

— *The* —
PURSUIT

Exploring your life in Christ

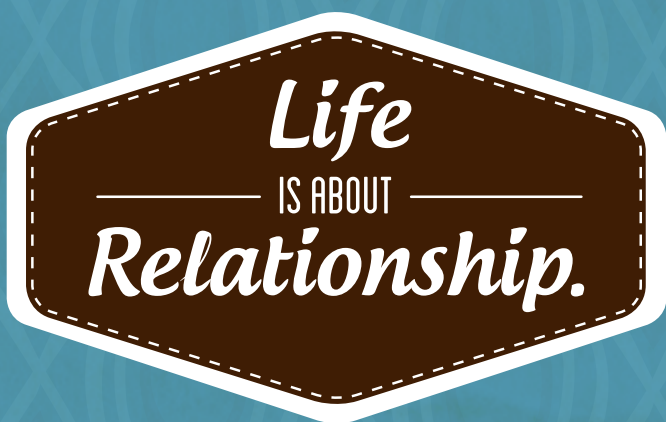




Paul Gotthardt

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Life — IS ABOUT — *Relationship.*

About this book:

The Pursuit shows how the three key relationships of Christ's life impact your growth as a disciple. Jesus lived in right relationship with the Father, with the Church, and with the world. All three relationships stayed in proper tension. Over the next four weeks, you will see how Christianity operates in each of these three relationships.

You will learn to pursue Christ while developing a deep love for God. Loving God will keep you focused on your relationship with the Father. As you pursue Christ, He will stress the importance of uniting with believers. You will see the ways Christ leads His disciples to be in right relationship with the Church. Finally, pursuing Christ will challenge you to serve the world and entrust the Gospel. Both activities encourage you to engage the world in ways that honor God. Over time you will see the world through the lens of relationship.

The Pursuit is divided into four weeks with six devotions per week. If you get behind on a day or so, that's okay. The free days will allow you time to get caught up. If you need to take more than thirty days to complete the guide, that is fine too! This is a guide to help, not a law to obey. Enjoy the time with God. Focus on Him. Take some notes and watch the way He transitions personal devotion into relational growth.

May God bless you as you pursue Him!

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— WEEK 1 —

Love God.

DAY 1: If You Can Only Do One Thing...

Vacation was two weeks away and Steve was making final plans. Wanting to include his six-year-old son in the process, Steve asked, “Is there anything you would like to do when we get to the beach?” Within a matter of seconds, the boy listed so many ideas that it was almost overwhelming. Knowing the budget, Steve rephrased his question. “If you could only do one thing at the beach, what would it be?” After taking several minutes to think, the boy smiled and said, “It really doesn’t matter what we do as long as we do it together.”

The journey of the Christian should resemble this story. At first glance, there are so many good things to explore and do as Christians. We can pray, study Scriptures, go to church, give to good causes, serve others, share our faith, and more. Christianity does not lack good activities. But at the heart of Christianity is a call to be with Christ.

When Jesus called the original disciples, Mark records, “*And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach*” (Mark 3:14). They were called to be with Him, and then He would send them out into service. The emphasis is on the relationship. If you can only do one thing in the Christian life—spend time with Christ.

As you focus on loving God, remember that **where** you go, **what** you do, and **how** you do it are always secondary to **Who** you’re with.

◆ List several practical ways that you can be with Jesus every day.

- _____
- _____
- _____

◆ What are several barriers that get in the way of being with Christ every day?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I understand that my first priority in life is to be with you. You have shown me several ways to fulfill this desire and several barriers that stand in the way. Give me the courage to change what needs to be changed in order to be with you on a daily basis. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

DAY 2: Keeping Love Simple

I recently heard of a man who proposed to his girlfriend by having “Marry Me” written in the clouds. Unfortunately, the pilot reversed the second “m” and wrote, “Marry We.” Not as romantic as he had hoped, but she got the point!

Do you ever feel the need to prove your love to God in some huge way? Loving God is not about the big things we do or the size of the gifts we give. Loving God is about being with Him and obeying His promptings.

Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

According to Jesus, our love for God is marked by simple obedience that flows out of relationship. The first response of many Christians is to say, “I will obey God to prove I love Him.” This premise is based on performance-driven religion and self-reliance. Jesus is saying, “Love me and you will obey.”

We do not obey so that we can love Jesus; we love Jesus and the result is obedience.

◆ Read 1 John 4:19. What is the basis of our love for God?

1 John 4:19 helps us realize that we are not initiating love—we are only responding to His love for us. God loves you!

While God invites each of us into greater levels of intimacy, He has created us to pursue Him in unique ways. Sit quietly with the Lord, and ask Him, "How do you want me to pursue You today?" Record what God says and do it!

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. Would you mercifully remove the parts of me that get in the way of loving you? I pray for your grace through the process and the courage to release what is required. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Luke 10:38–42, Mark 12:41–44, 1 John 2:3–6

Notes:

DAY 3: "He's Waiting for You"

"In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." —Mark 1:35

There is a less than famous painting of Jesus sitting alone at an old table in a rustic room. The table has two chairs, and Jesus is occupying one. On top of the table is an oil lamp, an open Bible, and a journal. In the background, there is a small open window with a view of the sun rising over a hill. The picture looks calm and peaceful, and then you read the words under it, "He's waiting for you."

When I first saw the picture, it had a profound impact on my time with God. All I could think of is the number of times that I left Jesus sitting alone at the table. My excuses were endless. I was too busy, too tired, too preoccupied with life! But no matter how many excuses I gave, the painting silenced every one of them. I was left with this image of Christ sitting patiently and silently, waiting for me to spend time with Him.

Spending time with God can seem daunting. What do you do? Where do you start? What do you say? What if you miss a day? The key to spending time with God is to emphasize the relationship. You are there to know Him. The ultimate goal in life is to know God; the daily goal in life is to spend time with God.

Based on the habits of Jesus in Mark 1:35, we can see that Christ made intimacy a priority. Our challenge is to follow in His footsteps.

◆ How does Mark 1:35 challenge you to develop greater consistency in your time with God?

- ◆ The passage speaks of Jesus meeting the Father at a specific time, in a specific place, and for a specific reason. Do you have a specific plan or pattern for meeting with God? If not, spend some time working on a specific plan for your life.

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I know that the only way to know you is to spend time with you. I pray that during our times together, I keep the relationship as the focus. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Lamentations 3:21–25, Psalm 33:18–22; 46:1–11, 2 Chronicles 16:9, Hebrews 10:19–22, Revelation 3:20

Notes:

DAY 4: Is God Lovable?

What does it take to fall in love with someone? Chances are, everyone will answer that question a little differently. Maybe a better question would be, "Are some character qualities more lovable than others?" That's the real issue! I doubt anyone would describe Mr. or Mrs. Right as arrogant, demoralizing, lacking integrity, and generally pessimistic. At the end of the day, we are attracted to qualities we admire or desire.

