 — the Lord's Prayer

Psalm 23 — the sheep's prayer

1 Kings 8:22-61 — Solomon's prayer

Daniel 9:1-19 — Daniel's prayer of confession

Jonah 2:1-10 — Jonah's prayer from the depths

Luke 1:67-79 — Zachariah's prayer



- **Another great way to persevere in the Word is to discipline yourself to read it and/or listen to it consistently!** Download the Bible app (bible.com/app) onto your phone. Then, pick a book of the Bible on which to concentrate, and listen to it over and over and over. Set aside your normal podcasts, music playlists or news feeds and allow the Word of God to be the only audio you hear for a full week, month, or season! See what a difference it makes when you allow yourself to be filled with the auditory reading of the Word and how persevering in that Word changes your perspective, attitude and desires!
- **Explore what it means to memorize God's Word in a way that is enjoyable and life-giving!** Keith Ferrin was the keynote at this past year's Cornerstone Pregnancy Center's Spring Banquet! His passion and mission "are helping individuals, families, and entire churches realize that the Bible isn't only true and relevant. It's also outstanding and enjoyable!" Hear his story and catch a vision for a passion for the Word at his website: keithferrin.com.



daily devotions



Reading God's Word

Sunday, October 13

Colossians 1:1-2:5; Psalm 94

Memorizing God's Word

"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."
- *John 15:5*

Meditating on God's Word

We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people. - *Colossians 1:3-4*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I thank You for our incredible church family and for everyone who attends Open Door at each of our campuses. Thank You for blessing me with so many friends here who also love You. Please help me to make new connections with people today and to see people through Your eyes. Thank You for loving us! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Monday, October 14

Colossians 2:6-3:11; Psalm 95

Memorizing God's Word

"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."

- *John 15:5*

Meditating on God's Word

Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.

- *Colossians 2:8*

Praying God's Word

Lord, as we continue in this excursion, please let me remain faithful and listen only to You and Your word. Protect me and my heart from any other voices and influences. I want to follow only You and what You say! Thank you that in You I have all the fullness of life and that I am alive in You! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Tuesday, October 15

Colossians 3:12-4:18; Psalm 96

Memorizing God's Word

"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."

- John 15:5

Meditating on God's Word

Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. - Colossians 3:13

Praying God's Word

Lord, please help me to forgive other people today! I especially pray for... *(add names of people who have hurt you in the past)*. You have forgiven me for so much more by dying for my sins on the cross that I want to honor You by treating others in the same forgiving way. Don't allow any anger or bitterness that comes from these past hurts remain in my heart. Instead, please help me to let go of their offenses and to focus on You and what You have done for me. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Catch-Up Day; Psalm 97

Wednesday, October 16

Memorizing God's Word

"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." - *John 15:5*



**PREVIEWING
1 THESSALONIANS**

Meditating on God's Word

Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name. - *Psalm 97:12*

Praying God's Word

Lord, let me praise You with all of my heart today! Let every breath out of my mouth honor You! You deserve all of my worship! I love You and Your holy name. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Thursday, October 17

1 Thessalonians 1; Psalm 98

Memorizing God's Word

"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."

- John 15:5

Meditating on God's Word

And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God - 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9

Praying God's Word

Lord, allow us to be a church family that welcomes people! Please help me personally to be someone who makes people feel accepted and that they belong and are drawn to You! Today, let me see the people around me as You see them and give me courage to get out of my comfort zone and respond accordingly. Please allow me to be a light in this world daily that shines brightly for You! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Friday, October 18

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16; Psalm 99

Memorizing God's Word

"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."

- *John 15:5*

Meditating on God's Word

And then, dear brothers and sisters, you suffered persecution from your own countrymen. In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews.

- *1 Thessalonians 2:14*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I want to pray for all the people around the world who are being persecuted for proclaiming Your name and Word. Thank you for their courage and their provision of an example of what it means to follow You completely. Bless them and their families in the midst of their difficult and painful circumstances! Give them strength and boldness... and let me gain from their strength to live each day fully devoted to You. Amen.



week five

HEARING THE WORD



“Our failure to hear His voice when we want to is due to the fact that we do not in general want to hear it, that we want it only when we think we need it.”

— **Dallas Willard**



discussion questions

1. **Icebreaker:** In the sermon introduction, we talked about the saying that has become so popular with the advent of mobile phones: "can you hear me now?" When was the last time you used that phrase? Have you identified "dead zones" in your house or while driving? Share with the group where they are.
2. What stood out to you most in the sermon?
3. We have been talking about the four elements of hearing God's Word for four weeks now in our Excursion. They were summarized again in this week's sermon:

Humble Openness
Eager Acceptance
Active Obedience
Retentive Perseverance

As you think back over these four elements and what we've learned over the last four weeks, which one do you find easiest to do? Which one do you struggle with the most and would like more help with? As a group, encourage each other and help each other in this, perhaps sharing practices you have found helpful.

4. Learning to hear God's Word helps us grow, but there are many other benefits from learning to really hear God's Word. As a group, look up the following verses and then fill in the blank.

Psalm 107:20: Hearing the Word of God _____ Us

Psalm 119:28: Hearing the Word of God _____ Us

Psalm 78:1: Hearing the Word of God _____ Us

Psalm 25:4,5 (NASB): Hearing the Word of God _____ Us

5. Can you think of an example from your life when God's Word healed you, taught you, strengthened you or led you? Share it with the group.
6. In what ways have you been resistant to letting God's Word change you? What are you "hearing," but not really hearing (H.E.A.R.ing according to Jesus) in your walk with God?
7. What happens if you leave one of the four elements out of H.E.A.R.ing God's Word?

