



JESUS PEOPLE

A 12 Week Discipleship Pathway for Teens

Created by Phil Wiseman and Megan Koch

DISCIPLESHIPPATH.COM

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DiscipleshipPath.com provides an outcome-based pathway for one on one discipleship. This guided journey through the basics of the Christian faith is a mix of original and curated content created by the church for the church.

DiscipleshipPath.com was created by pastors Phil Wiseman and Megan Koch at Table Church in Des Moines, IA. You can contact them directly at hello@tablechurchdsm.org.

Table Church exists to invite people to the way of Jesus. We pursue God, create belonging, do justice, and make disciples. Find more discipleship tools at tablechurchdsm.org/resources.

Cover Photo: Jon Tyson

JESUS PEOPLE

A 12 Week Discipleship Pathway for Teens

When you hang out with church people, it's easy to learn what to say and do to fit in. *But that doesn't necessarily mean you know Jesus.* We can do a lot of things to look good with other Christians, but still not understand what it means to live everyday life *with* Jesus, or to become just like him. The world doesn't need more people who know how to fit in at church. The world needs Jesus people. You become a Jesus person when you start to interact with Jesus every day and learn how to live your life straight from him. And you can't do that alone. Your church family is the perfect place to go to learn how to do that together. That's what this journey is for. This tool will help you build relationships and habits into your life that keep you walking and talking with Jesus together.

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

A disciple is a Christian who can recognize and replicate the way of Jesus. That means you're growing in your ability to see and hear Jesus in the world, and you're turning into a person who thinks, talks, and acts just like he does. That doesn't happen by accident. It happens because you want it to. If you want to be just like Jesus, you have to arrange your life around people and practices that will help you do it, and you've got to want to do what Jesus says. That's how you become a Jesus person. Jesus people don't just look good. Their hearts are good. Do you want to be a Jesus person? Keep reading.

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Discipleship is the lifelong process of walking, talking, and learning with Jesus, and inviting others along. Discipleship isn't just learning *about* Jesus; it's learning *from* Jesus. Jesus is alive and always with you. You really can know him and spend your days with him. He'll help you know how to live your life like he would live it if he were you. The more you follow through and live that way, the more you become like Jesus yourself, and the easier it is to help other people know him too. That's the goal. That's why this journey matters. This is important, so if you're going to join this group, give it your all and invite Jesus to say and do whatever he wants in the time you spend together. Trust your Guide and invest in the people in your group, too. You're in this together and you need each other.

HOW IT WORKS

This tool was created with middle and high school students in mind. The 12-week structure fits well into a school semester or a summer break. The only materials needed are a Bible, a notebook or journal, and a printed copy of this booklet. This journey has a 3-part rhythm: daily habits, weekly meetings, and monthly hang outs.

Week 1 introduces a **daily** habit of Bible reading and prayer on your own, and that pattern continues throughout the journey. Five days of Scripture are provided, and two days are left open. The group will check in with each other **weekly** with a guided discussion (in person *or* via Skype, Facetime, Zoom, Polo, or text) and will hang out **monthly** to have fun and pray together.

- ⊕ Weekly meetings in person are preferred, but not always possible if teens are also involved in other activities in or outside the church, so your method of checking in weekly is left open to the Guide's discretion.
- ⊕ Monthly hang outs are meant to be fun, so be creative with these events! Just be sure to include some food and a time of prayer together in the mix.
- ⊕ Guides will decide the date and time for each weekly and monthly event ahead of time so group members can commit to attending as a part of their Group Covenant.

This content has form and flexibility (you could cycle through the same pathway multiple times and it stays relevant). If you enjoyed this journey and want to join another group in the future, you can! But we want to help others grow, so **if you want to join another group, you need to bring at least one new friend into a group, too.** After all, if you love growing with a group, you'll want to pass it on! Don't let your friends miss out!

There's a growing **Resource Page** for Guides, teens, and parents to draw from online. These resources keep the conversation and practices relevant to current topics and life situations for the group. It includes original and curated videos, studies, tools, etc. Groups will follow the basic pattern laid out in this journey, but can feel free to draw from these resources whenever they want to dig deeper with a specific tool or topic.

GROUP STRUCTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

Each group has 1 Guide and 2-4 disciples (all male or all female).

- ⊕ Churches decide qualifications for leaders (Guides).
- ⊕ Once a teen has completed the Pathway at least once with a Guide, they can be recommended by church leadership to guide a group of peers or younger students.
- ⊕ *Everyone* participates in the daily, weekly, and monthly practices, *including the Guide*.
 - The Guide leads the disciples and models *being* a disciple. The Guide is as committed to learning *from* the group as they are to helping the group grow.
 - All participants complete the Group Covenant (located on the following page).

GROUP COVENANT

I am here to learn what it means to be a Jesus follower.

I commit to walking with Jesus and my group for the next 12 weeks.

I will trust and respect my Guide and give my all to the daily, weekly, and monthly opportunities I have to grow closer to Jesus and others.

I will respect each person's privacy and never share something about their life I know they wouldn't want me to say outside the group.

I will always be honest and kind. Groups are a safe space to ask questions and learn together.

I commit to attending every group event.

WEEKLY MEETING DAY / TIME: _____ / _____

MONTHLY HANG OUT DATES / TIMES:

_____ / _____

_____ / _____

_____ / _____

SIGNED _____

DATE _____

1. HEARING GOD

Prayer is talking to God. You know this. Prayer, by definition, is a conversation. There's a back and forth. But many Christians wouldn't describe their prayer life that way. If you feel that way, you're not alone. Prayer isn't just talking *to* God, it's talking *with* God—it's talking to God, and hearing from him too. Many Christians are quick to say prayer is "talking to God," but if you told a friend you talked to God today, and he talked back, they might say you were nuts. Talking to God is one of the most *curiously different* things Jesus people do. Christians have unlimited access to God. We can have an *interactive* prayer life; prayer that flows like a back and forth conversation with God. Much more than a simple exchange of information, prayer *moves* people and things. Prayer, in short, actually *does* something in us and in the world.

Jesus says we'll know his voice (John 10:27), so invite him to talk to you. The enemy wants you to think it'll be complicated to hear God's voice. He doesn't want your prayer life to thrive. He wants you to doubt if you're really hearing from God or if you're making it up. Jesus is always with you (Matthew 28:20). He is real, alive, and present. We can make it a habit to ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us to see, hear, and interact with Jesus.

Want to know Jesus? Jesus is where we look, and that means he's here with you right now. Prayer isn't just in your head. Jesus is right here in the room with you. You can talk *about* Jesus with people all day long, but make space to talk *with* Jesus every day; that's what Jesus people do. We interact with the real man, Jesus, all day long.

THE PRACTICE: DAILY PRAYER HABIT

Prayer is like breathing for Jesus people. We're meant to do it all day long! The problem is, a lot of us don't know *how* to pray. The best way to learn is to just do it. Experiment with prayer. See what happens. You might think this sounds messy, uncomfortable, complicated, or awkward. That's why so many Christians stay on the edges of prayer, when Jesus is inviting us all-in. You've probably heard a lot about what you *should* do as a Christian, but maybe nobody's helped you understand how to hear and see what *Jesus* is doing. We're going to practice that this week. Get used to this rhythm, because you're going to experiment with this prayer habit for the next 12 weeks!