With that being said, what makes God lovable? If the purpose of life is to pursue a love relationship with Jesus Christ, it presupposes that God is lovable. Therefore, what are the character qualities that make God lovable?

For a quick description of God's character, take a few moments and read Psalm 103. In twenty-two verses, we find that God is...

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| • Forgiving (v.3,9,12) | • Satisfying (v.5) | • Merciful (v.10) |
| • Restorative (v.3) | • Righteous (v.6,17) | • Considerate (v.14) |
| • Redemptive (v.4) | • Revelatory (v.7) | • Eternal/Everlasting (v.17) |
| • Loving (v.4, 8, 11, 17) | • Gracious (v.8) | • Sovereign (v.19) |
| • Compassionate (v.4, 8, 13) | • Slow to anger (v.8) | • Praise Worthy (v.20–22) |

Our love *for* God will never grow beyond our knowledge of God. Therefore, we should strive to study in a way that our knowledge of God remains firmly rooted in His revealed character.

◆ Take a few moments and list other character qualities of God that you find admirable or desirable.

DAY 5: *If You Really Love Me...*

Have you ever been guilted into doing something with the words, “If you really loved me, you would _____”? Maybe a couple of examples will jog your memory! “If you really loved me, you would take out the trash. If you really loved me, you would buy me this watch. If you really loved me, you would do what I want to do.” Unfortunately, love can become a manipulative bargaining tool.

With that idea in mind, how are we to interpret the statement of Jesus in John 14:15? Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” It’s almost like Jesus is saying, “If you really love me, you would do what I say.”

Yet based on the character of Christ, we know that He does not manipulate us. So where does that leave us as we try to understand this passage?

It leaves us with a spiritual litmus test for our relationship with Christ. If we are experiencing problems in our walk with God (e.g. lack of passion, stunted growth, sinful patterns, etc.), it is a love issue. Most Christians have been taught that the more we obey God, the more we will love God. Jesus is teaching just the opposite.

According to Christ, the more we love God, the more we will obey God. When relational breakdowns occur, Jesus is saying, “Focus on love. Look at love. Return to loving Me. Your problems are not a lack of motivation, a lack of self-control, or a lack of knowing spiritual truth. Your problems stem from a lack of love.” Love is the starting line—not obedience. When we love God, we will keep His commandments.

Our love will always result in obedience, but our obedience will not always result in love.

- ◆ What are three problems in your spiritual life that seem to be reoccurring?
-
-
-
-

The way we address the problems is not to focus on the problem. The way to address the problem is to focus on loving God.

- ◆ Based on the example of Jesus, how do we grow in our love relationship with God? (Hint: Mark 1:35; John 14–15)

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. Thank you for helping me see a clear path to godliness. I know that focusing on my problems will lead to defeat and focusing on you will lead to victory. Teach me how to love you. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages For Additional Study: Deuteronomy 6:1–25; 30:6, Joshua 22:5, 1 John 4:16–21, Romans 8:12–17

Notes:

DAY 6: Why Can't I Worship God at Home?

You know the routine. It's as predictable as taxes and just about as enjoyable. It's called Sunday morning mayhem. The alarm goes off and you feel like you got run over by a truck. The kids are cranky, there's no hot water, it's your week in the nursery, and the dog left a deposit in your good shoes. Everything is going in the wrong direction. About that time, two questions comes to mind: "Why are Sundays so hard, and why can't I worship God at home?"

Let's be honest! We've all wrestled with those types of questions at some point in our spiritual journey. How does the Bible address this concern?

In Acts 2:42–47, Luke writes these words:

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

I've underlined a number of words to show a general pattern for Christians. The words that are underlined are plural or group-oriented in some way. The point is simple! **There is no Christianity apart from community.** Why can't I worship God at home? The answer is that God has designed the Christian life to be fully expressed and enjoyed in the fellowship of believers.

The first-century church studied *together*, hung out *together*, ate *together*, prayed *together*, experienced life *together*, pulled their resources *together*, received communion *together*, and most importantly, worshipped *together*. Christianity is a team sport!

One of the greatest ways that we express our love for God is in the context of corporate worship. With one voice, we praise Him! With one heart, we pursue Him. With one mind, we desire to know Him. As a part of the church of Jesus Christ, much of our growth *in* Christ and passion *for* Christ will be determined by our connectedness to His Body.

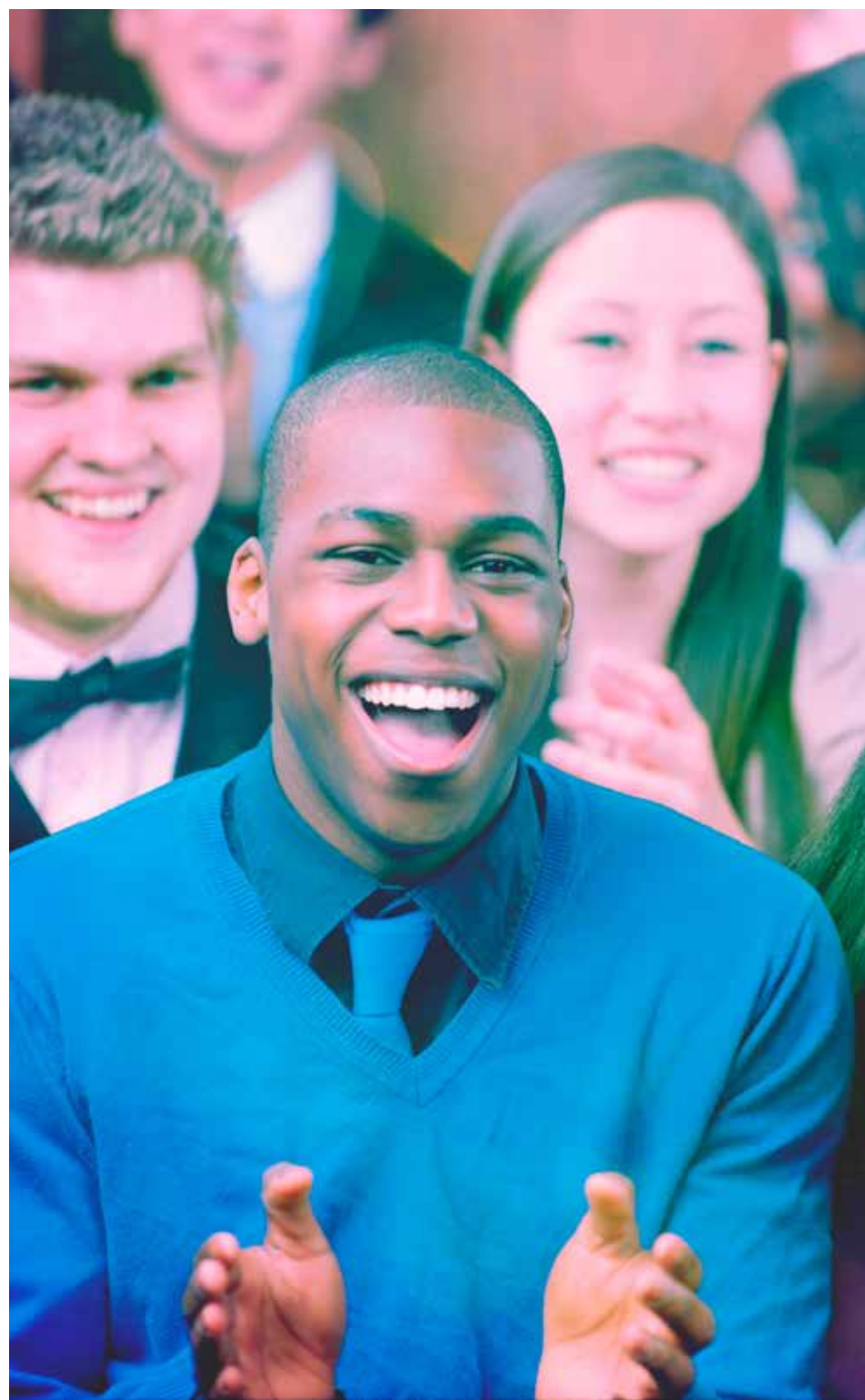
Determine today to make corporate worship a regular part of your week!

