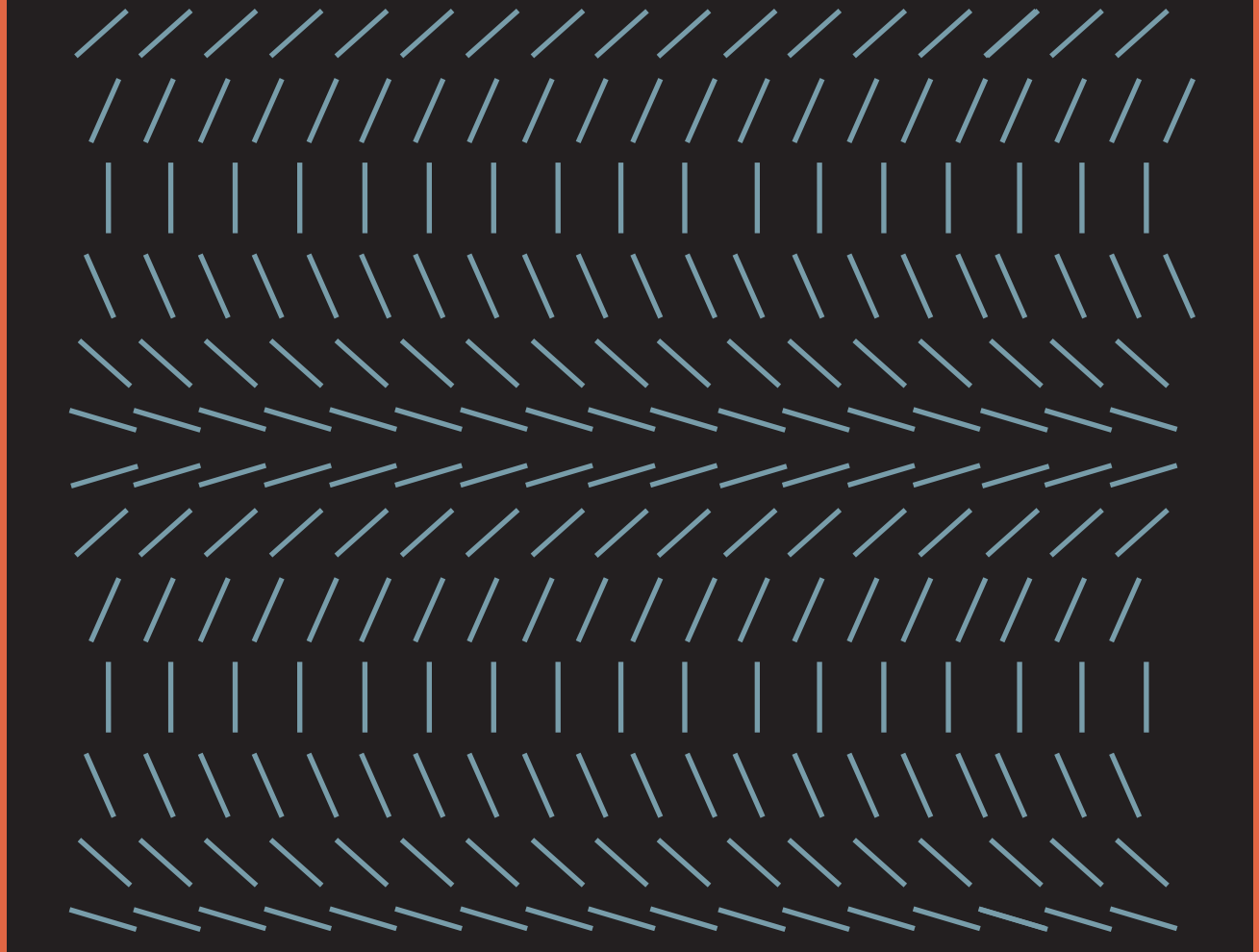
VINTAGE CHURCH

KNOW
LIVE
ADVANCE

A 30-Day Devotional for Growth in Gospel-Centered Habits



INTRODUCTION

After Jesus's death and resurrection, his parting words to his followers were:

> Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. — Matthew 28:19-20

In there are a command and a promise, a command to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them everything Jesus taught, and a promise, that Jesus would always be with his disciples.

Disciple is an old word for student; to be Jesus's disciple is to be his pupil. But don't let grade-school experiences define the word "student" for you; Jesus doesn't give out standardized tests or report cards. No, to be a student of Jesus is more like the Old-World practice of apprenticeship where a young learner would saturate themselves in the world of their master, paying careful attention to their craft in order to gain their own mastery. Here's Dallas Willard on the subject:

> A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner, even if only a beginner. The New Testament literature, which must be allowed to define our terms if we are ever to get our bearings in the Way with Christ, makes this clear. In that context, disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of Heaven to every aspect of their life on earth (*The Great Omission*, XI).

In the pages of this devotional we will get into that last statement, a growing understanding of being Jesus's disciple in every aspect of our life on earth. To restate Willard's point, this is not merely to emphasize what Jesus has to say about living but to include how we go about living in light of this command and promise. How do we learn and then teach all that Jesus commanded? But, perhaps even more importantly, how do we live a life in which Jesus is "with us always"?

Knowing, Living, and Advancing the Gospel

OUR CHURCH'S MISSION IS THIS

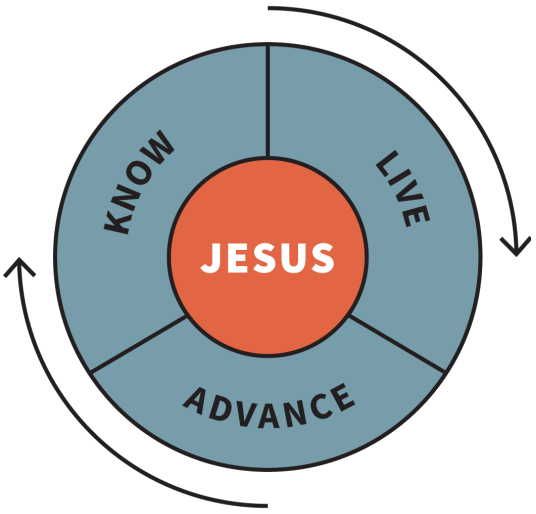
Vintage Church exists to make much of Jesus. We do that by making disciples who know the gospel, live the gospel, and advance the gospel.