Student-Specific Questions

1. Do you think you are a good listener? Who is the best listener you know? Why?
2. When you listen, are you open to changing your perspective or actions, or are you looking for ways to prove the other person wrong?
3. What do you think the difference is between hearing and doing?
4. What is one thing you have heard many times, but you still need to act on?



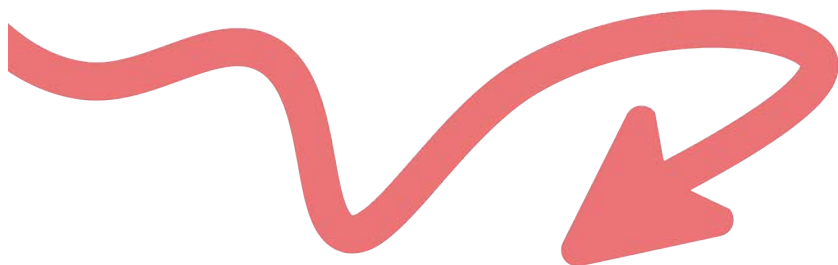
"DO THE WORD"
**weekly
challenge**



Now that we have learned how to HEAR according to Jesus, let's put the whole acronym into practice. Try turning the HEAR acronym into a prayer each time you read the Word or hear it preached or taught. If you are not reading the Word every day, start doing it this week. A helpful tool to use is the church-wide devotions we provide each day. Before you begin to read the Scripture for the day, pray through each of the four elements of how to HEAR God's Word according to Jesus.



Humble Openness
Eager Acceptance
Active Obedience
Retentive Perseverance



Here is one simple suggestion of how to turn this H.E.A.R. acronym into a prayer:

H—Ask God to humble your heart as you prepare to read or hear His Word.

E—Tell God you are eager to hear His Word and ask Him to give you ears to hear.

A—Pray *Psalm 119:145* back to God. (Then actively obey Him!)

R—Ask God to help you retain the Word you are hearing and reading today.

prayer



Use this prayer outline each time you read or hear the Word this week. **Report back to your group next week how it went.**

adventure gear



H.E.A.R. Test

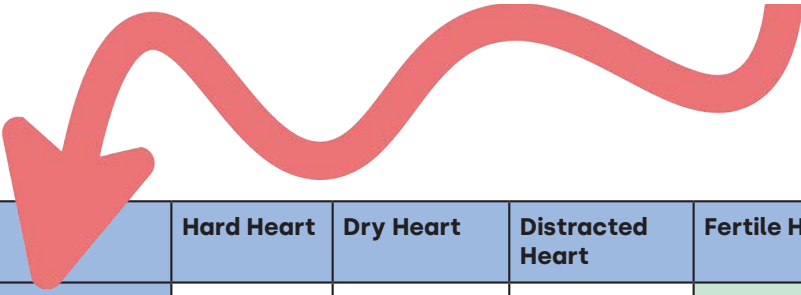
The soil of your heart determines the harvest in your life and the soil of your heart is revealed by how well you H.E.A.R. Most of us tend to think more highly of ourselves than what is actually true and practiced in our lives. Therefore, it can be helpful to have an objective test by which to measure ourselves. Read through the statements in the chart to the right and ask yourself honestly, "which statements from each row best represent how I actually live?" This assessment can give a helpful and more honest answer to the question: "which of the four soils Jesus described best represents the soil of my heart?"



Reminder: These four "soils" are not stages of growth; they are descriptions of the conditions of people's hearts. Unlike other

assessments, where you grow from one stage to another, this assessment divides hearers into two groups: those who "hear" but don't produce any fruit (the first three columns of hard soil, dry soil, distracted soil) and those who HEAR and do produce a crop (the last column, the fertile soil). God's desire is for us to have hearts like the fertile soil Jesus describes.

After you have taken the assessment, read **Luke 8:18** in the ESV again. Then talk to God in prayer about what the test revealed and ask Him to help you HEAR the way Jesus encouraged us to hear: with Humble openness, Eager acceptance, Active obedience, and Retentive perseverance.



	Hard Heart	Dry Heart	Distracted Heart	Fertile Heart
Humble Openness	I don't care what the Bible or preachers say.	The Bible doesn't seem relevant to my life.	I want to hear what God says to me, but then I get side-tracked.	I am wide open to whatever God wants to say to me.
Eager Acceptance	I think this assessment is stupid.	I am resistant to someone preaching.	I am too busy to go to church every week.	I am eager to hear the preaching of the Word.
Active Obedience	I don't like being told what to do.	I don't see the need for obedience to God's Word.	I want to obey God's Word, but I get easily distracted.	I am quick to obey God's Word. There are no areas of disobedience in my life.
Retentive Perseverance	I don't trust the Bible or preachers.	I have a hard time engaging with the Bible and sermons.	I make commitments to read, hear and memorize God's Word but then don't follow up on them.	I memorize God's Word and use it in my life.

daily devotions



Reading God's Word

Sunday, October 20

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, Psalm 101

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

Finally, then brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

- *1 Thessalonians 4:1*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I am so thankful for Your Word You have given us. You have called us to live a pure, holy life, pleasing to you, and because of your Word, we are fully equipped and made clear on how we ought to walk. Your Word teaches us what is true and right. It convicts us of sin in our life. It lovingly guides us along righteous paths. Help me to continue to stand firm on your Word even more, making it a lamp to my feet and light for my path. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Monday, October 21

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, Psalm 102

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. - *1 Thessalonians 5:2*

Praying God's Word

Lord, we do not know the time or season of your coming. What we do know with absolute certainty is that You WILL return and it will be without warning. When that day comes, I want to be spiritually awake and ready. Prepare my heart and my mind right now. Let the truths in Your word wash over me and sanctify me making me righteous and pure and completely prepared to meet my maker. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Wednesday, October 23