- ◆ Why do you think it was important for the first-century church to meet regularly in “the temple” and from “house to house”?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I understand that part of my growth in you is found in connection with other believers. Thank you for the privilege of joining in corporate worship. Please help me to pursue you with others. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages For Additional Study: Hebrews 10:23–25, Colossians 3:12–16

Notes:



WEEK 2

*Unite with
Believers.*

DAY 1:

A Place for Encouragement

Don't you love being around encouraging people? They compliment your shoes, your hair, your talents and strengths, and anything else they might notice. They have a knack for saying the right thing at the right time in the right way, and it leaves you uplifted and filled with hope. In some ways, encouragement is verbal balm to hurting people.

In recent weeks, I've noticed an interesting trend while reading through the New Testament. The apostles spent much of their ministry strengthening the believers and encouraging them in their walk with God. Encouragement and strength go hand in hand. Note the examples given:

- "When they had read it [a letter delivered by Judas and Silas] they rejoiced because of its encouragement" (Acts 15:31).
- "Judas and Silas...encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message" (Acts 15:32).
- "...and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed" (Acts 16:40).
- "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- "And also Jesus who is called Justus...proved to be an encouragement to me" (Colossians 4:11).
- "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).
- "Encourage one another daily...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13 NIV).

I've always been taught that the purpose of small groups was deeper learning. That might be a part of it. But what if uniting with believers has less to do with information and more to do with encouragement and strength? We all know more of the Bible than we practice, but no one has more encouragement than they need!

Are you walking through discouraging times? If so, ask yourself a second question, "Am I placing myself in areas where people can speak encouragement and strength into my life?"

◆ If you're not currently attending a small group, what's holding you back?

Have you taken any of these issues to God in prayer? If not, share your concerns with God.

◆ What does Hebrews 10:23–25 teach us about gathering together?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I understand that encouragement and strength are found in fellowship with other believers. Reveal yourself to me and through me as I meet with others. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Acts 11:19–24; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:11–14

Notes:

DAY 2: The Human Element

There's a lot of talk about spiritual growth among Christians. We know that growth is important, and we know that lack of growth is draining. But are we being told the whole story?

If you take a trip to your local Christian bookstore, your eyes are dazzled with thousands of books intended to develop you in the faith. You can read books on the power of prayer. You can study various methods for the devotional life. You can become an expert on spiritual gifts. But with each book you read, there is a subtle and consistent message you receive: "Growth is just a book away!"

Or is it?

In your experience, how many self-taught disciples have you encountered? While books will be a part of personal growth, they are not intended to be the "independent study method" of the Christian life. Books can unlock truths and broaden our understanding, but they cannot take the place of human interaction. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." By God's design, a major part of our growth comes through relational encounters with other believers.

Imagine how differently the Bible would read if books (not believers) were God's chosen instrument for spiritual growth? A couple of revisions might be:

- "As books sharpen minds, so one book sharpens those who read it." (The New Proverbs 27:17)
- "And all those who had believed were staying at home reading. They had little in common (because they rarely met together), but they enjoyed swapping books and notes and they were sharing outlines with all, as anyone might have need." (The New Acts 2:44–45)
- "Two books are better than one because they have more information." (The New Ecclesiastes 4:9)

Books are great, but they cannot replace the human element in spiritual growth.

- ◆ We know that uniting with believers is important for encouragement and strength. Today, we can see that uniting with believers is a key to spiritual growth. Who are you regularly meeting with for the purpose of spiritual growth?

- ◆ If part of our spiritual growth comes through meeting with others, that would also mean that part of someone else's spiritual growth will come from meeting with you. List two areas where God has taught you something that could be valuable to others (e.g. prayer, trust, patience, caring for others, etc.).

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I recognize that part of my growth comes through uniting with others. Would you please help me to connect with a group that fits my schedule and my place in life? Thank you for caring about each part of my development. I love you. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Romans 12:1–13; Ephesians 4:1–16;
1 Thessalonians 3:11–13

Notes:

DAY 3: A Challenge to Selfish Living

"Give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others." —Philippians 2:3–4 (NCV)

The story is not all about you. As hard as that might be to admit, it's true! Most of us are tempted to think that life is just one big story, and we have central roles to play. Everything that happens is seen as a challenge to us, a stepping-stone *for* us, or a lesson *about* us. We may never verbalize our beliefs in this way, but our statements give us away.

- "God, the account fell through. Why do you keep letting these things happen to me?"
- "God, there's not enough money. What you are trying to teach me in this situation?"
- "God, I'm needing to work late again. Why am I always singled out for overtime?"

What if the ultimate purpose of our life's events has nothing to do with us at all? What if the account fell through because it wasn't good for someone else? What if God removed some of your resources to answer someone else's prayers? What if your ability to work late allowed God to heal someone else's marital problems? While there is a huge story unfolding around us, every event is not about us.

There is a point in every believer's life where they must answer the question, "Will I live my life for self or will I give my life for others?" Jesus taught that those who tried to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life will find it (Matthew 16:25).

One of the blessings of uniting with believers is that it forces us to take interest in others. By nature, there are very few people who are genuinely concerned for the needs of others. Due to the fall of humanity, our natural default setting is hopelessly set on "self". Part of the journey towards Christ-likeness is "denying self" and serving others (Matthew 16:24–27). When believers meet together in biblical community, both areas are addressed.

◆ Why is it difficult to acknowledge that the story is not about us?