ALL ABOUT JESUS Our mission statement begins with making much of Jesus. He is at the center of all we are and all we do. And, as we've already seen, Jesus is at the center of Christian discipleship. For this reason, throughout this devotional you will notice an emphasis on worshipping Jesus for all he has done and continues to do for us.

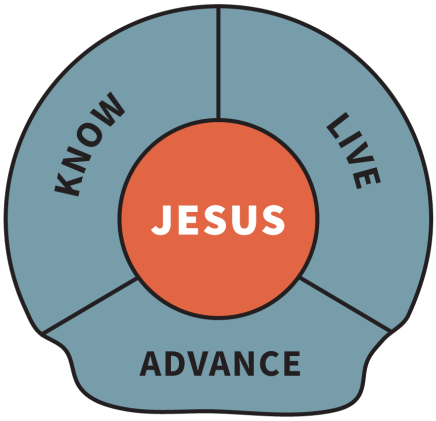
GOSPEL CENTRALITY Disciples at Vintage know the gospel, live the gospel, and advance the gospel not because we like the repetition but because the gospel is everything to us. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ came to save us sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), and we never want to get over just how *good* that news is. And while we tend to think hearing the gospel is mostly about evangelism, i.e. the gospel is simply the introduction to being a Christian, none of us ever graduates from the message of the gospel. As Tim Keller put it, "The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life… we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on" (*Center Church*, 48). The first section of this devotional, *The Gospel*, will look at this foundational, A to Z message for the Christian life.

KNOWING, LIVING, AND ADVANCING These three terms cover the various dimensions of the Christian life. Knowing the gospel means immersing yourself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It isn't just head knowledge; it's allowing the mercy of Christ to touch every part of your soul and daily living. Living the gospel is about embodying the teachings of Jesus in our everyday lives. Finally, Advancing the gospel involves sharing and living out the good news of Jesus with those around us. You'll notice, among other things, that this covers the inner life with God (Knowing), the shared life with God (Living), and the outward life with God (Advancing).

Knowing, Living, and Advancing are not linear like Steps 1, 2, and 3, but are circular and interrelated. You can think of these categories like three segments of a single wheel.



Jesus is at the center of all we do, and our life of discipleship to him revolves around him. And, our life of discipleship is headed somewhere; it is dynamic, not static. Finally, the different components of discipleship that we might organize under Knowing, Living, and Advancing all work together. Because they work together,



Knowing, Living, and Advancing support one another and depend on one another. If your wheel isn't filled out in all three, it's like having a tire that's flat on one side: it'll mean either bumpy driving or getting stuck altogether.

Now, before we get too much further, this discipleship plan is *not* about the 1000 things you really should be doing as a Christian. We are a gospel-centered people through and through, so the Christian life is not about what we do but about the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. When we talk about being "filled out" in Knowing, Living, and Advancing, what we mean is growth in your Christian life at whatever place in life you find yourself, with intentional effort to not neglect any one area. This will look different for someone who just became a follower of Jesus than someone who has followed him for decades, for an empty nester than for a single mom, for a bookish introvert than for an antsy extrovert.

The goal is not to check every box on this plan but to use it as a set of tools for your whole-life discipleship.

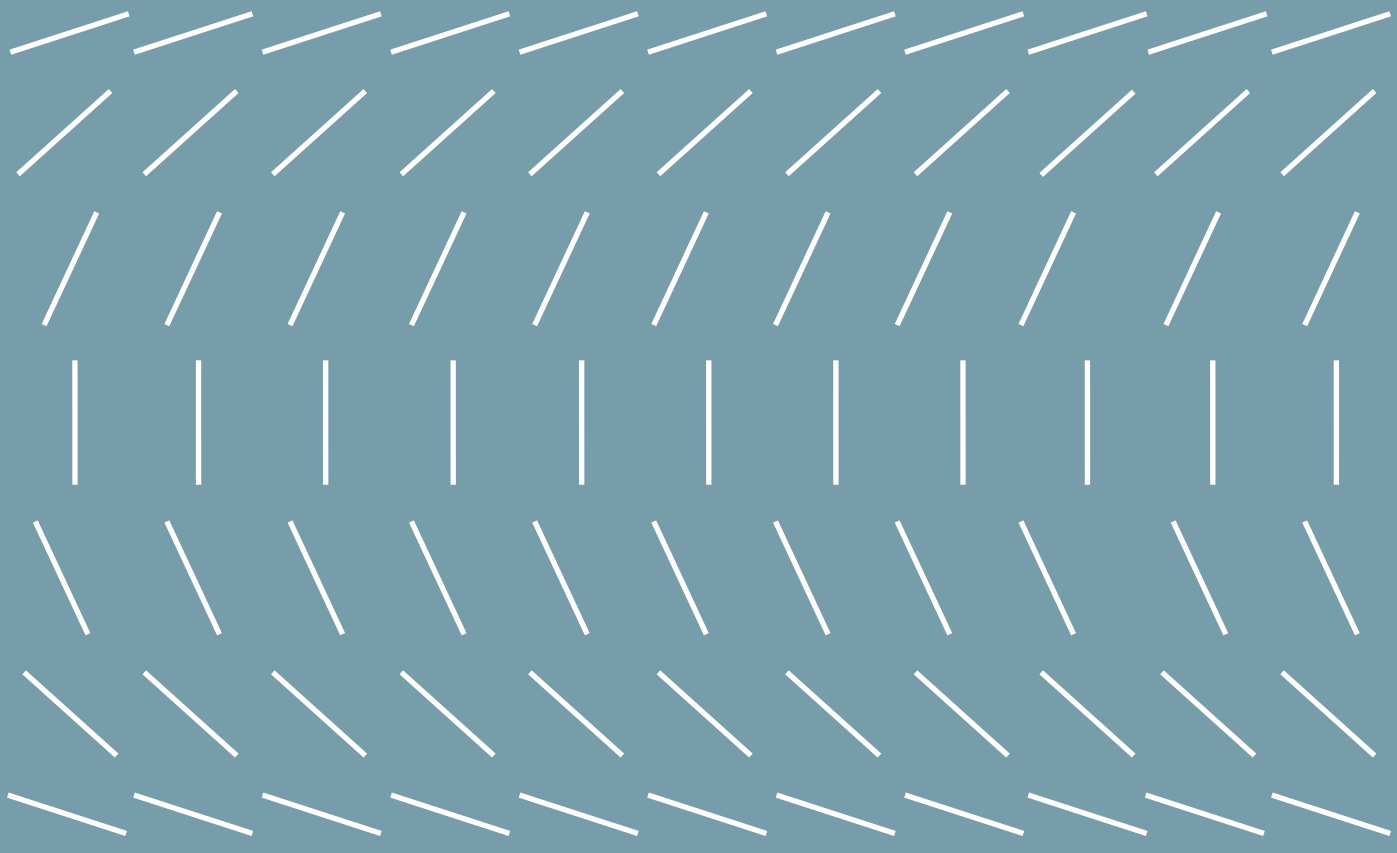
Below you'll see general practices like Bible reading, prayer, and sabbath, along with three big ones called Keystone Habits. A Keystone Habit is a habit upon which other habits depend like a chain reaction, or a habit that has a multiplying effect. "Keystone habits start a process that, over time, transforms everything" (Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*). Sleep is a good example because regularly getting good sleep can, among other things, boost your mood, help with memory recall, and make you more productive at work. This is not to say the other habits matter less, but to say that growth in these three will aid your growth in all the rest.