2 Thessalonians 1, Psalm 104

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

- *2 Thessalonians 1:3*

Praying God's Word

Lord, if someone were to write a letter or a news article about the Church of the Open Door, I wonder what their observations would conclude. Would they witness a church that is growing more and more in love and faith? Or would they see a church that is crumbling under the weight of hardships and suffering? Oh, that we would be a church that perseveres and stands strong when trials arise. A church that is counted worthy of Your calling and of Your kingdom. A church where You are glorified in everything. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Thursday, October 24

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Psalm 105

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what He has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds. - *Psalm 105:1-2 (NLT)*

Praying God's Word

Lord, throughout my life I have witnessed Your hand guiding and protecting me throughout many circumstances. I have seen You work miracles in situations that seemed hopeless. I have felt Your loving hand pull me out of the depths when I was sinking. Oh, that I would not forget how You have been and are continuing to move in my life. Would I make those known to others and they be testimony of Your greatness and faithfulness. For You are so worthy to be praised and given glory for all You've done. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Friday, October 25

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:18, Psalm 106

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. - *2 Thessalonians 2:15*

Praying God's Word

Lord, we live in a world where truth is what each individual perceives it to be. We are told that all our opinions are valid and that we should live out our own reality. This is pure deception, though. It is the secret power of lawlessness, talked about in our reading today. It's on the rise in our nation and has started to take root in some people's minds. Help me to stand firm and hold fast to the teachings in your Word. I pray they will be securely fixed in my heart and mind and dwell in me richly. For You and Your Word are the absolute truth that keeps me on paths of righteousness. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Catch-Up Day; Psalm 107

Saturday, October 26

Memorizing God's Word

"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them." - *Luke 8:18*

Meditating on God's Word

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind - *Psalm 107:21*

Praying God's Word

Lord, Your love for us is unfailing and steadfast. In our distress and trouble, every time we cry out to You, you swoop in and rescue us. You quench our thirst and fill our souls when we are wandering. You bring us out of darkness and break away our chains when we are sinning. You heal us with Your Word and rescue us from the grave when we are rebelling. You quiet the storm and calm the sea when we are stumbling. Let us rejoice and give thanks that You are a merciful God who redeems us when we call out to You and places us on solid ground. Amen.



**PREVIEWING
1 TIMOTHY**



week six

PRACTICING THE WORD



"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

— **Jesus**

discussion questions



1. **Icebreaker:** What is a family rule or expectation you had growing up that you disobeyed or loathed but has now become a valued practice? Share your story.
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. **Read Luke 8:19-21.** What does Jesus mean when He says, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice"?
4. **Read John 14:15, Luke 11:28, and Matthew 7:21.** Based on these verses, what would you conclude is the calling of a follower of Jesus? How does this relate to the truth of God's grace?
5. Think of a recent situation where you had to choose between following God's word and conforming to social or familial expectations. How did you handle it, and what could you have done differently?
6. We often read things Jesus said such as "sell everything, deny yourself, turn the other cheek, love your enemy, etc." and our first reaction is to explain how that is impossible/unreasonable. Do you think we are to take these statements **literally**? Why or why not?
7. Honestly, would others consider you to be known more as someone who hears/studies the Word or as someone who practices the Word? What (if anything) needs to change?
8. How can we support and encourage one another in our group to live out the teachings of Jesus more faithfully? What are some **practical steps** we can take?



Student-Specific Questions

1. We all have influence. **How do you see your influence impacting those around you?** Is it based on your privilege/position? Or is it based on Jesus Christ living within you? *Explain your answer.*
2. Do you believe you have a **safe community** where you can practice the Word of God, even if that means failing at times?
3. Just like we read in James 1:22, **where do we deceive ourselves?** Where do we hear the Word, but don't put it into practice?





"DO THE WORD"
**weekly
challenge**

"Our actions follow our beliefs 100% of the time."
—Dallas Willard

Whether you are one day into your journey to become like Jesus or you have many years as a follower, **the call for all of us is the same:**

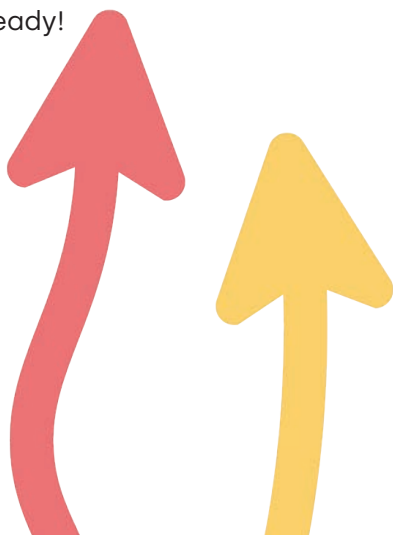
"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

—Matthew 28:19-20

This is the command from Jesus to his followers right before he left this earth. It's not "part" of his plan for us. This IS his plan for us. In light of our sermon this week on practicing the Word, our challenge for you is to take a step in obedience here. This week our devotions will take us into Galatians 2:20 where Paul penned these words: "I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live but Christ lives in me." **Doing the Word begins with believing the Word.** Do you believe Jesus is alive in you? Do you believe that He came to put the old fearful you to death so you can live courageously in Him through His Spirit (2 Timothy 1:7)? How can you courageously step out in faith this week? What can you do this week to begin making disciples?