MAKE SPACE Remove external distractions like other people or your phone and your homework, but also *internal* ones—the stuff you think might be in the way, the things that keep you from hearing God's voice clearly. Perhaps you'll need to forgive someone or get forgiven. Maybe it's hard for your mind to settle down, or maybe you just need to tell Jesus straight up that you're not sure he's listening. Whatever it is, put it out there. Know and trust that Jesus is in the room with you (even if you don't feel it yet) and let the Holy Spirit help you to even picture Jesus sitting with you like a friend (because that's what he's doing).

READ IT AND READ IT AGAIN Go over the day's passage once to read it, and then a second time to let it sink in.

PAUSE, TALK, AND LISTEN WITH JESUS

Sit for 30 seconds to a minute and just listen. What's happening in your mind and heart? Notice it. Start talking to Jesus, then keep waiting for him to respond. He's there with you. When you hear it, you'll know it.

JOURNAL

Write down what you and Jesus talked about. Remember, this is an experiment with Jesus, so it's ok if it feels a little strange— you're just trying things out.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Luke 5:12-16 / **DAY 2** John 10:27-30 / **DAY 3** Matt. 28:16-20 / **DAY 4** Matt. 5:43-45 / **DAY 5** Eph. 6:18

THE MEETING

1. What is the difference between talking *to* Jesus and talking *with* Jesus?
2. Saying we heard something "from Jesus" can sound a little crazy; and yet most of us would say we've heard from Jesus at least *once* in our life, in one way or another. If this is the case for you, discuss a time you heard Jesus speak. How did you respond?
3. How could our everyday lives change if we spent our days in a back and forth conversation with Jesus?
4. What kind of prayer life do you want? Do you have that now? Why or why not?
5. What did Jesus say to you during your prayer times this week? How did you respond?

2. CONFESSION

This week we're going to learn about confession. We all react to that word in different ways. Nobody looks forward to confessing their sins, but we all know how good it can feel to get something off our chest. Confession isn't simply for when we've done something wrong. Confession is for any time we're holding something in that makes us feel embarrassed or ashamed. Confession isn't simply about guilt. It's also a gift. Confession is about mending what's broken, especially in our relationships with God and other people. We put off confessing what's heavy on our hearts, and can really struggle with shame and insecurity (feeling gross about ourselves and anxious that there's something wrong with us that we can't fix). We're terrified we'll get found out; we wonder what others would think if they knew the truth about us. But the act of confession is meant to remind us how secure we are in Christ. Confession is a gift.

James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another so we can be healed. Jesus doesn't just want us to see what we've done wrong; he wants us to see the real problems underneath our struggles and *know for sure he is the solution*. Jesus is the only one who can make the problems right. We can't do it alone. We need his help, and he wants us to depend on each other, too. That's why the Bible urges us to confess our sins to one another. So everybody knows we're not alone, we all struggle, and with Jesus, we *can* see the wrong things in our lives and hearts get right. When we confess our sins to Jesus and each other, we get forgiveness for our sins and a whole lot more.

Sin and shame work to isolate us and cut us off from Jesus and the people who can help us the most. Confessing our sins to one another breaks apart all the fake stuff we do and say to try to cover up who we really are. It breaks the power of fear and guilt and shame in our lives and helps us live free and honest with Jesus and each other. God doesn't tell us to confess our sins to one another to humiliate us; he wants to set us free. Confessing your sins out in the open is like saying, "Jesus, I need you. I can't be free alone. You made me and you know me. I'm dropping everything heavy and handing it to you. I'm not afraid to be seen and known by you and my friends and family." Wouldn't it be awesome to live that way? Jesus is here to help you do it.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 James 5:16 / **DAY 2** Gal 5:1 / **DAY 3** Proverbs 28:13 / **DAY 4** 1 John 1:5-10 / **DAY 5** Gal. 6:1-2

THE PRACTICE: CONFESSION

Often in the Church we say we hide our faults and don't talk about our problems enough. Well, we know that's true. But it's probably more accurate to say that we actually *want* to talk about hard things, but we just don't know how. Either we don't know exactly what's wrong and don't have words for it, or we don't know who we can trust, or when it's a good time to bring it up. We'd all like to be more open with each other, but we're not sure if we're safe. How do you know you can trust someone with a secret? We wonder, "Will this person still want to hang out with me after they hear

this? Will they just try to give me pointless advice?" These are the things we wonder when we *want* to talk, but just don't feel like we can. It can feel easier to say nothing.

Have you ever confessed something to God again and again, but the problem doesn't go away? That's probably because we're confessing, but we're doing it privately. There's so little risk in that, and very little accountability for real life. When we confess to God, but we're not being honest about our struggles with the people around us, we're "confessing" but *we're still letting shame win*. We want the problem resolved, but *we also want to protect our image*.

This is why we're encouraged to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). Confession is appropriate any time we're burdened by something we need to get off our chest, and confessing to God in the presence of trusted brothers and sisters is what Jesus people do. Confession isn't about guilt; it's a gift. It's a gift to resist shame and speak out, and it's a gift to be loved and accepted by God and our friends. It's also a gift to be trusted with someone else's confession, so we take that very seriously. It's a privilege and a joy, and we want to be a safe person to trust.

You have just one job this week: ask Jesus to reveal to you a burden you need to confess. He might even show you more than one. We've all got a lot to get off our chest. As you think of things, write them down in your journal. Talk them out with Jesus. Come to your next meeting ready to take that private conversation with Jesus into your circle of trusted friends. See what happens. Confession is a *gift* you can get this week.

THE MEETING

1. What have you learned about confession in the past? What did you learn this week?

2. In his book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "He who is alone with his sins is utterly alone...in confession the break-through to community takes place...if a Christian is in the fellowship of confession with a brother he will never be alone again, anywhere."

How does confession bring us together?

3. We need forgiveness for wrong things we've done, but also for things we've left undone. Sometimes we sin by doing something. Sometimes we sin by *not* doing something Jesus was calling us to do.

How can our failure to act be sinful?

4. Repentance is a key step in the process of confession and forgiveness. Repentance doesn't just mean we're sorry we've been caught in sin; repentance means we're actually sad about our sin, and how it's hurt God and other people. It means we are ready to completely turn our back on that sin, and go the other direction.

Have you experienced the difference between confession with and without repentance? What impact did repentance make?

5. Practice confession with your group and pray for each other. Share something you need to confess, and watch what happens as you do this *together*.

3. SELF-DENIAL

Jesus doesn't put his own comfort first. He loves people. Love means we put God's best for everyone first. Jesus lives that way and invites us to do it too. There are many places we could go in the Bible to learn about how Jesus lives this out, but for now we'll limit ourselves to just one: the moment where Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

Let's read John 13:3-5 NIV:

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

The idea of a master washing his follower's feet was so offensive that Peter refuses to let Jesus do it: "You will never wash my feet" (John 13:8 NIV). Footwear wasn't what it is today, and most people had very simple sandals. That means that everybody's feet got *really* dirty. Not only were the roads dusty, but oxen and donkeys would likely leave plenty of "land mines" along the way, and stepping in one at some point was likely inevitable. Feet then were like feet now: *a little gross*.

That's why one of the primary roles of a servant was to wash their master's feet. In fact, it was a job that was reserved not only for a servant, but for the very lowest ones. Imagine the hush that fell upon the disciples when Jesus suddenly stood up and started to wrap a towel around himself. That hush would turn to confusion as he picked up the water basin; and it may even turn to disgust when he finally knelt down and started washing their feet. Jesus was upsetting the social order here. He was *humiliating* himself!