◆ How would small groups look different if we came to the meeting for the purpose of helping, serving, encouraging, and strengthening each other?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I confess my desire to be at the center of the story and I need you to change me from the inside out. As best as I know how, I submit to you and ask that you live through me for the purpose of blessing others. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Philippians 2:1–11; Galatians 6:1–2; Colossians 3:12–17

Notes:

DAY 4: Lessons from the Weight Room

In sixth grade I was introduced to the wonders of the weight room. It was a fascinating world of strength and bravado. I found out quickly that “gym life” is a subculture unto itself. The people are different. They think differently, act differently, and wear things foreign to most of us. There are gloves with no fingers, shirts with no sleeves, and shorts that leave nothing to the imagination. The only thing that was not in short supply was pride!

Inevitably, the smallest guy in the room would grunt the loudest, talk the most, and lift the least! If you watched for about five minutes, it was not hard to discern those who had experience and those who wanted you to think they had experience.

Those with experience wore normal clothes, paced themselves throughout the workout, and called for a spot when they attempted heavier weight. Those without experience wore all the gear, maxed their ability on every lift, and viewed a spotter as a sign of weakness. I cannot tell you how many times I’ve had to lift the barbell off the chest of a dude wearing cool gloves, a sleeveless shirt, and tight pants. (Not a pretty picture!)

Believe it or not, there are a couple of spiritual truths we can bring out of the gym.

- **Truth 1:** Experience will manifest itself in wise decisions.
- **Truth 2:** Experience is not afraid to ask for help.

Solomon said, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10).

Mature believers, who have experience walking with God, will consistently make wise decisions. They intentionally position themselves among pockets of believers because “two are better than one”. They don’t feel the need to prove themselves at every turn, and therefore, they will take advantage of the opportunities available to them (e.g. worship services, small groups, daily time with God, positions of service, accountability groups, etc.). While a mature believer might know a lot of the information presented in these venues, they also recognize their need for accountability and community. They know that when they fall, it is good to have “another to lift him up”.

Younger or less mature believers mistake gear for godliness. They have all the right tools; they just don't know how to use what they have. They turn down the opportunities for regular growth because they have convinced themselves that they don't have the time or the need is not urgent. When they do come together with other believers, they find themselves posturing for spirituality and battling the need to prove themselves in every situation. Inevitably, they overextend their resources and pride keeps them from asking for help. When they fall, they have positioned themselves in isolation.

The Christian life is not a sprint; it's a marathon! No one makes it alone, and consistent wise decisions will do more than occasional bursts of spirituality.

Read Titus 2:3–6, Romans 12:10 and Hebrews 11:1–12:2.

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I understand that part of the way I know you is to watch the lives of those who have known you longer. I commit to positioning my life in the context of mature believers. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Notes:

DAY 5: Community is a Lifestyle Choice

Over the past four days, we have seen that uniting with believers is important for providing encouragement and strength, establishing an environment for personal growth, challenging selfish living, and making wise decisions in the safety of community. Today, we see how uniting with believers becomes a lifestyle choice that brings joy to those who choose it.

In Acts 2:42–47, Luke writes:

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

What an incredible group of believers! We hear a lot about lifestyle choices. From Sunday school to public health commercials, we are urged to make wise decisions. The purpose is to help people see that the lifestyle choices we make will determine the lives we live.

When I speak of lifestyle choices, I’m referring to decisions that alter the general flow and course of your life. For example, a decision to do drugs, incur debt, or go to college will change the general flow and course of your life. A decision to follow Christ, become an avid golfer, or start a business will also change the general flow and course of your life. Lifestyle choices can be good or bad decisions. And while all lifestyle decisions will not have the same impact, they will change the way you live from day to day.

Doing life together is a lifestyle choice. When believers choose to unite together on a level deeper than casual church attendance and the occasional Bible study, it will change the general flow and course of their life. The first-century church learned together, fellowshiped together, ate together, and prayed together. They experienced God regularly in the context of community, and they were witnesses to God’s unbelievable power. They had many things in common, and they took care of each other by giving and sharing. Their hearts were bent toward praise, and they saw people added to their numbers

daily. What an incredible picture! BUT...at the end of the day, the choices they made to be in community determined the lives they lived overall.

You will never be forced to experience community on that level. But hopefully, the thought of genuine community will encourage you to choose it.

◆ Do you have any fears about genuine community? Write them out below:

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I thank you for providing a place where I can belong. Thank you for the family of God. Help me to move past any fears I might have about community, and help me to desire deeper relationships with other believers. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Acts 4:32–35; 1 Corinthians 12:4–27; Ephesians 4:1–6

Notes:

DAY 6: Serving Each Other

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? When we think of a disciple, we usually think of a student (someone who learns from a teacher). While there is definitely a component of learning involved, a disciple is more than just a student. A disciple of Christ is someone who does what Jesus does in order to be like Christ.

Take that idea and move it into the arena of disciple-making. As a church, our goal is to make disciples. Therefore, any conversation on disciple-making must also include a discussion on living as Christ lived. In Matthew 20:26–28, Jesus shared an important truth on how He lived:

“Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served.” (MSG)

Jesus came to serve others! As Christians, it is easy to focus on Jesus’ teaching, miracles, or divine qualities. But if we are to understand the way Jesus lived from day to day, we must see His life of service.

What does that mean to us? It means that serving others must become a major part of our lives. One of the first areas in which we learn how to serve is in the context of the local church. We learn by serving each other. It is for this purpose that the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to each believer. First Corinthians 12:7 tells us, “A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.” Pay close attention to the word “each”. We *all* have a spiritual gift, and God desires that each of us employ that gift for the purpose of serving others.

As we unite together with other believers, we are made aware of needs within the body. As the needs become known, it gives each of us the chance to use our spiritual gifts in the way God intended. As we serve, we model the life of Christ. Finally, as we model the life of Christ, we truly are His disciples.

◆ Do you know your spiritual gift(s)? If so, write them out. If not, are you willing to find out?



When you unite with other believers—do you come to serve or be served?

◆ Do you believe that you are serving the Body of Christ to your fullest potential? How else can you serve?

If you can serve in a greater way, would you be willing to share your heart with a pastor?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. Thank you for giving me a spiritual gift to use in serving others. I pray that you will use me to my fullest potential. Give me courage to share my gifts with others. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Romans 12:4–9; 1 Peter 4:10–11; 1 Corinthians 12

Notes:



WEEK 3

*Serve the
World.*

DAY 1: That They May See Your Good Works

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." —Matthew 5:16

Shortly after my conversion to Christ, I met a beast of a man named Bob. Bob was 6 feet 3 inches tall, and he weighed 270 pounds. He was perfectly built for his job. Bob was the chaplain at the detention center in Savannah, Georgia. Each week Bob would lead Bible studies, have prayer, and minister to murderers, thieves, rapists, and criminals of every kind.

There was one man who attended the meetings regularly, but he was unwilling to place faith in Christ. He would show up, watch from a distance, and then leave to do his own thing.