The following is a list of suggestions to begin doing the Word and not merely hearing it:

1. **Challenge yourself to intentionally greet as many people as you can each day.** Yes, literally just say "Hi" or "How's it going?" to as many people as you come across. Sound easy? Try it. It's hard! But it is SO like Jesus. Jesus NOTICES people. He greets them. It's pretty hard to make disciples if we are not even willing to say hello.
2. **Share your testimony with a family member or friend this week.** Fumble through it if you have to. It helps you to work it out. Making disciples begins by sharing the good news of how Jesus has changed our lives with others. Family and friends are a great place to start.
3. **Invite one or two people from church to begin a DIG (Discipleship Intensive Group) with you.** Commit to a period of six months or more to meet weekly and grow together. *There are resources listed on our website (opendoor.tv/dig) or you can contact one of our pastors for additional information or ideas.
4. **Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal an opportunity to love someone intentionally like Jesus while you are walking, shopping, or at work.** This may sound cliché and trivial but an honest prayer to have a Jesus-like encounter with someone will usually involve a clear opportunity to encourage, pray for, lay hands on, or simply share your faith with someone. God LOVES to answer this request. Be ready!





adventure gear

Many of us devote time to reading and/or hearing God's Word. Daily devotions, podcasts, and YouTube sermons are common occurrences for many Christians. However, the reality is that many of us are merely "hearers" of the Word when we have been called to be "doers of the Word" (James 1:22-25). **God speaks and it is our responsibility to not just listen, but also follow.** Jesus commands us to apply or put his Word into practice. A healthy exercise as you read Scripture is to begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to speak and convict, making **S.P.A.C.E.** for God to work. As you read and re-read, go back and ask the following questions to help you apply God's Word to your life.

S – Sin

Is there a sin I should confess or be watchful of?

P – Promise

Is there a promise I can claim?

A – Attitude

Is there an attitude I should adopt or change?

C – Command

Is there a command I need to obey?

E – Example

Is there an example I should follow or avoid?

Begin with Matthew 5. This is the beginning of Jesus' sermon on the mount. What a perfect place to begin putting the Word into practice! Read slowly through the passage. The point isn't to finish. **The point is to allow the Spirit to speak, reveal, and convict.** You might make it through the whole chapter or, the Spirit might stop you after only a few verses. Let Him take the lead. Review the S.P.A.C.E. questions (above) as often as needed.

To get more in-depth with S.P.A.C.E., you might try highlighting like this:

When you read the Bible, look for S.P.A.C.E.

Sins **Promises** **Assurances** **Commands** **Examples**

Luke 9:46-50

46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."

49 "Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us."

50 "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

Galatians 5:16-26

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

After you've found the S.P.A.C.E. in the Scripture, turn it into a prayer:

Sin: "I know I have offended you by not trusting you in this area of my life: _____ . Forgive me, God."

Promise: "Thank you for teaching (reminding, or promising) me that: _____."

Attitude: "By your Spirit, help me become a more _____ person that reflects your image. More mindful of _____."

Command: "Help me to live in light of who you are: Father, May I be quick to _____."

Example: "As I lead others in the adventure of becoming like Christ: Help me also to live in the light of your truth. Today, may I live like _____."

Next, take the following week to review the answers God revealed to you. Begin each day praying for conviction and strength to practice the various promises, commands, examples, etc. you were led to write down. Take time to share with a fellow disciple the revelations God has asked you to practice. **Invite that person to hold you accountable over the next several weeks, being sure to confess to one another your failures along with your victories.**



Reading God's Word

Tuesday, October 29

1 Timothy 3:1-13; Psalm 110

Memorizing God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

Meditating on God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

Praying God's Word

Lord, I have attended church for years and heard numerous messages. How many times have I really listened? Too many times I am thinking about lunch, plans for the rest of the day, work, and unfortunately the Browns game. It's humbling for me to think about what my Christian life would be like if I truly listened to the Word and acted upon it. Amen

Reading God's Word

Wednesday, October 30

1 Timothy 3:14-4:16; Psalm 111

Memorizing God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

Meditating on God's Word

Do not neglect the gift within you, which was given to you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. - 1 Timothy 4:14 (LSB)

Praying God's Word

Lord, we read today that Paul is telling Timothy to not neglect the gifts he was given. We are all like Timothy. We are told to use the gifts we have been given. We cannot keep and bury the talents God has given us. Holy Spirit show me the gifts I have been given and give me the courage to step out and put them to use with your help. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Thursday, October 31

1 Timothy 5:1-6:2b; Psalm 112

Memorizing God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

Meditating on God's Word

For he will never be shaken; The righteous will be remembered forever. He will not fear an evil report; His heart is set, trusting in Yahweh. - Psalm 112:6-7 (LSB)

Praying God's Word

Lord, You are the foundation of my life. When bad news comes into my life, and it will, may I firmly be grounded in You. Help me to be an example for those around me. May I point others to You in the good and bad times. May I always trust You. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Saturday, November 2

2 Timothy 1:1-2:13; Psalm 114

Memorizing God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - *James 1:22*

Meditating on God's Word

Therefore do not be ashamed of either the witness about our Lord or me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, - *2 Timothy 1:8 (LSB)*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I don't want to feel ashamed to follow You. I honestly don't know what it is like to suffer for the Gospel. I am not persecuted like those we read about in the Bible or stories I hear from missionaries. Father, I pray for those who are suffering. Strengthen them wherever they are now. If I am called to suffer for You, I want to give you the glory. Amen.



week seven

SOWING THE WORD



“When a man is filled with the Word of God you cannot keep him still. If a man has got the Word, he must speak or die.”

— **D.L. Moody**

“Evangelism has always been the heartbeat for our ministry; it is what God has called us to do.”