Or was he? Perhaps we are the ones who have made fools of ourselves by supposing that life is all about looking the best we can to ourselves and others. Maybe we are the ones who are out of step with the way things actually are: that those who find the best life are the ones who deny themselves, take up a cross, and follow the way of Jesus. Jesus people do things for love that most people wouldn't. We love people by putting God's best for them ahead of what we want right now. Often, that means we serve others and give up things in ways that confuse the world. But want to know a secret? Living like that brings a whole lot of joy you can't understand until you experience it for yourself.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 John 13:3-5 / **DAY 2** 1 Cor. 13:4-6 / **DAY 3** Luke 9:18-25 / **DAY 4** Phil. 2:1-4 / **DAY 5** Mark 10:42-45

THE PRACTICE: FASTING

God is good. In fact, everything good comes not just *from* God, but *out of* God. God is where everything good begins. When God pours out good things to us, it's a gift. We call that grace. God is doing good things all the time, whether we realize it or not. But there are actually ways we can arrange our lives around God that put us in a position to receive even *more* from him, if we want it.

That's what spiritual disciplines are. Spiritual disciplines are practices we take up in the midst of daily life that make space for us to meet with God. John Wesley called these things a *means of grace*; things like prayer, reading scripture, taking communion, and practicing confession. These are ways we willfully align ourselves with God. We know he'll be there with us, and we expect he'll give us exactly what we need.

As you try any spiritual discipline, always remember that the discipline is a *means* to an end, but not the end itself. When we meet face to face with Jesus, we change. If we want to become disciples who look, act, and talk like Jesus, our one job is to spend time with him, and let *him* change *us*. That's how we get cleaned out, set right, filled up, and sent. We become like Jesus. That's the end goal.

Spiritual disciplines don't do the work; Jesus does. *And we can't control the work Jesus does. He does whatever he wants.* We often approach spiritual disciplines as a transaction: I do or give something, and Jesus does something back. We can't help but insert our own expectations into the deal. The truth is, disciplines aren't a transaction; they're an *interaction* between us and Jesus. When we practice disciplines, we submit ourselves to God. We stop looking for him to simply give us something we want, and instead get hungry for Jesus to give us *himself*.

Fasting, like all spiritual disciplines, is both very simple, and very *mysterious*. Fasting from anything is a *subtractive* discipline; that means we willfully remove or limit a source of comfort (traditionally, food) for a time in order to be more alert to the presence and sufficiency of God. In the absence of old, familiar security blankets, fasting wakes us up to our wounds, weaknesses, and unholy habits. Fasting makes it easy to see where we are tight-fisted, demanding, or afraid. Fasting reveals what holds us back, and makes Jesus brighter than ever.

Remember: fasting is powerful, but mysterious. We don't fast to manipulate or control God. We fast in order to know God more rightly. He will move. He has good gifts in store for you as you fast; you just can't discover what they are until you participate. And finally, remember that all seasons of fasting prepare us for a time of *feasting* to follow. As we deny ourselves, we are made right and ready to enjoy life like we're supposed to: life to the full, with nothing in the way.

Practice one fast before the next meeting. It's as simple as setting aside one meal time to spend with Jesus instead of eating. Talk to your parents and your Guide to figure out the best way and time for you to do it. Remember, this isn't about trying to harm yourself or look especially holy. It's about letting yourself get a little hungrier than you normally do, so you can be more alert and hungry for Jesus. Remember to drink plenty of water while you fast, and follow any guidelines your parents give you as you do it. As you fast, journal any challenges, temptations, thoughts, or prayers that come to mind as you devote that time to seeking Jesus instead of a meal. And finally, don't forget to ENJOY your next meal all the more when you're done. Jesus wants to do that with you, too.

THE MEETING

1. Love means we put God's best for everyone first. What does that mean? Have you met anyone that does this? How do they do it?
2. If you had been in that room with the disciples, would you have let Jesus wash your feet? Why or why not?
3. You might not need Jesus to wash your feet today, but there are things you really need from him; things you might be embarrassed to need help with. Where do you need Jesus to serve you right now? Will you let him?
4. What have you learned about fasting in the past? What did you learn this week?
5. What was fasting like? Share the experience and anything Jesus showed you.

4. COMPASSION

Let's read Luke 7: 11-16:

"Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."

If you want to be a Jesus person, you might wonder whether or not you're doing it right. If you want to know if you're really starting to live like Jesus, consider whether or not you experience compassion for people who are hurting. Do you notice when someone is in need? Do you really *see* people throughout your day, or just think of yourself? Compassion is when we see what someone else is going through, and we respond somehow because we can't help ourselves. Rather than avoid people and their problems, we start *wanting* to get in the middle of their problems with them and help. That's compassion.

This is what Jesus is doing in this story. It says when Jesus saw this grieving mother, his heart went out to her. Like the feeling of your heart leaping out of your chest. He gets close, and even touches a dead body (that wasn't allowed according to the law because it would make you unclean). Then he raised the man from the dead! For real. Jesus could have just healed the man from a distance, but he got close to the people and the mess because he wanted to. He does that for us in our lives, too.

If you want to know if Jesus is really changing you, look at your everyday life. Do you ever get so overcome with compassion for somebody who's hurt, or mad, or lonely that you forget to think about what you're doing, and you just jolt forward with Jesus and go talk to them? Have you ever felt love for somebody you don't even like that much? That's compassion, and you can invite Jesus to fill you with it all day. Jesus people can be so full of compassion at the sight of pain that our hearts go *out* to the hurting; as in, we are compelled by a gut reaction so strong, our beating heart seems to leap *out of our chest*. A reaction so clear and pure, we forget to worry about getting dirty, we forget anyone else is in the room. We've just got to do what Jesus is doing, to get close, to get *with* the one who's hurting; to see them helped *right now*. That's following Jesus right.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Col. 3:12 / **DAY 2** Isaiah 30:18 / **DAY 3** 2 Cor. 1:3-4 / **DAY 4** Matthew 9:35-38 / **DAY 5** Lam. 3:22-23

THE PRACTICE: SEE AND RESPOND

This week, we're going to watch and pray. Today is a hard day for someone. Someone near you is hurting, lonely, or confused. Pray and ask Jesus to show you people like he sees them. And if you're willing, ask him to start helping you feel the same things he does for them. And when he prompts you to step in and respond, do what he says. Jesus people obey what he says.

This is simple but let's do it. We can't know all the ways this will play itself out. Let's ask Jesus to help us find the hurt in the people we meet, and empower us to be a helper. Jesus does this for you, and you can do it for others.

THE MEETING

1. What have you learned about compassion this week?
2. Think of a time when you needed help, and someone saw your need and helped you. Tell the story. What did that mean to you?
3. Sometimes we don't want to get involved with people who need help because we're worried about what other people will think. How does practicing compassion require self-denial? Are you willing to do it?
4. Sometimes we don't help people because we don't like them very much. What's the difference between liking someone and showing love to them? If God shows you a person in need and you know it would be safe for you to help them, but the only thing stopping you is that you don't *like* them, what do you think Jesus would invite you to do? Why?
5. How did you practice compassion this week? Tell the group.