There's more about these in the pages that follow, but the three Keystone Habits we'll talk about are:

- Knowing the Gospel: Sunday service (Day 7)
- Living the Gospel: Biblical Community (Day 14)
- Advancing the Gospel: Love One (Day 21)

SECTION 1

The Gospel



DAY 01

The God Centered Life

Romans 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments
and untraceable his ways!

34 For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
35 And who has ever given to God,
that he should be repaid?

36 For from him and through him
and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.

This 30-day devotional must, like the whole of creation and all history, start with God. This is where we're headed in this study: the God-centered life.

The passage above is taken part-way into Paul's letter to the church in Rome. By this point, Paul has spent the first eleven chapters on the shocking good news of salvation through Jesus, and he sums is all up in 11:33-36 with a doxology, a little hymn of praise to God.

Sit for a moment with this thought, that all of creation is from God, summoned through the Triune work of creation, and all of it circles back to praise him in wonder. All things exist for his purposes, all things are governed by his sovereign control, and all things find their conclusion in his glory. To live the God-centered, God-worshipping life is simply to fall into step with the rest of creation and to fulfill the purpose for which you specifically were created. This is, essentially, what it means to follow Jesus.

Over the next 30-days we will look at some of the many facets of this God-worshipping life. There will be exercises to try, things to do and things to stop doing. But before we get there, the beginning of the God-centered life isn't about what you need to do but about what God has already done. It also isn't about what God might do for you but about you praising God simply for who he is. "To him be glory forever. Amen."

Now, take a moment to reread the passage above, slowly. Then, take a moment to pray, praising and thanking God for who he is. You can use the space below to write out a prayer; if you find your mind wanders while you pray, writing your prayer is a helpful strategy for maintaining your focus.

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DAY 02

Life with God

Revelation 21:1-4

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for
the first heaven and the first earth had passed
away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the
holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of
heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned
for her husband.

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look,
God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live
with them. They will be his peoples, and God
himself will be with them and will be their God.
4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will
be no more, because the previous things have
passed away.

Yesterday we looked at the start of all things; today we'll look at the end. By "end" we don't mean like the end of a movie, though. If you remember back to geometry class, a line starts and ends at two points, while something called a ray starts at a point but has an arrow at the other end because it goes on and on into infinity. That's what life with God in the age to come will be like, so by "end" we mean the direction that arrow is pointed, the ultimate purpose of the God-centered life: right relationship with God.

The above passage is from the second-to-last chapter of the Bible, which tells us ahead of time about the eternal age to come in which God's people will dwell with him forever. This is the purpose for which mankind was created in Genesis 1-2, to live with God in his wonderful creation. This is the blessed state mankind forfeited when we rebelled against God in Genesis 3, after which we could no longer be with him. And this is the promise foretold throughout the Bible and fulfilled through Jesus, that God himself would make a way for us to re-enter relationship with him, a relationship that begins now in this life and continues in greater fullness in the life to come.

This is the glorious future of God's people, and it's the unifying plotline of the entire Bible. And, as Richard Foster points out in *Life with God*, it is also an invitation:

> **The divine assurance thundering throughout the ages is also a divine invitation: "*I am with you—will you be with Me?*" This dynamic is the absolute unifying center of the Bible. Every story in the Bible, no matter its twists and turns, whether the human characters are trustworthy or untrustworthy, whether the story is sad or happy, is built on this clarion call to relationship. "I am with you—will you be with Me?" (44-45)**

One of the goals of the God-centered life is that we would look ahead to eternal life with God by living with God here and now. Think of this like God's future + now desire for you: life with him. This looks like regular interaction with him through many things we'll talk about in the coming weeks (prayer, worship, sabbath, etc.). But before we get there, take a moment to think and journal below.

What are some ways you want to grow in being with God in your day-to-day life? What do you hope results from this growth? Close your time in prayer.

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DAY 03

Jesus the Way, Truth, and Life

John 14:1-7

1 "Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God;
believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many
rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that
I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 If I go away
and prepare a place for you, I will come again and
take you to myself, so that where I am you may be
also. 4 You know the way to where I am going." 5
"Lord," Thomas said, "we don't know where you're
going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus told him,
"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes
to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me,
you will also know my Father. From now on you do
know him and have seen him."

Jesus said this on his last night with his disciples, the night before he was betrayed and crucified. His "Father's house" is the eternal place for God's people to rest in God's presence, and this is the place Jesus would prepare for them.

However, despite Thomas's sputtering about not knowing the way, this was not some new revelation for the disciples. Jesus had already assured them, "I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved" (John 10:9), and "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live" (John 10:25). He had already told them (multiple times) that he was the way to God, the true light of God (John 1:9), the path to eternal life with the Father.