— **Billy Graham**

discussion questions



1. **Icebreaker:** Share the first time you heard the gospel message. Then, share the first time you shared the gospel with someone.
2. What stood out to you most from the sermon?
3. What does that mean to be a **Sower of the Word**?
4. Do you consider yourself a Sower of the Word? Why or why not?
5. Why are some people receptive to the Word and others aren't?
6. What role does the Holy Spirit play in evangelism and sowing the Word?
7. Does evangelism come **naturally** to you? Why or why not?
8. What is the **biggest hurdle** that gets in the way of sharing your faith boldly?
9. *Take time to pray for opportunities and boldness to share the Word.*

Student-Specific Questions

1. As we have heard about the HEAR acronym, what is the easiest and hardest letter for you personally?
2. Although we know some won't hear us when we share the gospel, **we are called to share**. Who is someone that you have given up on, that God wants you to continue to share the gospel with?
3. What has been your biggest takeaway from this whole Excursion Guide? **What is your next step?**



"DO THE WORD" weekly challenge

- We have the privilege of putting into practice the "sowing of the Word." **We all have circles of influence and a calling to sow the Word and teach the gospel.** This week, set aside time to do some sowing of your own. This can be at your dinner table, around a fire pit, or during your Group gathering. *Whatever the context, gather a group of people, read the Word aloud, and discuss what you have learned from it.*
 - Gather as a group.
 - **Read Matthew 10:36-38:**
"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"
 - Share what God has laid on your heart concerning this passage.
 - Begin praying that God would send out workers — specifically that He would send out YOU!
- **This week, find someone to have a gospel conversation with,** whether it's with a believer who needs encouragement or a lost sheep who needs hope. Ask good questions and sow the Word.



Don't get discouraged if people don't respond immediately to the Gospel or in a very positive way. That's perfectly ok! Your job is simply to be available to the spirit and His moving in the hearts of people. Just keep trying and learn from the experience.



adventure gear

John 17:20

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message."

As messengers of the gospel, **we should be equipped with the tools necessary for showing and sharing the love of Christ.** We must look for opportunities to sow the Word into any situation and any relationship.

Learn to ask good questions. **Questions are the key to a successful gospel conversation.** Every interaction is an opportunity to become a learner—to discover more about another soul. We need to become people who are genuinely interested in the lives of others.

Learn to be a dynamic asker of questions. Build an inventory of questions you can pull from later.



Here are some example questions that you can add to your repertoire:

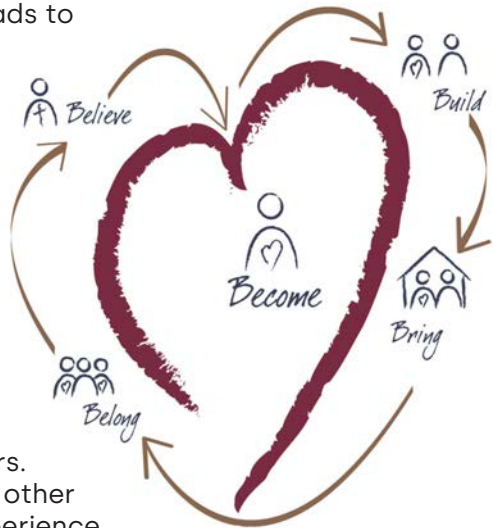
- Tell me more about your tattoos. What are the stories behind them?
- When you aren't at work, what do you enjoy doing with your free time?
- How's your day? What would need to happen to make it better?
- Thank you for the food. I'm about to pray for the meal, do you have anything I can pray for?
- Are you connected to a church in the area?
- What do you do with Jesus?



Remember, we are called to be Sowers of the Word and representatives of the gospel. At Church of the Open Door, we often talk about it in the framework of doing the B's:

Because of the **love** we have for our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc., we **BUILD** relationships with them, serve them, model Christ to them and explore what they believe about Jesus. This leads to **spiritual conversations** that directly relate to their spiritual questions and concerns and offers opportunities for us to lovingly share the gospel.

These spiritual conversations make it more natural for us to **BRING** them to a group, worship service, BRING event, or just relational activities with other believers. The more they interact with other believers, the more they experience the **love of God** and start to feel they **BELONG**. **This allows them to see and hear the gospel lived out and spoken through relationships.**



Throughout this process, we are praying and listening to the Holy Spirit and looking for **opportunities** to share and explain the gospel so they might **BELIEVE** the truth of the gospel, surrender their lives to Christ and put their faith in Him. Once they believe, Christians who know them continue the relationship by **discipling** them, helping them in the lifelong adventure of **BECOMING** more like CHRIST.

daily devotions



Reading God's Word

2 Timothy 2:14-3:9, Psalm 115

Sunday, November 3

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. - *1 Thessalonians 2:8*

Meditating on God's Word

Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. - *Psalm 115:1*

Praying God's Word

Lord, I love how this Psalm repeats the idea that we are not the ones who should be getting the glory. Guard my heart from this idolatry! Remind me again and again: I am not living for the glory of myself, my family, my country, my denomination, my political party, my workplace, or even my local church. None of these things are worthy! Only You, because of Your love and faithfulness, are worthy of the glory, so help me to glorify You alone today. Amen.

Reading God's Word

Monday, November 4

2 Timothy 3:10-4:22, Psalm 116

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. - 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Meditating on God's Word

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:16

Praying God's Word

Lord, as we learn about how to HEAR Your Word in this study, help me to remember that the Scriptures that I read are so much more than just the writing of good men. Like Paul says, these are the very words that you breathed out! Help me to come alive to Your Word, so that it can teach me, rebuke me, correct me, and train me to be more and more like Jesus. Amen.