5. EXPERIENCING SCRIPTURE

Often when we read the Bible, we take it in quickly, or we read it at face value. Consider the difference between looking at a postcard from the ocean, and what it's like to put on a wetsuit and get underwater to explore it yourself. We can take a deep dive into Scripture and discover things we never knew existed. To add *another* illustration, you could look at it this way: every passage of Scripture we read is like a prism. We read it one way, then turn it in the light to examine it from another angle. Suddenly we discover there are *endless* things to uncover and experience within even just one small passage of God's Word.

The Bible is the *living* Word of God; Jesus is constantly speaking and revealing himself to us; especially through Scripture. So when we dive into Bible study, we can be confident that Jesus is present, active, and talking to us as we do it. You can encounter Jesus right now through the Word, and the experience can change you, if you let it.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 2 Tim. 3:14-17 / **DAY 2** Heb. 4:12 / **DAY 3** Luke 11:28 / **DAY 4** Psalm 119:105 / **DAY 5** 2 Tim. 2:14-16

THE PRACTICE: SCRIPTURE STUDY

Set aside 30 minutes for this practice. You'll need your journal and also a Study Bible. If you don't have a Study Bible, ask a parent, your Guide, or your pastor. They'll be happy to lend you one! Follow the directions below, and remember not to jump from one step to another quickly. Just when you think you've seen all you can see, press in a little farther before you move on; Jesus might have even more for you to discover if you stick around a while.

1. Open your Bible to **1 John 1**. Take yourself through the passage slowly. Walk through the chapter step by step. Do not rush.
2. Learn some facts using the Study Bible's introduction to the book. Who wrote this book? Where and when was it written? Who was it written for originally? What are the themes in this book?
3. Read 1 John 1 again. Start to think for yourself. What's the point of this chapter? Find at least three things the author wants to show the reader.
4. Try to wrap up the point of this chapter in one sentence. Just take a guess.
5. Now pause for a minute. Ask Jesus to show you what all this means for you. What's he showing you right now? What will you do with it?

THE MEETING

1. The Bible can be intimidating, especially if we feel like we don't know much about it. But Jesus isn't worried about measuring how much you know. He wants you to know him. How can the Bible help us know Jesus himself?
2. What's the difference between reading the Bible and studying it?
3. Now consider this: there's a difference between just reading and studying the Bible, and actually experiencing Scripture *with* Jesus. How do we move from just reading words and learning facts to actually experiencing something with God through Scripture? How can that help us move from just learning to really growing?
4. You got to study a chapter of the Bible this week. What interesting things did you learn?
5. Now move on from what you learned to how you changed: What did Jesus show you this week through this study, and what did you do with it?

6. FORGIVENESS

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

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

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Luke 4:16-21 NIV)

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” (Matthew 18:21-22 NIV)

Forgiveness isn’t just about saying we’re sorry and forgiving someone certainly doesn’t mean what they did doesn’t matter anymore. Forgiveness, at the heart, is about handing over a burden that’s too heavy for us to bear. We can’t hold it and live well, so we turn it over to Jesus instead. He can take it– he’s *happy* to take it. Burdens are heavy for us because we weren’t born to carry them. The good news is, Jesus *was* born to carry them. He’s already paid for them, so we can hand them over.

Forgiveness reminds us that we’re secure; God is in control. When we forgive, we choose to surrender our resentments. We give up anything we’re holding against someone and invite God to handle it from here without our interference. Essentially, we surrender our right to judge, and stop trying to do God’s job for him. That’s when we get cut free, and that’s how we can move forward and heal. Forgiveness is about living untangled and untethered.

It’s important to remember that our freedom and healing are *never* dependent on what other people do or say. So, regardless of what the offending person does in *response* to our forgiveness, *we can be free*. In some cases, it might not even be best to tell a person we’ve forgiven them (in some situations, that could make things *worse*, not better). Or, perhaps that person is no longer living. That’s OK, because again, forgiveness is ultimately about cutting free from burdens with God’s help. He’ll guide you to know how to restore broken relationships. Many times, that will mean coming together to resolve differences, but sometimes it will mean keeping a safe distance.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Luke 4:16-21 / **DAY 2** Matthew 18:21-22 / **DAY 3** Col. 3:13 / **DAY 4** 1 John 1:9 / **DAY 5** 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

THE PRACTICE: FORGIVE

Jesus wants us to one another the same thing he gives us: forgiveness. Imagine what it would look like to be surrounded by people who don't hold grudges. Imagine how free it would feel to know if you mess up, you'll get love instead of rejection. We can ask God to help us see ways we've hurt others by what we've done or *not* done, and seek forgiveness for our own sins. That's what Jesus people do. When we live like that, we show other people it's possible to do the same. You can start a revolution just by obeying Jesus and humbly admitting you're in the wrong.

Have you ever had someone come to you to admit they've been wrong and seek forgiveness? It's incredibly disarming. It's hard to let a rift stay between us when we all own our mistakes. Forgive others habitually, before anything has a gross has a chance to grow between you. Practice forgiveness every day, because it's one of the most powerful and effective weapons you have against the things the world and the enemy are doing to keep people apart (remember: sin wants to isolate you from the people you need the most). *You might face a lot of hard things in life, but if you refuse to get tangled up in fights and bitterness that keep you divide, you'll be healthy and mature.*

Forgiveness is so much more than only saying we're sorry. There are so many ways we can hold grudges, even against ourselves or God. One of the most helpful ways to unpack your burdens is to practice forgiveness in every direction.¹ That's what we're doing this week.

First, ask Jesus to reveal to you at least one way you're holding on to a burden, whether you've done something wrong, or someone has hurt you. Pause and let Jesus talk right to you, and tell him you're willing to see anything he wants to light up.

Ready? Here's how to walk through it with Jesus:

1. Get right with Jesus and people you've hurt.

If Jesus shows you something you've done wrong, we need to ask him for forgiveness for our own sin and seek forgiveness from anyone we've sinned against as he leads us.

2. We need to forgive ourselves.

Strangely, it can be "easier" to forgive others for what they've done, or to receive forgiveness from Jesus for our own sin than it is to let ourselves off the hook. Have you ever done something you really, really regret? Forgive yourself for doing it. Let it go.

¹ You can read an overview of the Six Steps of Forgiveness in Tim Howard and Brian S. Burke's book, *With Gentle Authority* (p. 145-163).

3. We need to forgive the things other people have done that have hurt us (whether it was intentional or not).

Even if you're sure they never intended to hurt you, they hurt you nonetheless. It's a burden, so forgive it and let it go.

4. We need to forgive God.

Yes, God. Most of us don't realize this is even possible, because God is perfect, and doesn't make mistakes or sin. But again, forgiveness isn't *only* about forgiving a way someone has sinned against us. *Forgiveness is necessary any time we're holding a grudge against someone else— and yes, we can hold a grudge against God.* If we're mad that God allowed something happen, and hurt that he didn't intervene to stop it, we can surrender even *that* to him, and let him show us what we need to see so we can heal.

THE MEETING

1. One of the first things we learn as children is to say we're sorry when we do something wrong, but Jesus people do a lot more than just apologize. What are some ways Jesus people approach forgiveness that go *way beyond* what the world expects of us?
2. How has forgiveness been described to you in the past? How would you define it today?
3. It's important to remember that our freedom and healing are *never* dependent on what other people do or say. No matter what the offending person does in *response* to our forgiveness, *we can be free*. Have you ever felt like you needed someone else to "get right" before you could move on?
4. Is there ever a time it's best to forgive someone without letting them know? Is there ever a time to resolve things "from a distance"?