Yesterday we looked at the eternal future we were made to live with God. Today we see how to get there: through Christ. But notice the three words he uses about himself. He is the way, and like the "gate" he mentioned, he is the one through whom we come to God. By his sacrificial death in our place for our rebellion, he alone can bring us into God's presence. He is also the truth, the "true light" who reveals God to us, and by the light he brings we can properly see all things. And finally, he himself is the life.

What on earth does that mean? Much like being "the resurrection and the life," it means that Jesus is the source of resurrection life; because he has resurrected, those who trust in him can hope that they too will live on the other side of death (1 Cor 15:22).

But this isn't the only thing it means. Jesus also taught, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me" (John 15:5). Jesus doesn't merely provide future life on the other side of death; he is also the source of life now.

All of this to say, if we're asking ourselves how to live the God-centered life, it starts with Jesus. He is the door in, the light to guide our way, even the source of life to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Take a moment to read back over John 14:1-7, then close in a prayer to Jesus. What do you want to thank him for? What do you hope he does in your life? Feel free to write out that prayer below.

NOTES

DAY 04

Repeating the Gospel

1 Timothy 1:15-17

15 This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full
acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to
save sinners" — and I am the worst of them. 16 But
I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the
worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his
extraordinary patience as an example to those who
would believe in him for eternal life. 17 Now to the
King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be
honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is Paul again, though this time he's writing to his apprentice, Timothy, about the task of leading God's people as a pastor. Here we find an amazing little summary of the gospel and a shocking little confession.

The gospel is God's message of good news, and "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is just about the best little summary of that good news. As we've already seen this week, we forfeited life with God through our rebellion (Genesis 3), but Jesus came to save us from this alienation and make a way for us to re-enter right relationship with him.

But right after Paul's little summary is a shocking little confession: "and I *am* the worst of them." Perhaps Paul was thinking back to his former life before meeting Jesus, back when he punished and imprisoned Christians for their faith (Acts 9). And yet, he didn't say "I was" but "I am the worst." Paul isn't beating himself up; instead, he is seeing himself rightly. He was and still is sorely, desperately in need of mercy from Christ, and yet he received mercy not because of his achievement—clearly he hadn't earned it!—but because of Jesus's love and "extraordinary patience" towards him.

Paul was recognizing the relevance of the gospel for himself, as in, "Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and that means *me*." A regular confession of our need for Jesus's mercy is a necessary component of the Christian life. This regular rehearsal is a little like game-day prep, like the sort of reminders professional athletes give themselves before the game ("keep your eye on the ball"), and a little like a grounding reminder, like someone who suffers from PTSD might tell themselves when they wake up from a nightmare.

Way back in the 400s AD, folks in the early Church had a way of rehearsing this truth in prayer now called the Jesus Prayer. It was a short prayer that could be easily memorized, said at a moment's notice, and repeated again and again:

> **Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

Take a moment to read that prayer out loud (that'll get it in your auditory memory, which helps with recall). There's nothing magic in those words, but the truth behind them is nothing short than the massive truth of the gospel: Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and that means *me*.

Now take some time to close by writing a prayer below, thanking God for his mercy towards you in Christ.

NOTES

DAY 05

Whole-life Discipleship

Romans 11:36-12:1

36 For from him and through him
and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.

1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

Today we'll summarize the past few days, and to do that we're going back to our passage from Day 1, plus one verse. Recall, Paul wrapped up his first eleven chapters in Romans, in which he covered the mystery of salvation through Jesus, with a little hymn of praise (11:33-36). Like Paul, when we truly see the Triune God's all-surpassing greatness as the source, sustainer, and goal of all things, and when we see the mercy we've received from this God through Jesus (12:1), we are moved to worship: "To him be glory forever. Amen."

But we should ask, what do we do with this realization? Paul plants a giant "therefore" right between the praise of 11:36 and the exhortation of 12:1 because the two are linked. God is the all-in-all, therefore we give him all; God is the Everything, from whom we have received everything, therefore we give him everything. By calling us to "present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice," Paul is talking about the whole of our lives, though with a particular emphasis on the visceral, concrete, even mundane aspects of our embodied existence. Jesus is worthy of our *entire* life, so we give him our entire life; this is what it means to be a "living sacrifice."

Lest we stray away from it, though, remember back to Day 1 — the beginning of the God-centered life isn't about what you need to do but about what God has already done. This is the message of the gospel that we need to repeat over and over: our response to him is from a place of security with him. Tim Keller, in his foundational *Reason for God*, says, "Religion operates on the principle 'I obey — therefore I am accepted by God.' But the operating principle of the gospel is 'I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey'" (186).

This whole-life discipleship is the direction the rest of this devotional is headed, and we'll look at various facets of life in Jesus under the headings of Knowing the Gospel, Living the Gospel, and Advancing the Gospel. But again, all of this starts with who God is, what he has done for us in Christ, and his future + now desire for us: life with him.

Take a moment to read back over the thoughts and prayers you wrote down for days 1-4. What do you think God is stirring in your life right now? In what ways do you hope to grow in your worship of him or in giving every part of your life to him? This God knows you intimately so you can be honest about what you do and don't know or what you do and don't want. Journal your thoughts below, then close your time in prayer, asking God to be with you in your everyday life today.