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. - 1 Thessalonians 2:8



**PREVIEWING
TITUS**

Meditating on God's Word

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD. - Psalm 117:1-2

Praying God's Word

Father, today I find in the shortest Psalm in all Scripture such a great summary of the reasons I have to worship You with my whole life. I praise You because Your love toward me is so great, and because Your faithfulness is never ending. This is exactly what is put on display at the cross: It's a picture of the depth of Your love, and the extent of Your faithfulness. So let me praise You in all I do today! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Wednesday, November 6

Titus 1-2; Psalm 118

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. - *1 Thessalonians 2:8*

Meditating on God's Word

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. - *Psalm 118:21-22*

Praying God's Word

Lord, what a foreshadowing we have in this Psalm hundreds of years before Jesus! You have answered the greatest need that I have before I was even alive to ask for Your help. I needed forgiveness from my sins, and through Christ, You have become my salvation! He is the cornerstone, rejected by so many, but precious to me, because He is the One who I can build my life on. Thank you for coming to my rescue! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Titus 3; Psalm 119

Thursday, November 7

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

- *1 Thessalonians 2:8*



**PREVIEWING
PHILEMON**

Meditating on God's Word

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

- *Psalm 119:18*

Praying God's Word

Father, as we come to your Scriptures, there is so much for us to take in. Even in this one Psalm, the longest in the book, what we need is not to get through it, but for You to get through to us whatever it is you long to say to us today. Today, and every day throughout this excursion, we need You to open our eyes to see the wonder of who You and what You're doing. Reveal Yourself to us in Your Word, we pray! Amen.

Reading God's Word

Philemon; Psalm 120

Friday, November 8

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:8



**PREVIEWING
HEBREWS**

Meditating on God's Word

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers.

- Philemon 1:4

Praying God's Word

Lord, as I read about the relationship between Paul and Onesimus, I find myself longing for a community like this: One who is chasing after You, and that is not afraid to challenge one another to do the right thing. Even as I pray, remind me of those in my life that I take for granted. Thank You for my brothers and sisters in the faith, who you have sent to 'refresh my heart in Christ.' Amen.

Reading God's Word

Saturday, November 9

Hebrews 1; Psalm 121

Memorizing God's Word

So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. - *1 Thessalonians 2:8*

Meditating on God's Word

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. - *Hebrews 1:1-2*

Praying God's Word

Father, I'm thankful today that You are a God who speaks. You have been speaking since the dawn of creation, revealing Yourself that we might know You as You are. And here I read that Christ, who was with you in the beginning, through Whom You spoke the world into being, is also the way that You have shown us who You are most clearly. Help me to hear what it is You have to say to me today, and help me to know You more and more through Your Son. Amen.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

APPENDIX A

the WYNS? survey

Every true Christian wants to grow in his/her faith. But few of us are clear about what the next step is in that growth. When the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write these words in 2 Corinthians, he gave a wonderful gift to everyone who wants to grow spiritually:

"Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups." - 2 Corinthians 13:5 (MSG)

You may just be exploring Christ right now. In fact, you may be taking this survey to find out how to start your relationship with Christ. If you have not taken the first step of accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior, then that is your next step. It is a simple one. Contact the church office (440.323.4644) to find someone to talk to, or visit our website (opendoor.tv) for more information.

No matter where you are in your walk with Christ, each of us needs regular spiritual checkups: an accurate assessment that serves as a progress report that helps us see exactly where we are in our process of becoming like Christ. Once we know where we are, all we need is a clear goal and a next step and we can continue our journey of growing in the Lord.

clear goal

Our goal is Christlikeness. This becomes even more clear in what we call the *Core CHRISTlike Characteristics*: a biblical summary of what Christlikeness looks like. These six characteristics are summarized from the life of Christ and provide a clear biblical picture of what spiritual health looks like in our lives as well:

Connected to God through the Word and Prayer
Heat of Worship
Relates with Other-Centered Love
Intentional Evangelism
Spirit-led Servant
Trustworthy Steward of God's Resources

accurate assessment

We have created this survey tool—based on the Core CHRISTlike Characteristics—to help you “test yourself” in order to accurately discern your current spiritual health. This helps us obey what Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians 13:5. Think of it as a spiritual health check-up. Fortunately, this check-up (about five minutes) won't take nearly as long as going to your doctor, and it shouldn't involve any physical pain.

take your next step

When you are done with the survey, we will provide you with some clear action steps and activities to encourage growth based upon your results. Spiritual growth is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

What got you to your current state of health may not be what brings you to maturity.

The Next Step Survey



APPENDIX B

profiles for Christlike growth

CONNECTED TO GOD THROUGH THE WORD AND PRAYER

Beginning in Christ (C1)

Hungry to learn. Unfamiliar and overwhelmed with the Bible, may have begun to read it but haven't established a consistent pattern of reading. Confused about Bible language and content. May or may not come to church. Not sure how to pray so rarely prays. Ignorant about biblical teaching and purpose of life. After initial exuberance of forgiveness of sins, may struggle with doubt. Connection to God is very feeling-oriented. Have not yet discovered discipleship.

Young in Christ (C2)

May be hungry or may have begun to cool in hunger for the Bible. Beginning to get familiar with the Bible, learning the basics and foundations of biblical teaching. Not sure how to apply what they are learning. Inconsistent Bible reading. May or may not come to church. Learning basics of prayer. Struggling with sensing God's presence which creates huge highs and lows in feeling connected to God. Susceptible to feeling God has abandoned them at times. Idealism can create frustration. Discovering discipleship and taking first steps to grow.