Think about relationships where the other person doesn't understand faith like you do. In some circumstances, could openly forgiving them alienate them, make them feel judged, or even push them further away from God? Also, consider relationships that are not safe in some way emotionally or physically.

5. Share about your experience with forgiveness this week.

7. GENEROSITY

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'

He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

'You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live.'

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'

In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" (Luke 10:25-37 NIV)

Have you ever gone on an amusement park ride that had a height requirement? People often asked Jesus questions to clarify the minimum entrance requirements for entering the Kingdom of God. That happens in this story from the gospels. For thousands of years, God's people have been able to sum up everything they should do in two statements: love God and love your neighbor. But the man in this story wants to know: who is our neighbor? Because you see, he's not motivated by love. He's blind to that, so Jesus uses a story to help him see. Jesus tells this parable (a story) to illustrate how God has always demonstrated his love to us and expects us to demonstrate love to others.

It's easier to love and take care of the people who are just like us, but all throughout the Bible, we see evidence that God has always expected his people to be very, very generous to everyone, *especially* outsiders. Who should we love? Our neighbors. Literally, anyone near us, anyone we interact with. Whether they're in our "tribe" or not. This is generosity that the world doesn't understand, and it's what Jesus people do.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Luke 10:25-37 / **DAY 2** 2 Cor. 9:7 / **DAY 3** Luke 6:27-31 / **DAY 4** 1 John 3:16-18 / **DAY 5** Matt. 6:14-21

THE PRACTICE: ADDICTION INVENTORY

Life is not easy. Whether you feel like you've "had it easy" or not in life, the fact is, the world can be a hard place. Things go wrong all the time. We get hurt easily and often. Our wounds begin at a very early age. For many of us, our earliest memories are negative ones. It seems life is constantly trying to knock us down, and when it does, we reach out for something to hold us steady. The problem is, when we're very young, very few of us know we can reach out for Jesus. So we do the best we can, reaching out for a false sense of security and comfort from things that can never measure up to the God we're created to cling to.

We're abused, ignored, or bullied when we're young, and instead of Jesus, we reach out for approval, food, or accomplishment. We grow up with a nagging ache inside that doesn't seem to go away, so we try to fill it with relationships, a good job, substances, or sex. Meeting Jesus doesn't make these old, insufficient security blankets go away, it just makes them more obvious. In light of Jesus, it's much easier to see where we've fallen for impostors; for comforts that can never satisfy.

Old habits die hard, but in Christ, they *can* die. The key is to first confront the behavior, then submit it to Christ—but don't stop there. You see, behavior modification is not enough. Acknowledging unhealthy behaviors leads us to greater discipline in Christ. And it is by practicing these disciplines of freedom that we uncover the root of our issue; the real brokenness *beneath* the behaviors.

This week, we're going to take an addiction inventory: we'll ask Jesus and the people closest to us if we have any unhealthy habits. None of us are as fine as we think we are. You may think you are not addicted to anything harmful, but, look closely with Jesus. There is likely something there. He won't point it out to shame you; he'll bring it out to set you free.

It's easy to spot our addictions, because the thought of losing them makes us feel anxious and exposed, and we all know what that feels like. We like to think we're in control of our unhealthy habits, and we justify their presence in our lives; but the fact is, they control us. Addiction is the master, and we are the puppet. Our old, corrupted comforts are much more harmful than we realize, and they don't just affect *us*; they impact everyone around us. And if we've never lived *without* the sins we savor, it's hard to estimate how much better life could be without them. Try to imagine it anyway. Imagine what it would be like to really be free. You'd be a new person. You'd be *you*. Just *you*, without the baggage. That's how God made you to be.

You can't live a life of open-handed generosity with one hand tied behind your back. Boldly go discover where you are settling for less, pacifying your pain, or denying God the chance to heal you. *Discover how much energy you waste maintaining and managing your addictions* and imagine how much *more* you'd have to give if those unholy habits were gone. You'd have more time, more money, and more creativity to spare to partner with God to heal the world. You

really would. If you want to be generous with what you have, you have to discover what has *you*. Identify your unhealthy behaviors and addictions so you can surrender them and get to the bottom of things.

If you want to be generous with what you have, you have to discover what has *you*. Identify your unhealthy behaviors and addictions so you can surrender them and get to the bottom of things.

Remember: some addictions are easy to name (cell phones, candy, soda, TV, video games, pornography) and others are apparent to the people we love, but we remain oblivious (like the man in the story!). As you uncover addictions, keep pressing in until you uncover *why* the thing is so irresistible. That's when you can address the core issue and see real change. For example, almost everyone is addicted to their cell phone. Why is your phone such a good distraction? What do you want to be distracted from? It's easy to turn to your phone. What unmet need to you have that you hope will be satisfied in your apps and searches? *This* is the point of the inventory.

Start by completing this simple inventory below. Journal your responses to these questions.

1. Does the suggestion that you probably have an addictive habit annoy you? Why do you think that is?
2. If you already have some of your own addictions in mind, what are they? List them.
3. Directly ask one or two of the people closest to you if you are addicted to anything (email or call them, text them, etc.) Write their responses down.
4. Do you often wish that you had *more* of something? What?
5. Do your loved ones often disappoint you or fail to meet your expectations? How?
6. What annoys you most about other people? Why do you think that is?
7. Do you ever do, say, or *not* do things that you then hide from those closest to you?
8. What is your most common New Year's Resolution, or what types of things do you keep trying to give up? Why?
9. Is it easier to give money to another person or cause, or purchase things for yourself? Why is that?
10. What makes you irrationally angry? Why?
11. Do you regularly do or say anything you know other people would think is wrong, but justify your right to do it anyway?
12. Where do you most often resist obeying God? How do you live out that resistance?

THE MEETING

1. How have you thought about generosity in the past? What have you learned this week?
2. What was the problem for the man in the gospel story? How did Jesus address it? What did he want him to understand?
3. It's easier to do nice things for the people we're closest to and like the most, but what does Jesus ask us to do? What's biblical generosity look like in our everyday lives?
4. It might seem strange to learn about generosity and addictions in the same week, but they are related! How does understanding what has power over us help us become truly open, generous Jesus people?
5. What did Jesus show you through your addiction inventory? What are you tempted to grab on to instead of God? How has that hindered you from loving others?

8. SEEING SEEKERS

In Luke 10, Jesus sends seventy of his followers out to proclaim the kingdom of God. He warns them that some people will not receive their message, while others will receive it. Jesus refers to those who accept the message as “sons of peace.” If they find such a “person of peace,” Jesus instructs them to stay and do ministry among them. However, if someone doesn’t receive them, Jesus is clear that they should move on. After all, receiving the gospel is a work of the Holy Spirit, and *it’s not our job to force people to believe.*

There are people in your life who don’t know Jesus like you do yet, but they’re open and curious, even if it doesn’t look like it on the outside. After all, it’s a big risk to say you’re interested in Jesus! You never know what other people will think. A person you meet who’s open to God and what you have to say about Jesus is a “person of peace”. It seems that Jesus teaches his followers to simply seek out these people who are already open to Jesus instead of spinning our wheels trying to convince people who don’t want to hear it. We don’t always know who’s open to Jesus, so that’s why we pray for eyes to see them like Jesus does.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Acts 8:25–40 / **DAY 2** Matt. 13:15 / **DAY 3** Acts 2:45–47 / **DAY 4** 2 Cor. 4:6 / **DAY 5** Eph. 3:16–19

THE PRACTICE: IDENTIFY AND EXTEND

This week’s practice is simple: every morning, pray this prayer (perhaps stick it in a place you will see it every day):

Jesus, open my eyes to see people who are open to you, and open my heart to welcome them in.