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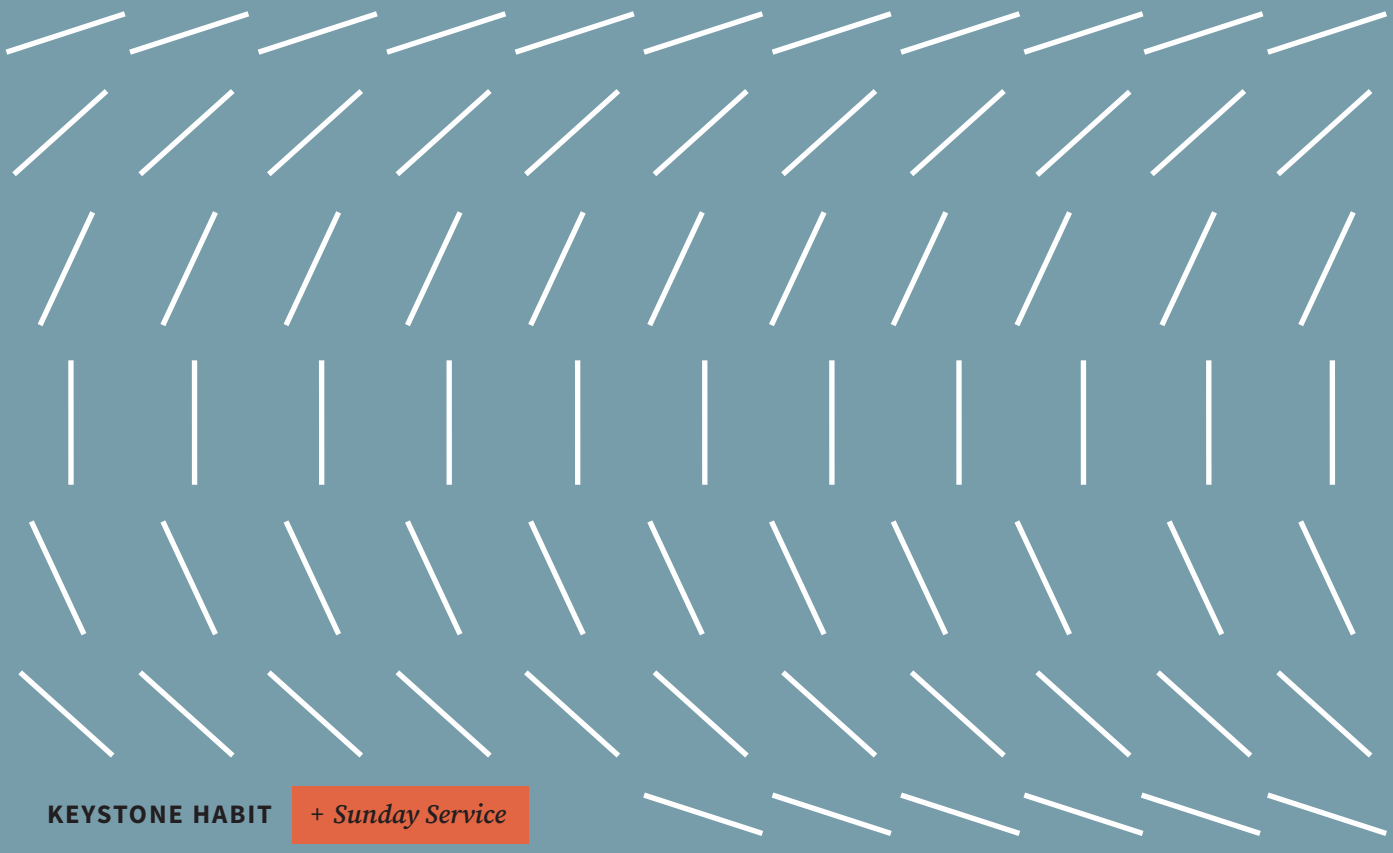
SECTION 2

Knowing the Gospel



KEYSTONE HABIT + *Sunday Service*

DAY 06

Knowing the Gospel

Philippians 3:7-11

7 But everything that was a gain to me, I have
considered to be a loss because of Christ. 8 More
than that, I also consider everything to be a loss
in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ
Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the
loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that
I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having
a righteousness of my own from the law, but one
that is through faith in Christ — the righteousness
from God based on faith. 10 My goal is to know
him and the power of his resurrection and the
fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his
death, 11 assuming that I will somehow reach the
resurrection from among the dead.

Strong words from the Apostle Paul; it's not often you read the word "dung" in the Bible. This passage is a helpful summary of Knowing the gospel for two reasons. First, you can tell how central Jesus and his good news were for Paul; he counts everything else as a waste of time in comparison. If you go back and read Philippians 3:1-6 you'll see Paul look back on all his bone fides and supposed accomplishment and conclude that it didn't amount to anything if he didn't have Jesus. Elsewhere Paul told the church in Corinth "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Second, Paul highly values "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord," which describes the relational rather than merely informational knowledge here. To only know the information of the gospel without having a relationship with Jesus is also a waste of time. As Paul says, the true prize is to "gain Christ."

In the Christian life, Knowing certainly includes information to be learned, both when it comes to the basics of the gospel and when it comes to the complexity of the Bible. The Scriptures are an inexhaustible treasure that you can learn more about for the rest of your life. But think back to the goal of the Christian life we talked about Days 1-5: the goal is life with God. We go to the Scriptures and learn more about the Christian life not as an end of itself but as a means to an end, that end being life with God.

Take a moment to read back over Philippians 3:7-11. What do you think Paul felt about Jesus when he wrote these words? What are some ways you hope to grow in Knowing Jesus like this? Journal your thoughts below, then close your time in prayer.

NOTES

DAY 07

Keystone Habit: Sunday Service

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,
to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and
to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and
many wonders and signs were being performed
through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were
together and held all things in common. 45 They
sold their possessions and property and distributed
the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day
they devoted themselves to meeting together in
the temple, and broke bread from house to house.
They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts,
47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the
people. Every day the Lord added to their number
those who were being saved.

This describes Jesus's church in its infancy. Shortly before this the resurrected Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9), then after a stretch of waiting the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus's disciples (Acts 2:1-41) and over 3000 people were saved in one day! That massive group of people is who's being described in the passage above, and you'll notice just how devoted they were to Christ and to one another, even though just the day before they were mostly strangers to one another.

Today we're looking at the first habit for Knowing the gospel: Sunday service. This is also our first Keystone Habit. A Keystone Habit is a habit upon which other habits hang like a chain reaction, or a habit that has a multiplying effect. For example, a good night of sleep can make you both more productive at work and less irritable with your spouse. Sunday service is like that.

As an aside, the Sunday service is also a good example of the interrelated nature of Knowing, Living, and Advancing the gospel, since the worship gathering does all three. But, we needed to put it somewhere.

Now, strictly speaking Acts 2:42-47 doesn't describe Sunday services since the early church gathered in the temple *every day*. However, the best corollary for us is the Sunday worship gathering in which followers of Jesus come together, worship, pray, give generously, break bread (communion), and devote themselves to God's word. That's what makes the Sunday service so powerful for our Christian lives, because so many things get taught, practiced, and honed in our short time together.