After a couple of months, the same man raised his hand in a Bible study and confessed that he had placed faith in Christ as Savior. Everyone was surprised! Racked with curiosity, Bob asked, "Why did you become a Christian?" This inmate replied, "I became a Christian because I saw you sweep your own office." As you might imagine, the inmate's answer only raised more questions.

He explained that people of authority always take advantage of those under them. He was worried that if he were to surrender to the authority of Christ, then Jesus might do the same. His fears were calmed when he noticed Bob sweeping his own office. He noticed that a number of inmates offered to clean Bob's office, but instead of taking advantage of their willingness, Bob graciously declined.

The inmate connected the dots in this way. If Bob, as a follower of Christ, would not take advantage of those under him, there was a good chance that Jesus would be the same. An act as simple as sweeping the floor was used by God to convince a man of God's gracious character.

Jesus said that we are to live in such a way that people "may see your good works, and glorify your Father." We are not to engage in good works to draw attention to ourselves; our activities are intended to bring glory to God the Father. The principle found in this passage should encourage Christians to be mindful of our actions. The way we live is often more powerful than what we say.

- ◆ Serving others should flow from a heart of love. Are there adjustments that you can make that might open more doors for serving others?

- ◆ In your current context, how can your light shine brighter for Christ?

How we treat others will either compel people towards Christ or repel people from Christ.

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you, and I want others to know you too. Please help me to be mindful of how my actions are perceived by those around me. May my life reflect your glory! In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Matthew 5:13–16; Acts 4:32–35;
1 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Titus 3:14

Notes:

DAY 2: When a Plan Comes Together

"It is God Himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others." —Ephesians 2:10 (LB)

For those of you who are 80's fanatics, this devotional is specifically designed for you! Do you remember the incredible TV programs that marked the 1980's? There was *Knight Rider*, *The Dukes of Hazard*, *Air Wolf*, *Magnum P.I.*, *Remington Steele*, *Simon and Simon*, *Chips*, *T.J. Hooker*, and others. I'm tearing up just thinking about them! Good times, good times!

Anyway, one of the programs that my family watched religiously was the *A-Team*. The cast was sensational, the music rocked, and the plot was exactly the same from week to week. You could predict 80% of next week's show if you had seen three other episodes. The theme was always the same.

Someone was in trouble, they hired the A-Team to help, Hannibal had a plan, Murdock acted crazy, "Faceman" got all the ladies, and B.A. would build fourteen weapons with three pieces of pipe, a roll of duct tape, and a box of finishing nails. They would barely make it through the plan. Hannibal would light up a cigar and say, "I love it when a plan comes together." What a show!

When I think back over the series, I cannot remember a single time when Hannibal's "plan" didn't work. He was either the smartest guy on TV or the luckiest. Either way, the show was entertaining.

In Ephesians 2:10, we find that Hannibal is not the only one with a plan. According to Scripture, God "planned that we should spend [our] lives in helping others." From eternity past, God has looked into the future, understood the problems, and creatively designed a plan to address those problems. God's plan is that He lives through His people, and His people spend their lives in helping others.

As followers of Jesus Christ, our desire should not only be to grow in Bible knowledge; our desire should also be to join in God's activity around the world. Serving the world is not just a good idea; it's God's plan! When you and I serve each other and serve the world, we are living out the very design of our lives.

- ◆ How could you be used by God to serve others? Think of the areas where you are gifted or have a passion in a particular area.

- ◆ If God created us for service and planned that we devote our lives to serving others, what happens if we choose not to serve?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I see that you have a plan for my life and that plan is to serve others. Would you help me to see opportunities for service and give me the courage to serve when the time comes? I love you, Lord! In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Genesis 1:26–31 & 2:4–8; 1 Peter 2:9–12

Notes:

DAY 3: Becoming Like Those We Follow

"Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served." —Matthew 20:26–28 (MSG)

Have you ever idolized someone? I'm not talking about worshipping a person or thinking they're a god. I'm talking about really, really, really wanting to be like them. Most people can look back over their lives and remember a ball player, an actor, a musician, or even a popular kid in school that seemed to have it all. We would have done anything to be like them.

Due to our idolization of others, we find it easy to imitate those we admire. Marketing giants have capitalized on this phenomenon for years. The quickest way to sell shoes, sunglasses, watches, or clothes is to have a famous person wear it in public. While making fashion decisions based on admiring others seems harmless, our need to imitate doesn't stop with fashion. Life decisions such as drinking, sex, attitudes, excessive debt, and even the treatment of others can often be traced back to imitating the ones we admire.

But imitation is not always a bad thing. In fact, the desire to conform is actually placed in us by God. It is the desire of God that we conform, not to the ways of the world, but to the character of God (Romans 12:2).

Here's the tricky part! It's not hard to get people to conform. The issue is helping people see that Christ must be the apple of their eye. When Christ is the One we admire the most, respect the most, love the most, and treasure the most, He will be the One we desire to imitate.

Jesus taught His disciples to serve others. As each believer grows in their relationship with Christ, they will experience a greater desire to serve. As we pursue God in a love relationship, the Holy Spirit changes our character to match Christ. Our goal is to love Him, but in the process, we become like the One we follow.

- ◆ Have you ever served within the church and found it unfulfilling? Where did you serve and why did you choose to serve there?

- ◆ Based on your answers above, do you think your experience would have been different if you focused on loving God and allowed your service to flow from that pursuit?

- ◆ Based on how you live from day to day, does it seem that Jesus is the apple of your eye, or do you find yourself idolizing others? If so, who do you idolize and why?

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you and be conformed to you. Help me to respect others, but to conform to you. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Luke 22:24–27; Philippians 2:1–11

DAY 4: Taking Aim Against Pride

“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble...Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.” —James 4:6b,10

I don't understand pride. It's not because I lack the inability to define it; it's because I find it difficult to explain its allure. Why is pride so hard to release?

There is no other sin that receives as much rebuke and chastisement as pride. Yet there is no other sin so prevalent in the lives of believers as pride. Pride can be traced to original sin, the fall of Lucifer, the division of languages at Babel, the banishment of Nebuchadnezzar, the rejection of Christ in the first century, and the root of our refusal to depend on God in all things. At the root of sin is the issue of pride.

How do we actively address the sin of pride?

The best response to this question is to follow the example of Christ. Jesus pursued His relationship with the Father, and He positioned Himself as a servant of others (Romans 15:8). His relationship kept Him dependent upon the Father, and His position of service kept Him aligned with humility. Christ remained sinless, even though He was “tempted in all things just as we” (Hebrews 2:17–18, 4:15; Matthew 4). Christ pursued relationship, and He positioned Himself on a path of service.

As we deal with pride, our plan should be the same. Begin by pursuing God in a love relationship. As you pursue Him, ask God to reveal places of service. By pursuing God and humbly serving others, we proactively confront our individual struggle with pride.