Now live your life and watch to see what happens. Actively look for people who seem open to you and willing to hear what you have to say about Jesus. God is already at work in the people you meet. Our job is to simply be obedient, and to extend invitations to people God puts in our path. What’s an invitation? It’s a choice you make to talk with someone, hear what they have to say, and freely tell your own story. If someone’s hurting, demonstrate compassion. If someone’s mad, help them figure out why and perhaps even help them forgive someone. These Jesus things we’re doing are really, really relevant to real life.

Do you love getting invited to parties? Life with Jesus is the best party invitation you’ve ever gotten. Extend Jesus to the people around you who are curious about him. They’ll be so glad you made the first move.

THE MEETING

1. Was there a time in your life when you weren't open to Jesus? Are you open now? What changed?
2. What's a "person of peace"? How do you spot one?
3. We get intimidated about sharing Jesus because we're afraid we won't do it right. But whose job is it to help people understand the gospel? What's our part in that?
4. Look back at a time when you didn't know Jesus as well as you do now. Who helped you know him?
5. Did you meet some people of peace this week? Tell the stories.

9. SEEING GOD

Read 2 Kings 6:8-22.

Elisha is a prophet. Prophets listen for the voice of God, and help bring people close to the heart of God. At this point in the story, Israel is in a conflict with the Arameans, and they're outmatched. However, *God is actually telling Elisha the enemy's battle plans*. That keeps Israel one step ahead, and the King of Aram is convinced there's a spy in his army. The king realizes he's not dealing with a *spy*, he's dealing with a *prophet*— and now he's out to get Elisha.

The Aramean army surrounds the city, intent on trapping Elisha. The text says,

"When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

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

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:15-17 NIV).

The king saw Elisha as a threat, and out of that fear, he pulled out all the stops to get rid of him. But the thing is, even if he did capture Elisha, *he'd never be able to trap God*. The king focused on what he could see with his eyes, but Elisha and his servant saw more. Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened to see a fuller picture of reality, and he did. In light of all those horses and chariots of fire, the Aramean army didn't look so terrible. So, we need to ask ourselves: where are we looking? And *how* are we looking?

We need to ask Jesus to open our spiritual eyes so we can see the world like he does. The Apostle Paul prayed like this all the time. In Ephesians he writes, *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."* (Ephesians 1:18-19a NIV). When our eyes are open, we can see God's love and his power at work in the world, right here among us. God is with us, and he's fighting for us. Too often we see one without the other, but we can't separate them.

Jesus people learn to see *everything* through Jesus; the good and the bad. We live with confidence that God is making things right—no matter how things look on the surface. Disciples see hope where everyone else sees a lost cause. We see beauty in the ugliest places. We have a fuller perspective of what's going on. Our sight and perspective motivate us to live by faith, not fear. We understand more than what meets the eye, because we see *everything* in light of Jesus. We see sunsets, work, play, people, social media, art, war, and our breakfast cereal through Jesus. Jesus people experience *everything* through Jesus. He is here and we know it.

God is everywhere— but that doesn't mean we always see him. If we want to see what God is doing, we're going to need to put our whole lives into it. Jeremiah 29:13 says, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* Here is the key: we often pray and ask God to show up, but the fact is, he is already here to be found. God gives us a wide-open invitation. *If we don't hold anything back, he won't either.*

We want God to help us with the battles all around us— we want him to show us what he’s doing, and take care of it all for us. We want God to be our protector. If someone is against us, we want God to work in their life and reveal the truth to them so they can have a change of heart— but we don’t always invite God to change *our* hearts first. How often do we seek divine help, without actively submitting ourselves to God?

You see, if we want God to take care of all the things going on around us, we’re going to need to let him take care of what’s going on in our own hearts. If we want God to guide us as we navigate the everyday circumstances of life, and we want him to fix what’s going wrong in the world, we need to first listen when he tells us what’s wrong with *us*. That’s the deal. When we can’t see God or hear what he’s saying, we are quick to say he’s distant and silent— when really, we’re the ones far away and closed off to what’s happening.

If we want *some* of God’s help, but not *all* of it, if we’re holding anything back— something is in the way between us and Jesus. We can’t see clearly until we hand it over. We can’t ask God to help us see what to do about something outside ourselves if we want to stay blind to what’s going on within us. It just doesn’t work that way. Perhaps we only see a little because we’re only surrendering a little. Remember: we will seek God and find him when we seek him with *all* our hearts. If we want God to show up in our lives, we have to want to see *everything* he has to show us.

In a way, our level of God-awareness is linked to our desire for self-awareness. We say we want to hear God’s voice, but do we really want to hear everything he has to say?

Disciples live connected to Jesus and they know it; Jesus is not only *near* us, but *with* us. As we submit ourselves to God, his light wins over our lives. Jesus has always been present, but we haven’t always seen him. He has always been speaking, but we haven’t always heard his voice. Jesus is here to be found. We don’t need to seek mountaintop experiences to see and hear him. In fact, we experience God most easily within the events of our everyday lives.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 2 Kings 6:8-22 / **DAY 2** Eph. 1:18-19a / **DAY 3** Jer. 29:13 / **DAY 4** James 4:4-10 / **DAY 5** Deut. 31:6

THE PRACTICE: AWARENESS

In his book, *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard writes, “God is not looking for a holy place. Places are holy because God is there”. This place where you are, right now, is a holy place. God is here, and he’s eager to meet with you. Are you eager to meet with him? Are you willing to see *everything* he has to show you?

How do you need your eyes opened to God’s presence in your life? Here are some prompts to ask yourself that can guide you to that answer. Consider these questions and journal your responses to them. Remember, this is a *practice*, not a test. If you’re not certain about a particular answer, just take a guess.

1. What direct actions have you taken this week in response to Jesus? What were the results?
2. How is Jesus speaking to you through other people this week? How did you respond?

3. What important thing are you putting off today? Why do you avoid it?
4. Who needs more than you are giving today?
5. Does any part of you resist rest? What parts of you are uncomfortable just being *with* Jesus? Why?
6. What burden is Jesus asking you to surrender? What gift does he have to replace it? Do you want it?
7. When was your last moment of true joy? What produced that joy, and how can you pursue that today?

THE MEETING

1. *How* we look for God is as important as *where* we look for him. What does that mean to you?
2. Jesus people see and experience everything through Jesus. How is this different from how the rest of the world works? What difference does it make for you?
3. If we want God's help with a problem, we need to be willing to see *everything* he has to show us. What's that mean? Why might we resist seeing everything he wants to show us?
4. Sometimes we are blind to what Jesus is doing, simply because we forget to ask him to help us see. How has this week's conversation changed how you approach your everyday life?
5. What did Jesus show you through the practice this week? Share about it.

10. HOSPITALITY

“When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.” – Romans 12:13 NIV

“Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.” – Hebrews 13:1-3 NIV

“That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit. The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.” – 1 Peter 4:6-9 NIV

Jesus arguably did most of his ministry around tables. It seems like everywhere you look, he’s sharing a meal with someone. Often, the people he was with were those you’d least expect. In an age where the people you ate with were a reflection on your social standing, it’s clear that Jesus wasn’t interested in maintaining his reputation among the elites. He makes this clear when he shows love to a despised tax collector and his sinful compatriots. Take a look:

“After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’

Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’” (Luke 5:27-32 NIV).