Take a moment to read back over Acts 2:42-47. What stands out to you about these early church gatherings? What do you hope for your own participation in Sunday services? Journal your thoughts below and close in prayer, thanking God for the blessing of worshipping him alongside others.

NOTES

DAY 08

Prayer

Mark 1:32-38

32 When evening came, after the sun had set,
they brought to [Jesus] all those who were sick
and demon-possessed. 33 The whole town was
assembled at the door, 34 and he healed many who
were sick with various diseases and drove out many
demons. And he would not permit the demons to
speak, because they knew him. 35 Very early in the
morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went
out, and made his way to a deserted place; and
there he was praying. 36 Simon and his companions
searched for him, 37 and when they found him they
said, "Everyone is looking for you." 38 And he said
to them, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages
so that I may preach there too. This is why I have
come."

In the three years Jesus spent with his disciples, this was likely a common occurrence: they'd wake up and find Jesus missing. Imagine the scene—Jesus had been up late healing folks by lamplight, seeing shocking sights of suffering, before passing out on a woven mat in the floor. Yet he woke in the dim grey dawn, perhaps cold and stiff from the day prior, and gingerly stepped over snoring disciples so he could slip out of town unnoticed. To pray.

"He often withdrew to deserted places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). Here you have the Son of God, a member of the Trinity with perfect relational access to the Godhead, often slipping away even when exhausted so he could be with his Father. You have to wonder, what did he pray about that morning? Was his heart heavy from the night before? Was he asking for strength and energy to do it again today? Did he need guidance on whether he should stay in that city or move onto the next? How much did he talk, and how much did he just sit and listen?

Much like we saw David lead his people in worship, Jesus leads us in the practice of prayer. He taught his disciples how to pray both by giving them words to use in prayer (ex. the Lord's prayer, Matthew 6:9-13) and by exemplifying a key way to pray: withdrawal. This is certainly not the only way to pray, particularly if we want to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). As we saw on Day 4, quick prayers like the Jesus Prayer help us weave prayer into any moment without having to withdraw, and prayer with other people is a foundational component of the Christian life (see Day 14). Nevertheless, seeking quiet moments alone with God is a key habit of the Christian life. If Jesus so clearly needed it, how much more do we?

Take a moment to think about your typical prayer habits. If you don't already, start with this: what's a place in your day when you could get 5-10 minutes alone with God in prayer? This doesn't have to be first thing in the morning; it could on your lunch break or before bed, but it'll be best if you are still, quiet, alone, and not multitasking. What will you need to do to set this time apart — perhaps put it on your calendar, leave a note somewhere, or ask a friend to help you remember? The eventual goal, of course, would be to increase this to an amount of time that cultivates your relationship with God.

Now, write down below: how do you want to regularly be in prayer, and what do you want for these times with God? After you do that, give this a shot: go ahead and set a timer for 10 minutes and spend it in prayer. Don't miss this chance to be with your Father.

NOTES

DAY 09

Bible Reading

Matthew 4:1-4

[1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2] After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. [3] Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." [4] He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Just like yesterday, here we have Jesus withdrawing to a desolate place, but this was perhaps the opposite of the nourishing prayer retreat he took in Mark 1. Here Jesus faced a harrowing ordeal perhaps second only to the cross: temptation by Satan himself, and this only after Jesus has fasted to the brink of starvation.

And what was Satan's first ploy? Of course, the thing every cell in Jesus's human body was screaming for: food! But Jesus stayed steadfast, treating his dependence upon the Father as even more important than life itself.

And notice that Jesus is quoting something here. He's referencing Deuteronomy 8:2-3, in which Moses (about 1200 years before Jesus's birth) reminded the people of Israel how God had miraculously provided them manna, bread from heaven, while they wandered in the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land. God did this, Moses said, not merely to feed them but to remind them that their very existence depends on God and his sovereign word. This is the same word with which he created the cosmos (Genesis 1), conveyed his good and perfect law (Exodus 20-31), corrected his wayward people through the prophets (ex. Isaiah), and finally revealed himself through his perfect Son, who himself is called the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1). We owe both our physical life through creation and our spiritual life through salvation (James 1:18) to the perfect power of God's Word.

It's for this reason that God's people make a practice of going to his word, collectively when we gather on Sundays to hear the word of God preached, then individually through the habit of regular Bible reading. This can look a number of ways, though, perhaps by using a devotional like this one, or simply by picking a book of the Bible and reading through it slowly, taking time to think and pray over what you find there. You can also use different strategies for different seasons of life; for example, you might pick a single verse to meditate on for a week to really let it seep into your bones. Whatever the case, the goal here isn't legalistic conscience easing—I've read the Bible today so I can feel okay about myself—but instead the same goal that Jesus had in the desert facing down his worst enemy: steadfast reliance upon God.

So, with that being said, how do you want to regularly read the Bible, and what do you want for these times with God? Again, when it comes to forming habits, combining multiple habits is good bang for your buck, so consider coupling this with your prayer habits from yesterday. Jot your plan down below, then consider this: Psalm 19:10 says that God's word is "more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb." What do you think it would look like to think about God's word like that? Close your time in prayer, thanking God for the good gift of his word.

NOTES

DAY 10

Wisdom

2 Samuel 6:14-16, 20-22

14 David was dancing with all his might before the
Lord wearing a linen ephod. 15 He and the whole
house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord
with shouts and the sound of the ram's horn. 16 As
the ark of the Lord was entering the city of David,
Saul's daughter Michal looked down from the
window and saw King David leaping and dancing
before the Lord, and she despised him in her
heart…

20 When David returned home to bless his
household, Saul's daughter Michal came out to
meet him. "How the king of Israel honored himself
today!" she said. "He exposed himself today in the
sight of the slave girls of his subjects like a vulgar
person would expose himself." 21 David replied
to Michal, "It was before the Lord who chose me
over your father and his whole family to appoint
me ruler over the Lord's people Israel. I will dance
before the Lord, 22 and I will dishonor myself and
humble myself even more."

This records the entry of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem under David's kingship; up till then it had been kept elsewhere in the nation of Israel, at various places of worship or with various caretakers (see 1 Samuel 7:1-2). The ark represented God's own life-giving presence among his people, and this is why David led Israel in jubilant, even undignified worship of their God.