◆ What are your fears about serving?



- ◆ Most people have a need for recognition, appreciation, and affirmation. Many positions of service rarely offer these amenities. How does God address this concern in Matthew 6:1–4 and Matthew 25:31–40?

- ◆ How have you tried to address the sin of pride in the past? Did it work?

The sin that keeps us from serving is pride, and the antidote to pride is humble service. It is difficult to look down on others when you've taken the position of a servant.

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you and follow the path you walked. Based on the principles of Scripture, I know that I am to humble myself. I take this responsibility seriously. I want to begin by confessing my desire to do it my way. I pray that you confront my pride as I pursue you. Help me look for positions of service. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: Romans 12:3–8; Galatians 6:1–4

Notes:

DAY 5: I've Never Felt More Fulfilled

The reaction is common. A believer builds up the courage to serve others. After they're finished, they say, "I feel great! In fact, I've never felt more fulfilled in my life."

The part that Christians overlook is *why* they feel this way. In short, design determines fulfillment. Use your sanctified imagination for just a moment, and please don't think I'm weird for asking these questions. If a plane could experience emotions, do you think it would be more fulfilled sitting on the ground or flying through the clouds? If a race car could express thoughts, do you think it would be more fulfilled sitting in traffic or racing around a track? If a boat could talk, do you think it would be more fulfilled sitting in dry dock or cutting through the waves?

It's easy for us to look at the design of inanimate objects (e.g. a plane, a race car, or a boat) and know if it is fulfilling its purpose. Design determines fulfillment. For some reason, we find it difficult to use the same logic with people. We focus more on our individual design than on our human design.

We know that painters experience fulfillment when expressing themselves on canvas. Dancers experience fulfillment when expressing themselves in movement. Inventors experience fulfillment when tinkering with new ideas. But in all of these areas, the focus is on individual design. What about our design as humans? Has God designed people in such a way that we all experience a common form of fulfillment?

The answer is "Yes"! God created us for a relationship with Himself, and He commissioned us to serve others.

- "It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others" (Ephesians 2:10 LB).
- "Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work" (Jeremiah 1:5 NCV).
- "It is He who saved us and chose us for His special work, not because we deserved it, but because that was His plan" (2 Timothy 1:9 LB).

It should never surprise us when people find fulfillment in serving others. Fulfillment is the by-product of living as we were designed.

- ◆ Do you struggle with fulfillment in life? If so, where are some areas that you can serve?

- ◆ If design determines our fulfillment, then living apart from this design will lead to a lack of fulfillment. Can you identify areas in your life where you are living apart from God's design?

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you! I see in the Bible that you created and designed my life for relationship and service. When I lack fulfillment, please help me to remember to return to my design. I love you. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Notes:

DAY 6: Building a Platform for Sharing Christ

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place." —1 Thessalonians 1:2–3, 8

Is sharing Christ a privilege or a right? In America, we are quick to tell people our rights. We have the right to free speech. We have the right to assemble in worship. We have the right to peacefully gather in protest. Our rights are protected and vigorously defended. And while I am extremely grateful for the rights we enjoy, I am afraid that the Church has mistaken rights for privileges.

In a recent poll, Americans were asked to give their first impression when they hear the word "Christian". The top three responses were judgmental, condemning, and hypocritical. Not exactly a raving review! Americans have picked up on the fact that Christians speak through our rights, not our actions. We boycott businesses for unbiblical stands. We protest abortion clinics because of the destruction of life. We march against gay rights. We petition Congress for dry counties, and we demand that prayer be returned to schools. But the entire time, the driving force is, "We have the right to speak, we have the right to protest, and we have the right to share our views." Legally, we have the right; practically, we may have lost the privilege.

Sharing Christ is a privilege. We find no accounts in Scripture of Jesus demanding to be heard. He didn't need too. Instead, Jesus healed the hurting and then shared the message. He touched the helpless and then taught about the Kingdom. Christ's acts of service opened doors for discussion.

For the Church in Thessalonica, they were known for their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope". As they ministered to others, and worked out their faith, and labored in love on behalf of believers and unbelievers alike, "the Word of the Lord...sounded forth". God's Word flourished as a result of their acts of service.

In the past five days, we have seen that serving the world brings glory to the Father, is a part of God's plan, conforms us to the character of Christ, positions us against pride, and brings fulfillment to our lives. As we finish our study of serving the world, we also need to see that our service builds a platform for sharing Christ. As we serve others, God opens opportunities to share the Good News.

As you finish this devotional thought, I hope that you don't misunderstand my heart. I am not suggesting that the church should lose its rights; I'm only suggesting that we speak through our service. It is my prayer that the Church in America will be known for the Christ we love and not the issues we hate.

◆ Do you find yourself demanding to be heard or being asked to speak? Why?

◆ List several stories where Jesus followed the pattern of serving then sharing.

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I also want to share your Gospel with others. Help me to follow the pattern that you lived. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Notes:



WEEK 4

*Entrust the
Gospel.*

DAY 1:

What Does it Mean to Entrust Anything?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." —Matthew 28:19–20

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

—2 Timothy 2:2

This week, we will focus on entrusting the Gospel. Of the four weeks presented in this devotional guide, entrusting the Gospel is probably the most difficult concept of the group. For the purpose of clarity, we will take the first couple of days to set up the overall picture.

In both passages presented above, we see a challenge to pass on to others what we have learned. Jesus told His followers to make disciples by "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you". They were to pass on what they had learned. The same is true for Timothy. Timothy is challenged to share with others what Paul had shared with him. There is a simple truth at work in these two passages: Whatever is passed on continues to influence others; whatever is kept to ourselves will die when we die.

We all live with the understanding that when we die we take nothing with us. We came into this world with nothing, and we will leave the world the same way we came. Therefore, whatever is kept to ourselves (e.g. ideas, knowledge, possessions, encouragement, etc.) will die when we die. It has no influence in the future.

Think about influence and consider all the truths that God has taught you. What has He taught you about the Word? What has He taught you about faith? What has He taught you about relationship? What has He taught you about family? What has He taught you about prayer? Does it make sense that God invests a lifetime of truths in us, and we take all of that knowledge to the grave?

God wants us to pass on to others what He has passed on to us. The first step of entrusting is to know that God wants our lives to be a conduit of His truths and grace.

- ◆ Write the names of several people who have invested time and truth in your life. (Think back to pastors, Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, mentors, or good friends.) Where would you be spiritually if these people had not entrusted truth into your life?

- ◆ Do you know of any relationships in Scripture where a mature believer entrusted truth and time in another person(s) life? If so, list several examples.

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you, and I want others to know you too. When I look back over my life, I am reminded of how much you have taught me. Would you help me understand how I can entrust these truths to others? In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Matthew 10:1–16; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20

Notes:

DAY 2: Entrusting the Gospel

The word “Gospel” means “good news”. When the Bible speaks of the Gospel, it’s referring to the good news of God. However, the good news of God is more than an invitation to salvation (or eternal life); it also includes how a person is to live once they are saved or reconciled with God.