If the significance of this passage doesn’t strike you, it’s because you’ve grown so used to the notion that it’s virtuous to be hospitable toward the marginalized. But it hasn’t always been this way. Bible Scholar Donald Hagner helps us understand the significance of this:

“Table fellowship in that culture was regarded as a very important symbol of the closeness, indeed the oneness, of those participating...For Jesus and his disciples to be at the same table with tax collectors and sinners implied a full acceptance of them.”

When Jesus sat at the table with Levi and his friends, he was saying to them, “you’re with me.” As a result, their lives were changed. We often don’t realize this, but there is a strong correlation between hospitality and evangelism. When we think of evangelism, we might think of people knocking on doors and sharing tracts. But this is not how Jesus went about it. Jesus got into the lives of people, and within a relationship of love, invited them to the gospel party. Ultimately, that’s what hospitality is about—reaching out to those who are far from God and inviting them into a place where they can be known and loved. This is what Jesus people have done for millenia, and it’s how we’re going to continue to change the world today.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Romans 12:13 / **DAY 2** Heb. 13:1-3 / **DAY 3** 1 Peter 4:6-9 / **DAY 4** Luke 5:27-32 / **DAY 5** 1 John 4:8

THE PRACTICE: MAKE ROOM

Fred Rogers wrote, "When your heart has room for everybody, then your heart is full of love." God's love has room for everybody. God's love is unconditional, and if you've received it, you're called to let that love change you and move out of you to others. Everywhere, to everyone. No exclusions. Love is not earned, so it can't be given out based on merit. God is not only loving, *God is love* (1 John 4:8). Life with God is a life of generous, unconditional love.

We are called to be peacemakers (Romans 12:18). Hostility is a sense of opposition or resistance to someone or something. Disciples don't choose to live in hostility toward God or anyone else. Is any part of your heart hostile to God? Do you ever keep God out or push him away? Is any part of you hostile toward a person, or a group of people? Are you shutting out anyone who needs to be welcomed in? *When your heart has room for everybody, then your heart is full of love.* Who is invited to your table? Who has eaten with you at your table this year? How about your relationships? Have you had a falling out with anyone that's left division between you? Are you willing to ask God to mend it? If your heart won't make room for everyone, then to some degree, all the love you give is *conditional*. You're making a judgement call, deciding who is worthy of love, and who is not. You're deciding who you have room for. This is not the way of Jesus.

To stretch this even further, we are not only called to actively love those we know, but to live with open invitation to strangers, foreigners, and outsiders. Romans 12:13 says, "When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality." The Greek word for hospitality in this verse is *philoxenia*. It means, "to receive and show hospitality to a stranger, that is, someone who is not regarded as a member of the extended family or a close friend." To show biblical hospitality is to receive a *stranger* as a *guest*. In sharing what is most dear to us, a moment of conversion happens: someone we once identified as a stranger is welcomed as a guest and is transformed into a friend. This is our own story as we were once outside the family of God, and have been welcomed in. God commands us to live out that story again and again with one another.

This week, we will practice hospitality. Choose the path(s) you will take and come ready to discuss your experiences with the group at your next meeting. Choose one practice, or all three, or commit to another specific step God seems to be nudging you toward. Choosing just one is fine, but ask yourself, "Could I do all three?" If no, why not?

PRACTICE 1: PRAY

Marjorie Thompson explains that, "When we intercede for others in prayer, we welcome them into our inmost sanctuary of compassion. We participate in the spacious hospitality of God's grace for each person. Since hospitality has a special place for the stranger, praying for our enemies (inside or outside the church) is a most fitting expression of the heart's hospitality." Who will you intercede for daily for one week?

PRACTICE 2: CROSS THE THRESHOLD

Alan Hirsch writes, "If every Christian family in the world simply offered good conversational hospitality around a table once a week to neighbors we would eat our way into the kingdom of God."

Identify someone in your life who feels like an "other", where some sort of invisible barrier exists between you, and invite them across your threshold (figuratively or hopefully, even literally). Reach out to them and each lunch with them or have them over to your house, and then simply just talk together. The gesture does not need to be grand, just genuine. Break that invisible barrier in the name of Jesus. If the first one or two people you invite refuse you or can't make it, *find someone else*.

PRACTICE 3: MAKE ROOM FOR GENEROSITY

Ask God if there is any way you are withholding generosity from someone by not giving what you can. Where are you keeping extras for yourself instead of sharing with those who don't have access to what you do? How can you make more room for generosity?

THE MEETING

1. Evangelism and hospitality are often misunderstood in our culture. Look back on what we learned this week. How would you define each of these terms?

3. We introduced the Greek word *philoxenia*. It's translated as hospitality; to receive a stranger as a guest. Perhaps you've heard the word xenophobia before. It comes from the Greek term *xenos*, which means "stranger" or "guest", and *phobos*, which can mean "fear" or "flight." It essentially means "stranger fearing." Xenophobia is defined as, "fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign."

Consider every kind of "difference" you can think of between yourself and others. Think about cultural, political, and religious differences, but also differences in personality, lifestyle, etc. Have you ever experienced a fear of the "other"? If so, how? Who makes you uncomfortable? Who do you avoid? Why?

4. When have you been an outsider, and who invited you in? When have you been the recipient of a gift of generosity? What difference did that make in your life?

If this applies, consider writing that person a letter right now, or reaching out to them with a text or phone call. Thank them for welcoming you in, and helping you when you needed it.

5. How did you practice hospitality this week? Tell the stories.

11. UPSIDE DOWN ACHIEVER

When we come to know Jesus, we approach him with our questions, our expectations, and our needs. But we can't begin to *follow* Jesus until we are ready to obey him. In fact, Jesus says our obedience to him is the fruit of our love for him (John 14:23). The obedience Jesus calls for has love at its root. Throughout Scripture, there is an expectation that those who love God do what he says out of devotion, not duty. We can't walk with Jesus and go our own way. If we follow Jesus, we go where he leads.

On the surface, this can look very positive! After all, God is wise! He loves us! His ways are good for us! Obeying God can make us safer and healthier. Our relationships, finances, and even our bodies benefit from following what God says is good. We want that good stuff. But here is the problem: God achieves these good things in and through us with methods that are often *entirely backwards* from how the world works. When we give our lives to Jesus, it doesn't take long before following him means going against the tide of the world, other people's expectations, and especially our own natural desires.

Jesus says if we want to gain life, we'll need to lose our life (Matt. 16:25). He says the path to freedom is to find the one thing in the world we hold most dear, and let it go (see Luke 18:18-29). The key to tapping in to eternity here and now is to align ourselves with *selfless ambition*. To lay down our own pursuits and desires and take up the things Jesus says matter most.

Jesus himself perfectly embodies that life. When Paul describes how we should relate to one another and the world, he tells us to think and act like Jesus, who lived out the life of a humble servant, obedient even to death (Phil. 2:5-8). If we are following Jesus closely, humility, sacrifice, and obedience will become a part of our nature, too. We will begin to do things, love things, and create things that will baffle the world, but will reveal the Kingdom of God right here and now. God is at work where you are, and we need to resist the pull of self, the enemy, and the world if we want to join him.