If you've been wondering, a linen ephod was a thin, white, sleeveless tunic reaching from the shoulders to the knees and worn under robes as an undergarment. In an era in which royal power was displayed through pomp and circumstance, David's stripped-down act of worship was exceptional (and, at least for Michal, scandalizing). Think about the remarkable precedent he set for his people, particularly in the way even their leader's heart was oriented to God in glad humility.

We're looking today at the habit of worship, but we're not merely talking about singing along to worship music on Sunday. You can worship God with anything; in fact, we are told to worship God *with everything*, as we already saw in Romans 12:1: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship."

David's actions show us that song, dance, and celebration can all be acts of worship. Read throughout the Scriptures and you'll see that generosity (Exodus 35:21), feasting (Exodus 12:21-28), loving your neighbor (Hebrews 13:16), even mourning (Job 1:20) can all be acts of worship, too. All these start with a heart that is thankful to God, even jubilant over who he is and what he has done for you: "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

Take a moment to journal your thoughts below. How would you like to grow in your worship of God? How do you think you can both grow and express your thankfulness to him? After you've had a moment to think about this, consider kneeling down wherever you are, if you're able, and thanking God for who he is and what he has done for you; simply getting in this posture can help prepare your heart to worship him.

NOTES

DAY 11

The Sacraments

Acts 2:36-38

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

37 When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

A *sacrament* is a specific practice ordained by God that communicates the good news of his grace to his people. There are two: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is the entry point into the people of God, signifying our cleansing of sin through the work of Christ on the cross (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). For this reason, Jesus sent out his apostles to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). That's exactly what we see in the passage from Acts 2 above; Peter preached a sermon, his listeners responded to God through repentance and faith in Jesus, and they were immediately baptized. For 2000 years, Jesus's church has continued to practice baptism in order to rehearse with our bodies and remind one another about the hope we have in Jesus for salvation.

The Lord's Supper, also called communion, is the regular practice of identifying with Christ's death for us. Unlike baptism, which happens only once, we're invited to practice the Lord's Supper often (which is why our church serves communion almost weekly). As 1 Corinthians 11 describes above, we crush this bread between our teeth and drink of the cup to remember Christ's body broken and blood shed for us. Like baptism, this is a rehearsal of truth, that these things were accomplished apart from us (we didn't contribute anything but our need) and yet for us. We remember together, week in and week out, that we desperately needed Christ's sacrifice and, wondrously, Christ has already given it.

You might think of the sacraments as just two solitary features of the Christian life, but in fact they are regular practices for following Jesus. First, if you are a follower of Jesus and yet have never been baptized, take this opportunity to reach out to someone about being baptized, whether you have questions to sort through first or you're ready to go. If you've already been baptized, take any opportunity you can to remember your baptism. Remember the moment you declared all that Jesus has done for you, and walk in the newness of life that he gives you in his name.

More frequently, though, receive this encouragement to participate in the Lord's Supper, and when you do, to truly *participate*. Use it as an opportunity to reflect on Jesus's wondrous sacrifice in your place, and let the knowledge that you are welcome at his table nourish your faith week in and week out.

Take a moment to journal below: what do you hope for your participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper? Close in prayer, inviting the Lord to meet you in your observance of the sacraments.

NOTES

DAY 12

Ongoing Study

Philippians 1:9-11

9 And I pray this: that your love will keep
on growing in knowledge and every kind of
discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things
that are superior and may be pure and blameless
in the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of
righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to
the glory and praise of God.

Today is our final practice for Knowing the Gospel, and it's a little bit of a catch-all category: ongoing study. Though it can look a number of different ways, the intent of this practice is to regularly pursue growth in knowledge about God and the things of God.

This may take the form of reading helpful books about the Bible, Christian living, church history, or any number of things (see the Further Resources Appendix for some examples). Or, this may take the form of informal classes at your Vintage location, even formal classes through seminary or an online program (many seminaries offer their lectures and class materials for free online). For those of us who tend towards nerdy, academic pursuits, those things may be an easy addition to your discipleship, but for others of us this may be a challenge. There are, however, loads of helpful resources online in the form of blog posts, videos, and other resources. In whatever form you prefer, this is a great opportunity to seek diverse input, to read widely from folks in and outside your corner of the global church, to hear from men and women of different backgrounds and cultures. Jesus's church is blessed with a wealth of diversity, and we can make use of these riches to our benefit.

Additionally, all of this is enriched by doing it with others, as we'll stress in our upcoming section on Living the Gospel. Especially if reading isn't your favorite pastime, consider doing a book club with friends or your community group to benefit from each other's insights. Ask a trusted friend to help you think through a biblical or theological question you've had for a while. Or, perhaps most formative of these options, find a mature believer to learn from (as we'll discuss on Day 24).

Over the course of a lifetime of following Jesus, you'll likely try all of these and more. In whatever ways you pursue ongoing study, let Paul's prayer in Philippians 1 guide you. All too often we pursue knowledge for the paltry sake of appearing knowledgeable to others—flee this impulse! Instead, pursue knowledge about God and his word as a means to grow in love and discernment, that you might "approve what is excellent" (1:10, ESV) and be filled with righteousness to God's glory (1:11), not your own.

To close out our study on Knowing the Gospel, take a moment to read back over your thoughts and prayers from Days 6-11. Think about the habits you hope to put into practice for Sunday service, worship, prayer, Bible reading, and the sacraments. These things can work together with your ongoing study; if you've got questions about the Old Testament, consider reading through an Old Testament book for your regular Bible reading. Now identify, where do you hope to grow when it comes to your ongoing study? What's a topic, question, or idea you want to dig into soon? Jot that down, and close in prayer, thanking God for walking with us through our life-long journey of Knowing the gospel better and better.

NOTES

SECTION 3

Living the Gospel

KEYSTONE HABIT + *Biblical Community*

DAY 13

Living the Gospel

Colossians 3:12-17

12 Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly
loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility,
gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one
another and forgiving one another if anyone has
a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has
forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. 14 Above
all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of
unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you
were also called in one body, rule your hearts.
And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell
richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and
admonishing one another through psalms, hymns,
and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in
your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in
deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Today we transition to our next section, Living the Gospel. Living the Gospel is about embodying the good news of Jesus in our everyday lives. That's a big, broad category, especially because the gospel has something to say about every last bit of our lives. But, in particular, we focus on the tangible ways followers of Jesus are called to live out their faith together. We'll touch on spiritual disciplines, things like fasting and Sabbath, as well as more relational elements like community and family.