Maturing in Christ (C3)

Devoted to reading, meditating on, studying and hearing the Bible preached and taught. Building on the foundations, has fair grasp on content of Bible. Developing mature understanding of biblical doctrine through classes and study. Comes to church regularly. Learning how to feed oneself from the Bible and does so regularly. Learning to navigate emotions instead of being driven by them. Is learning to breathe into their lives the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to help them navigate life and relationships. Starting to learn how to practice the presence of God. Developing healthy prayer rhythms and other spiritual disciplines. Is in a DIG. Can surprisingly be susceptible to plateauing in Christ and stop growing, stunting

Reproducing in Christ (C4)

Deeply rooted in Christ, seasoned student of the Word who is teaching, discipling and mentoring others in how to read and study the Bible. Intentionally and strategically looks for opportunities to help others understand and live out the Bible. Regularly practices discipline of feeding oneself from God's Word and is eager to help others grow in the Word and prayer. Is leading a DIG or is discipling another 1 on 1. Has deep knowledge of God and His ways and looks for ways to help others grow. Regularly practices spiritual breathing as a lifestyle.

HEART OF WORSHIP

Beginning in Christ (H1)

May toggle between singing and just observing during worship services, looking around checking things out; may sense God's presence but not sure what is going on. Soaking it in, they like the environment, but lack understanding of worship and may not be ready to fully participate. May be very emotional; full of questions about what is happening around them. Often mimic what they see around them as they learn the culture. Not worshipping outside of Sunday services. Not practicing spiritual disciplines, may just be hearing about them. Everything is about Sunday. Very dependent on people and environment to begin worshipping. Come to church sporadically.

Young in Christ (H2)

Their worship is initiated by worship leader rather than their own response to God. Confuses emotions with worship. Easily influenced and distracted by what's around them. View worship services as something "they get something out of" vs. "what they have come to give." Consumer mindset. Focused on which songs are sung, preferences and externals rather than bringing a heart of worship ready to join with others to honor God. Evaluate songs based on how they make them feel. May experiment with other ways of worshipping God besides corporate Sunday gatherings. Come to church irregularly.

Maturing in Christ (H3)

Developing a heart of worship where worship comes from within and is driven by who God is and what He has done. Recognizing the value in each worship personality, they may be growing personally in other expressions of worship besides Sunday services. Have identified their favorite way to connect with God. Love to gather for corporate worship every week and are so focused on God that they are not impacted by and may even be oblivious to others in the room. Beginning to explore multiple ways to worship. Worship is increasingly characterized by deep surrender. Learning to love God with ALL their heart, soul, mind and strength. Seek to glorify God in all they say and do.

Reproducing in Christ (H4)

Have explored multiple spiritual disciplines and ways of worshipping and are eager and able to teach these to others. Are so engaged in worship as a lifestyle that Sunday worship gatherings are their least practiced worship times. Give deep thought to how to prompt authentic worship in others. Are very focused on how environments can help or hinder worship in others. More concerned about helping others worship than themselves. Their worship of and passion for God is contagious. Their pursuit of and engagement with the Lord can change the atmosphere in a room and influence others to worship. Take on a shepherding mentality during corporate worship where their own personal preferences are secondary to helping the majority engage in worship.

RELATING WITH OTHER-CENTERED LOVE

Beginning in Christ (R1)

Love is understood in terms of emotions. Very focused on how they feel and how others make them feel. Ignorant about their effect on others. Confused about the shifting feelings associated with their understanding of love. Easily offended. Self-centered and often self-absorbed. Very dependent on others' actions for love to be felt and expressed. Lack of understanding about need for self-sacrifice in loving others. Rarely initiate loving actions. Ignorant of the nature of other-centered love. Don't discern well between good and evil.

Young in Christ (R2)

Love is still understood primarily in terms of emotions. Very focused on how they feel and how others make them feel. Church is seen as the place to meet their needs. Just starting to become self-aware and to recognize their effect on others. Easily offended and quick to get into arguments. Pride makes it difficult to forgive others. Don't accept criticism well. Often act out of self-centeredness, making it hard to see the needs of others. Can be uninterested in growing spiritually. Overly focused on own needs. May have zeal but lack wisdom. Defines and practices love as defined by culture around them more than God and Bible. More focused on what can get from others than what they can give to others. Slow or unwilling to resolve conflict with others.

Maturing in Christ (C3)

Growing awareness of and appreciation for what others bring to the church, relationship, or team. Beginning to develop relational wisdom. God-centeredness is creating sensitivity and attentiveness to needs of others. Learning to practice Christlike forgiveness, kindness and patience. Developing an unoffendable spirit. Growing in appropriate independence and inter-dependence. Extroverts recognize need for solitude and introverts recognize importance of reaching out to others. Learning to breathe into their lives the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to help them navigate life and relationships. Humble self-awareness is accompanied by other-centeredness and sacrificial love. Focused on helping others "belong." Practices encouraging others. Love for people begins to transcend own culture and country into developing eyes for the world. Has been or is in a DIG. More focused on expressing love than feeling love.

Reproducing in Christ (R4)

Attentive to spiritual temperature of church expressed in loving, Christlike relationships. Helps others see how their attitudes and actions affect others. Is leading a DIG or is discipling another 1 on 1. Regularly practices spiritual breathing as the Spirit expands their vision to lead others. Leading and multiplying a LifeGroup, identifying, training and releasing leaders to lead a LifeGroup. Focused on building teams and helping people in teams love and relate well to each other. Enrolls others in helping church become a place where everyone feels "they belong here." May be teaching classes on loving and forgiving like Christ. May be asked to lead missions trips to help people get a vision for loving the world. Encourages others regularly, spurring them on to love and good deeds.

INTENTIONAL EVANGELISM

Beginning in Christ (11)

Either sharing Christ out of excitement of newfound faith or not sharing Christ with anyone. Ignorant of basics of evangelism. Does not know how to explain Christ or Christianity. Does not see need for evangelism. Consumed by own needs and oblivious to lostness of those who don't know Christ.