When Jesus started His earthly ministry, the Bible says, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom”. (Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14; Mark 1:14). This text is the first time the word “Gospel” is mentioned in the New Testament. It specifically refers to the Gospel of the Kingdom. In fact, the Gospel of the Kingdom is common terminology in the New Testament (Matthew 9:35; 24:14; Luke 16:16). The good news of God is connected to the good news about the Kingdom.

Let’s talk about the Kingdom for a moment. The Kingdom is the range of God’s effective will where what He wants done is done. While God is the Creator of everything, He has chosen to establish His Kingdom among His people. Where God’s people go, His Sovereign influence goes with them. As God lives through His people, His influence and Kingdom expands.

The Kingdom is the focus of Jesus’ teaching and training.

- Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14; Mark 1:14).
- The Sermon on the Mount has been referred to as the Constitution of the Kingdom (Matthew 5–7).
- Jesus shared seven parables in Matthew 13. The focus of every one was the Kingdom.

Why is all of this “Kingdom talk” important? Answer: Because the Gospel is more than “Jesus saves”. The Gospel taught by Christ and John the Baptist was “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” They shared the Gospel of the Kingdom. The good news is that God is offering a reconciled relationship, and this new relationship is lived out in the context of God’s Kingdom.

When believers understand the extent of the Gospel, it changes everything. It changes our focus. It changes our appeal to the lost. It changes our priorities. It changes how we interact with others. It changes how we pray. It changes how we view the world. It changes how we spend our money. It changes the goals we make and even how we pursue those goals. The Kingdom provides the context of the Christian life.

To entrust the Gospel is entrust the Gospel of the Kingdom.

- ◆ Make a list of areas where God has entrusted truth in your life (e.g. marriage, Bible study, prayer, faith, finances, children, etc.). Where can you entrust what God has shared with you?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. Based on Scripture, it seems that you also want me to know about the Kingdom. I pray that you open my eyes to the extent of the Gospel message, and help me to entrust what I’ve learned with others. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Isaiah 9:1–7; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 5–7; Galatians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4

Notes:

DAY 3: The Rails of Relationship

Entrusting the Gospel can seem like a huge task. Our mind usually jumps to concerns over *what* we share instead of *how* we share. The “what” was defined yesterday! We are to share the good news about the Kingdom. The “how” is defined today! We are to share the good news about the Kingdom through our network of relationships.

It’s been said that everything runs on the rails of relationship. Entrusting the Gospel is a perfect example of this truth in action. While there are times when we have the opportunity to share the good news with a complete stranger, the regular pattern of entrusting the Gospel involves our relational networks. These networks are comprised of friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, and the people we encounter with regularity. Because of the underlying relationships, these networks are fertile soil for entrusting the Gospel.

There are several reasons that the Gospel flourishes in relational networks.

- **First, the nature of the message is relational.** Three key relationships are involved with the Gospel of the Kingdom. There is our relationship with God, our relationship with the Church, and our relationship with the world.
- **Second, sharing the message is time-consuming.** While some subjects can be adequately discussed by sketching ideas on the back of a napkin, the Kingdom *is not* one of those subjects. Sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom takes time. If relationships are in place, it provides multiple opportunities to continue the discussion.
- **Third, the result of the message is a transformed life.** It is one thing to tell a complete stranger how God changed your life. But all they see is the person standing in front of them. For the people who comprise our relational networks, they have seen God’s continuing transformation of your life. This life change provides a platform for sharing.

As we read the New Testament, we see the Gospel of the Kingdom being entrusted through relationships. God desires the same pattern in our lives. Look up each passage and fill in the blanks appropriately.

◆ Mark 3:13–19

- Who entrusted the Gospel? _____
- Who received the Gospel? _____

◆ Mark 5:1–20 (Focus on the formerly demon-possessed man; verses 18–20.)

- Who entrusted the Gospel? _____
- Who received the Gospel? _____

◆ John 1:40–42

- Who entrusted the Gospel? _____
- Who received the Gospel? _____

◆ John 4:7–42 (Focus on the woman's response to Christ's message; verses 28–30; 39–43)

- Who entrusted the Gospel? _____
- Who received the Gospel? _____

◆ 2 Timothy 2:2

- Who entrusted the Gospel? _____
- Who received the Gospel? _____

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. Help me to see the relational networks around me, and live through me so that the Gospel goes forth. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Luke 5:27–32; Acts 10; Acts 16:22–33

Notes:

DAY 4: A Simple Way of Entrusting the Gospel

"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." —1 Corinthians 2:1–5

We now have three primary pieces in place:

1. **The mission is to entrust the Gospel.** As the Gospel is entrusted to others, disciples are made, and the Great Commission is realized.
2. **The message is the Gospel of the Kingdom.** If we only share the redemptive portion of the Gospel, we make decisions for Christ and not disciples' of Christ. The Gospel is the good news about the Kingdom.
3. **The mission field is primarily our network of relationships.** While we can entrust the Gospel to strangers, the primary pattern outlined in the New Testament is to work through relational networks.

If you're like me, the next question that comes to mind is, "How do we start?" The world is huge, the message is extensive, and time is short. How do we practically take the information we have and live it out?

The answer is as simple as following the example of the Apostle Paul. When Paul spoke to the people of Corinth, he concentrated his teaching on "Christ and Him crucified". In some ways, it could seem like Paul left a lot out of the Kingdom. What about faith? What about love? What about spiritual gifts? What about missions and ministry? What about prayer and praise? How could Paul be so narrow-minded as to only share one message?

The answer to this question is found in the relationship between Christ and His Kingdom. When we focus on pursuing Christ and knowing Christ, He will lead us into areas of faith, hope, love, mission, ministry, prayer, praise, etc. We do not have to become experts in every area of the Christian life in order to entrust the Gospel. In fact, if we are not careful, we can become intellectually proficient and spiritually lacking. Rest assured! **The specifics of the Kingdom will become known in the pursuit of the King.** Why? Because the Kingdom bears the heart of the King!

What does this mean to you and me? It means our job is to pursue Christ and share what we learn. If you are walking through a period of faith, trust, and patience, teach others what He is teaching you. If you are pursuing Christ and learning about stewardship, entrust those teachings to those around you. If God is teaching you several principles of prayer, share those principles with friends, family members, or those in your relational network. God is not asking us to get a Christian degree before we entrust the Gospel; He wants us to pursue Him, and as we go, share what we've learned with others.

- ◆ Read through 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, and write three or four words that describe Paul's state of mind. Does Paul sound like an average guy or a fearless leader? Can you do what Paul did?