Henri Nouwen often explained that in the world, we seek three things above all else: to be relevant, to be spectacular, and to be powerful. In other words, we want to be essential to the people and things around us. We want to be very relevant; to matter and be missed if we're gone. We want to be needed and wanted. We want to be spectacular; we want to be incredibly good at many things, and enjoy the spotlight because of it. And we want to be powerful. We want to be the masters of our own universe; to call the shots, to hold things together in the way we want them to be. We want to be in *control*. None of these pursuits bring us peace, because all three attempt to stand us up in a place that only God can occupy. We strive and strive and cannot ever get enough relevance, ability, or power, because *we are not God*.

Look at the culture around you. Voices everywhere say move *yourself* up, up, up. Get a good degree, then get a Master's degree. Get a good car, then get a better one. Have a good job five years from now, and use that job to get a better one. Have the clothes you want now, not when you can afford it. Think about how our culture works: success means doing bigger and better things every year, getting more possessions, and securing the right relationships. If we aren't moving up in the world, we're failing. Everybody's looking for the "good life".

Jesus says we're successful when we actively love our enemies, share our homes with strangers, and forgive people who don't deserve it. *That's the good life*. Rooted, risky, unglamorous, full life. Life in the Kingdom of God operates

downward; we lay down our lives (self-denial), we surrender and drop our hold on achievement, performance, and control, and we choose to serve without getting credit. We give costly gifts (generosity), choose community growth over individual gain, and place what others need above what we want right now (hospitality). We become so secure in Jesus we begin to forget that anyone else's opinion ever had power over us. Jesus people don't compete. We rest in our identity in Christ, and out of that identity, we pursue costly obedience in love. The rewards are rich, but mysterious, and often *entirely confusing* to the world.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 John 14:23 / **DAY 2** Matt. 16:25 / **DAY 3** Luke 18:18-29 / **DAY 4** Phil 2:5-8 / **DAY 5** 2 Cor. 8:8-9

THE PRACTICE: PURPOSE

You have many roles. You're a Jesus follower. You're a student. You probably do extra activities. You're a friend, a son or daughter, a sister or brother. Maybe you have a job. And you have goals, too. Things you really want to get out of life.

1. Look at your life and define five primary roles you fill. List them here:

2. Now break those five roles down even more. List each role, then next to it, write a statement that defines who you want to be in that role:

ROLE 1:

STATEMENT:

ROLE 2:

STATEMENT:

ROLE 3:

STATEMENT:

ROLE 4:

STATEMENT:

ROLE 5:

STATEMENT:

3. Look over your statements. How do these reflect the world's influence? How do they reflect Jesus? You don't have to write anything down. Just think about it.

4. Think about who you'll be 10 years from now. Dream a little. Be creative. Write a paragraph describing the kind of person you want to be in 10 years.

5. Now read over what you wrote for question 4. Name three practical things you can do in your everyday life that will help you get there.

1.

2.

3.

THE MEETING

Spend time sharing what you wrote during the practice this week. Make sure everyone gets to share, and find ways the group can hold each other accountable to practice the habits that you listed in question 5.

12. LOOKING BACK & REACHING OUT

You. Are. A. Finisher!

This week will look a bit different. Instead of something new, you're going to look back at how far you've come. Head back through this booklet at each of the weeks you've met with your group. Read through the content and practices and what you wrote. As you do, complete the practice below.

THE WORD

MAKE SPACE. READ IT. READ IT AGAIN. PAUSE. TALK AND LISTEN WITH JESUS. JOURNAL.

DAY 1 Acts 9:1-22 / **DAY 2** 2 Cor. 3:17-18 / **DAY 3** Col. 1:1-29 / **DAY 4** Eph. 1:3-23 / **DAY 5** Heb 12:1-3

THE PRACTICE: REFLECT AND INVITE

Look back at your journey one week at a time. As you do, list at least one thing you learned that week, and one way Jesus changed you.

WEEK 1: HEARING GOD

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 2: CONFESSION

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 3: SELF DENIAL

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 4: COMPASSION

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 5: EXPERIENCING SCRIPTURE

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 6: FORGIVENESS

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 7: GENEROSITY

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 8: SEEING SEEKERS

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 9: SEEING GOD

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 10: HOSPITALITY

What I learned:

How I changed:

WEEK 11: UPSIDE DOWN ACHIEVER

What I learned:

How I changed:

In your own words, what does it mean to be a Jesus person?

What did this 12-week journey give you? What means the most?

Who is Jesus prompting you to invite to take this journey? Write their name(s) here.

THE MEETING

1. What does it mean to be a Jesus person?
2. Look back at what this 12-week journey gave you. What meant the most?
3. Who will you invite to take this journey? Name them, and pray for them. Have questions about sharing Jesus with friends? Check out the resource at the end of this book.

HOW TO SHARE JESUS

Jesus people practice *hospitality*. For a Christian, this means welcoming people into the family of God. At the heart of this is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, or, "the gospel."

PART 1: WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

There is a word that Christians often say but rarely define: the word "gospel." What exactly do we mean by it? In the Bible, the word used for "gospel" simply means "good news." This Greek word, *euangelion*, is not unique to the Bible, but is used in many places to proclaim all sorts of news that was considered "good." For example, we have ancient writings celebrating the "good news" (or "gospel") of Caesar Augustus after he had just won a great battle. Often, this word was used to announce the fact that a ruler had just won a battle, and their kingdom was therefore advancing.

This context helps us make sense of what's happening when we see Jesus preaching the good news, or gospel:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk. 1:14-15 NIV)

In other words, Jesus is proclaiming the fact that God's kingdom is advancing, so we'd all better get in line with it! The battle is being won, with the decisive victory being the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, perhaps we can attempt a simple definition of the gospel:

The gospel is the good news that God's kingdom has come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who now rules over all. Therefore, we can be forgiven for our rebellion and enjoy a life with God in His kingdom.

Now that's good news!

PART 2: SHARING THE GOSPEL

Now that we have a sense of what the gospel is, we should ask, "how do we share this good news with others?" That's what we do with good news: we share it. If we don't, then it would appear we don't think it's particularly "good."

The first thing to understand is that nothing beats your own story. There's no comparison for having your own transforming relationship with Jesus to share with others. Even in the Bible, we see the power of personal stories to transform lives (see Luke 8:39).

Nevertheless, it helps to have a good framework to use. Consider these four statements that you can use to help people understand God: God loves you, sin causes death, Jesus gives life, and live for Jesus. Let's explore these more in-depth.

1. God loves you.

Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

One of the most important things we can understand is that God loves us more than we can imagine. As this verse makes clear, God will stop at nothing to show us this love.

2. Sin causes death.

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The problem is that we are broken. That brokenness is called "sin." We all try to do God's job, and in doing that, we rebel against him. This separates us from God forever, and it causes eternal death in our souls. The good news is that...

3. Jesus brings life.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

Not because of anything we've done, and not because we deserve it—but purely because of God's unfathomable love—he provided a way for our sin problem to be cured. Jesus did it by sacrificing his own life for you, and when God raised him from the dead, that meant that when we decide to make Jesus our master, sin and death will no longer have victory in our lives, not only in this life, but in the next!

4. Live for Jesus.

2 Cor. 5:15 says, " And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

The key to receiving this new life is that we no longer live for ourselves, but for Jesus! It's God's upside-down sort of way. To have an abundant life, we must give it away! Sounds crazy, but it's true. Jesus offers life to us, and all we have to do is surrender to him.