Young in Christ (12)

Starting to become aware of the need for evangelism but feel unequipped and unqualified to share Christ with anyone. Tend to be self-centered and more focused on their own need to grow by concentrating on Bible study, gaining knowledge, and attending church activities. May or may not come to church regularly. Tend to lean towards building Christian friendships and subsequently losing touch with non-saved friends. May not have a relationship with any unsaved or unchurched people. No vision for reaching a lost world.

Maturing in Christ (13)

Is equipped or is getting equipped to share their faith in Christ with others. Intentionally building relationships with people who don't know Christ. Prays regularly for those who don't know Christ and feels a burden that they come to know Him. Becomes a world Christian, realizing that other cultures and countries need Christ. Has led at least one person to Christ in last year. Moves through "questions that build relationships" effortlessly due to regularly practicing the 5Bs with numerous specific people. Is learning basic apologetics to help people answer objections and questions about Christianity. Is learning to breathe into their lives the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to help them know next step in witnessing.

Reproducing in Christ (14)

Regularly leads people to put their trust in Christ by practicing the 5Bs. Takes others along with them to train them how to share their faith. Is leading a DIG or discipling other people 1 on 1. Is encouraging and training people in their LifeGroup to practice the 5Bs. Always has at least one person who they are trying to lead to Christ. May teach a class on the 5Bs, sharing their faith or apologetics. May lead a missions trip, exposing and training others to reach their world for Christ. Can trace back several generations of people they have led to Christ who have led others to Christ who have led others to Christ. Refuses to guilt others into sharing their faith, but regularly prays that God would spur others on in evangelism. Regularly practices spiritual breathing to guide their evangelism activities whether that's sharing Christ or training others.

SPIRIT-LED SERVANT

Beginning in Christ (S1)

Needs teaching on the importance, privilege and call to serve. Comes to church to be served not to serve. Ignorant of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Isn't listening for the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Confused about who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. Isn't serving others or the church in spontaneous or structured ways unless is encouraged to by another person. Focused far more on taking and receiving than giving or serving. Self-centered and focused on own needs.

Young in Christ (S2)

May not even realize need to serve. Can be critical of the church and its failure to meet their needs. Still living in self-centeredness though may have been recruited to serve in the church. Still comes to church to be served instead of to serve. Believes role of the Holy Spirit is to give them what they want, meet their needs and lead them into blessing. Unable to discern the difference between the Spirit and their own conscience. May have taken the SHAPE assessment and is learning their Servant Profile. May feel overwhelmed and unqualified to serve. Will not move out of this stage until they begin serving and discover the joy of doing so.

Maturing in Christ (S3)

Is learning to hear the voice and promptings of the Holy Spirit and obeys these promptings to serve or share with others as they learn to breathe in the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Have taken the SHAPE assessment or a Spiritual Gifts survey, knows their spiritual gifts and Servant Profile and is serving regularly in the church. Recognizes that serving and doing ministry is a lifestyle not just a role one fills once a week. May have served in several different areas before finding their sweet spot. Have discovered the joy of serving and does so freely and eagerly as a lifestyle. Is a dependable member of a serving team and can be counted on to not only show up but serve with all their heart to the glory of God. Is growing in being led by the Spirit and is accumulating stories of how the Spirit has led them.

Reproducing in Christ (S4)

Seasoned, mature disciple of Christ, who displays increasing Christlikeness in many areas and is reproducing disciples. Regularly practices spiritual breathing and lives out of the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives. Frequently teaching, discipling and mentoring others in becoming like Christ. Lives out of their sweet spot in serving the body of Christ and does ministry as a lifestyle. Regularly asking people if they know their SHAPE using SHAPE as a tool to coach people and help them get involved in ministry. Is helping coach people in learning to be led by the Holy Spirit in every area of their lives. Is leading a DIG or discipling other people 1 on 1.

TRUSTWORTHY STEWARD OF GOD'S RESOURCES

Beginning in Christ (T1)

Living in a consumer mindset; needs teaching on being a steward of all that God has given them. While trusting God for salvation, may not feel able to trust God in other areas, including finances and possessions. Sees possessions as belonging to themselves and may feel wary of biblical teaching on stewardship. If does give to the church, it is likely seen as tipping or pitching in to help. May begin small amounts of percentage giving.

Young in Christ (T2)

Is growing in trust of God, but still may separate trusting God in some areas while resisting trusting God in stewardship areas. Does not see that all of life is stewardship and all God has given us He has entrusted to us to manage for His purposes and glory. Pride and fear keeps them from living surrendered and they may ridicule the concept of surrendering everything to God. Personal economic circumstances will affect how they hear teaching on stewardship. As they grow in this stage, they will begin to tithe. If they do not begin tithing they will never move beyond this stage.

Maturing in Christ (C3)

Practices tithing and generosity as a lifestyle. Is learning to breathe into their lives the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to help them navigate life and relationships. Sees all of life as stewardship and freely and joyfully gives of their time, talent and treasures as the Spirit prompts them or even out of their own initiative. Experiencing the joy of trusting God even in the hard times.

Reproducing in Christ (T4)

Tested, mature disciple of Christ, who displays increasing Christlikeness in many areas and is reproducing disciples. Thinks of the possessions they have as God's not theirs. Dependable, team-minded steward who is frequently teaching, discipling and mentoring others in stewardship and becoming like Christ. Regularly practices spiritual breathing and lives out of the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives. Has likely moved beyond the tithing and may be regularly increasing their percentage giving. Regularly asking people if they know their SHAPE using SHAPE as a tool to coach people and help them get involved in ministry as an act of stewardship. Is leading a DIG or discipling other people one on one.