Prayer Suggestion: "Lord Jesus, I want to know you. As I get to know you, give me the courage to share what I've learned with others. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Passages for Additional Study: 1 Corinthians 1:17–31; John 17:3; John 15:1–8

Notes:

DAY 5: The Greater Progress of the Gospel

"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." —Philippians 1:12

I hated missionary Sundays when I was a kid. I know that sounds horrible, but I'm trying to be honest. It wasn't because I disliked the missionaries or the ministries they represented; it was because I always felt that God was calling me to do something similar.

It didn't matter if the missionary was serving in Africa, India, South America, or Antarctica, they always spoke of the things they endured for the sake of the Gospel. One person would speak of living on rice and water for months. Another person would share how they battled rare diseases and fought the forces of witchcraft. Another missionary would share how they served the same people group for years, and saw very little fruit for their labor. In my mind, the stories had one similarity, suffering!

I'm not big on suffering. In fact, I try to avoid it if at all possible. But there are times when the progress of the Gospel is amplified through difficult situations. If we are to become serious about entrusting the Gospel, we need to answer one question: "How much am I willing to endure for the progress of the Gospel?"

The answer to this question will be different for everyone. Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:1–3). Paul endured prison, beatings, and eventually death (2 Corinthians 11:23–28). These are two extreme examples. Chances are, most Christians in America will never endure that type of suffering. But it's not uncommon to endure the separation of family, loss of income, feelings of depression, problems of all sizes, the attacks of the enemy, and any number of minor inconveniences.

My point is simple! The advance of the Gospel will meet with the opposition of Satan. In Paul's situation, his circumstances (prison, trials, beatings, etc.) "turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel". Had Paul not endured the trials, the Gospel would not have gone as far as it did.

Even if you and I are never called upon to endure suffering on that scale, the smaller trials of our lives will provide opportunity for the advancement of the Gospel. How we conduct ourselves with problems will often determine the extent to which the Gospel will spread. Remember, in every situation you face, the world is watching. God has positioned you in an ideal spot for Him to receive glory!

- ◆ When people see the way you handle the pressures and trials of life, does it help or hurt the influence of God? How can your response honor Christ and lead others to Him?

- ◆ Name a person in your life who went through difficult times, yet maintained strong courage and faith in Christ. How does his or her example impact your life?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I understand that you will allow trials and problems to come my way for the furtherance of the Gospel. Help me to live in such a way that people are drawn to you by my example. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Acts 8:1–4; Acts 4:1–31; Luke 21:12–19

Notes:

DAY 6: What Will You Do with the Dash?

"I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it." —1 Corinthians 9:23

"There's secret in every cemetery," explained a father to his son. Intrigued by the mysterious nature of the statement, the boy listened closely. "The secret in the cemetery is in the dash on every tombstone." The two walked together a few more steps. "Between the date of birth and the date of death is the dash of life. Life is essentially the same for everyone. We are born, we live, and we die. The difference between a person who lived and an individual who leaves a legacy is what they do with the dash."

What will you do with the dash? Paul said, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." When Paul looked back over his life, he had ups and downs, trials and triumphs, pains and promotions. But there is one thing that is completely lacking from Paul's memories—regret! "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

There is no question that Paul's life without regrets is connected to doing "all things for the sake of the gospel". Paul utilized the "dash" to its fullest potential. There are only two people in the entire Bible who were able to say, "I've done everything God put me on this earth to do." The first was Jesus; the second is Paul (John 19:30; Hebrews 10:11–12; 2 Timothy 4:7). How will your story end?

We know that Christ commissioned His followers to make disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:19). In a general sense, we all have the same purpose. Regardless of our station in life, we are to entrust the Gospel to others. Christ gave His life so that we might have the Gospel. Paul devoted his life for the sake of the Gospel. What will you and I do with the life God has given us?

Give me, Father, a purpose deep,
In joy, or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing You in my daily life;
Only one life and it will soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

As followers of Christ, we have the privilege of devoting our lives to the greatest pursuit in the world. We can know God and help others know Him as well. The biblical process for knowing God and making disciples is very simple. Love God! Unite with believers! Serve the World! Entrust the Gospel!

◆ In one sentence, describe what you want your legacy to be:

◆ How can you make entrusting the Gospel a greater part of your life?

Prayer Suggestion: “Lord Jesus, I want to know you. I pray that you would live through me so that I might accomplish everything you placed me on this earth to do. I want my legacy to be marked with knowing you and helping others enter and grow in their relationship with you. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen!”

Passages for Additional Study: Mark 1:32–39; 1 Corinthians 9:13–27

Notes:



Christ Life Resources

After your eyes have been opened to the wonders of relational living and the Christ-life, there's no going back to dead religion. The question becomes, "Where can I go to learn more?"

We've included a list of books that have a strong relational emphasis. Some of these books are out of print, but they can be found in second-hand bookstores. Key thoughts from several of these writers are represented within the *This is the Gospel* Resources.

Some of these books present teachings that are not held by the writers of this devotional guide. For example, Stanford teaches that believers have both the sin nature and the new nature (simultaneously). We disagree based on Scripture. McVey, Foster, and George give powerful rebuttals in their respective books. We've left these books on the list because they provide spot-on insights into other relational issues. Stanford is one of the greatest writers on the process by which God brings a believer into positional truth. While there will be some differences, a mature believer will have no trouble discerning error in light of Scripture.

As you read these books, look for key concepts on relationship. Take note of phrases like, "Christ in you," "abiding in Him," "relational living," "being instead of doing," "knowing God," "intimacy with Christ," "God living through you," "positional truth," or "in Christ truth." These phrases will guide you into the riches of relationship.

Here's a list of recommended resources:

- ***Grace Walk*** by Steve McVey
- ***The Complete Green Letters*** by Miles Stanford
- ***Because We Love Him*** by Clyde Cranford
- ***Transformed Into His Image*** by David Foster
- ***Grace Amazing*** by Steve McVey
- ***Complete in Christ*** by Bob George
- ***The Explicit Gospel*** by Matt Chandler
- ***The Rest of the Gospel*** by Stone and Gregory
- ***Laws for Liberated Living*** by Manley Beasley
- ***Classic Christianity*** by Bob George
- ***Calvary Road*** by Roy Hession
- ***The Indwelling Life of Christ*** by W. Ian Thomas
- ***Truefaced*** by Thrall, McNicol Lynch
- ***Renovation of the Heart*** by Dallas Willard
- ***Alive By His Life*** by Manley Beasley
- ***The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*** by Evan Hopkins
- ***Born Crucified*** by L.E. Maxwell
- ***Grace Rules*** by Steve McVey
- ***Falling for God*** by Gary Moon
- ***Not I But Christ*** by Stephen Olford
- ***Gospel*** by J.D. Greear
- ***Jesus + Nothing = Everything*** by Tullian Tchividjian
- ***Jesus Changes Everything*** by Bob George
- ***To Live is Christ To Die is Gain*** by Matt Chandler

If you have questions, please contact us at
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