But, before we get there, notice the totalizing aspect of the last verse: "Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (3:17). This might remind you of what we looked at on Day 5 in Romans 11:36-12:1. God is the Everything, from whom we have received everything, therefore we give him everything.

That might sound overwhelming, even invasive, but the goal here isn't to add more to your already-full life. The goal is that your life, all the stuff you're already doing (plus the empty space left behind by the things you should say no to) would be saturated by the good presence of God, to your benefit. For centuries the church has had a phrase for this: *coram Deo*, literally "in the presence of God." Living *coram Deo* is an invitation not to new way of living but a more truthful way of living because really and truly all of life is played out in the presence of an omnipresent God. And living *coram Deo* is an invitation not to more doing but to more life in what you're already doing — an invitation to life with the Life-giver.

Now, take a moment to journal below. When you think about the various facets of your life, in what ways or areas of life to you want to enjoy the presence of God more fully? In what ways do you want to grow in living *coram Deo*? Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his life-giving presence.

NOTES

DAY 14

Keystone Habit: Biblical Community

Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,
to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and
to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and
many wonders and signs were being performed
through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were
together and held all things in common. 45 They
sold their possessions and property and distributed
the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day
they devoted themselves to meeting together in
the temple, and broke bread from house to house.
They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts,
47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the
people. Every day the Lord added to their number
those who were being saved.

We've already seen this passage, back at our first keystone habit: Sunday Service (Day 7). Yet it's worth looking at again to talk about our second keystone habit: biblical community.

As mentioned on Day 7, this describes the earliest moments of the Christian church. When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and they began proclaiming the good news of Jesus, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were visiting Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). When Peter preached and over 3000 people were saved and baptized, it was from this diverse, multicultural, multi-lingual group of pilgrims.

Let that sink in. Many of these 3000 individuals and families were strangers to one another and to Jerusalem. They came from regions all around the east Mediterranean, had different cultures, and spoke different languages. These people all came in together, tossed into the great big family of God, and what happened? The gospel turned otherwise disparate people into a family, and they devoted themselves to one another. They learned from the apostles together and they worshipped together in the Temple. They shared what they had, provided for one another's needs, and hosted folks in their homes (a necessity with so many folks who didn't live in Jerusalem). And they did so joyfully, gladly, filled with awe.

This illustrates the reason biblical community is our keystone habit for Living the Gospel, because so much of what happens when we Live the Gospel occurs within, is aided by, and often requires community with other followers of Jesus. On the latter point, the New Testament has about 60 different commands that include the words "one another"; for example, yesterday Colossians 3:13 said to bear with one another and forgive one another. You literally *have to* be in community with other people to obey these Scriptures. And all this is further improved by the wealth of diversity—age, race, culture, disposition, background, gender, etc.—that Jesus's church is blessed with, just like the early church in Jerusalem.

Take a moment to journal below: in what ways have you benefited from being in community with other followers of Jesus? In what ways do you hope to grow in community like this? Close your time in prayer, thanking God for the gift of life together with his people.

NOTES

DAY 15

Obedience

Luke 6:46-49

46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do
the things I say? 47 I will show you what someone
is like who comes to me, hears my words, and
acts on them: 48 He is like a man building a house,
who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.
When the flood came, the river crashed against
that house and couldn't shake it, because it was
well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not
act is like a man who built a house on the ground
without a foundation. The river crashed against it,
and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction
of that house was great."

You most likely haven't experienced the horrible effects of a flood. Or, perhaps you have and it stuck with you: the chilling fear of seeing something you've always treated as perfectly secure, something like a road or house or mountain side, sliding off into the current. This sort of unveiling of insecurity in our own lives, like the crumbling of a foundationless house, is what Jesus warns against in this passage.

So, what is it that leads to greater security? Hearing the word of Jesus and doing what he says. At first glance you might think that leaves it all up to you and your own effort, but notice in Jesus's parable how the house's strength is due not to its own integrity but to its connection with the true source of strength—the rock. Jesus has secured salvation for us through his own perfect obedience, given us his Spirit to empower our obedience, and taught us the paths of obedience by revealing the way to true life. Though the task of obedience is still our work to do, it is a work that proceeds from the gospel, and we can't take credit for any of it.

This work is what Paul calls "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5, 16:26). This is faith that is lived, believing in Jesus to the point that you actually take him at his word and do as he says. The obedience of faith is, according to Jesus, motivated by our love for him: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word… The one who doesn't love me will not keep my words" (John 14:23-24).

To do this, though, you first have to know his words. This is what Jesus commanded of his disciples after his resurrection, that they would go and teach others "to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). This connects back to Day 9 and our regular rhythms for Bible reading; if we hope to obey Jesus's commands, we must know his commands, which will require reading and rereading, finding ways to remember them, practice them, and repent when we don't (see confession on Day 20).

Take a moment to journal and pray. Are there areas of disobedience you need to confess to God? Are there areas of obedience you have neglected? This is an opportunity not to feel crushed by your disobedience but to find freedom knowing that Jesus was crushed for you, and to resolve to follow him wherever he says go.

NOTES

DAY 16

Confession

1 John 1:5-10

5 This is the message we have heard from him and
declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely
no darkness in him. 6 If we say, "We have fellowship
with him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are
lying and are not practicing the truth. 7 If we walk
in the light as he himself is in the light, we have
fellowship with one another, and the blood of
Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say,
"We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and
the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is
faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to
cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say,
"We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his
word is not in us.

This is one of the good graces of the Bible: the God who speaks to us knows us and knows what we humans are like. He doesn't give us the standard of holiness in Jesus without accounting for the times we will fail to keep that standard; put another way, God is not surprised by our sin. Yesterday we looked at obedience, and today we look at confession, and following Jesus means growth in both.

This is, essentially, living according to the gospel message. Following Jesus means admitting, "Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and that means me." This is a confession of needing salvation, of having been lost in sin and found by Jesus. But in the text above, John recognizes something else: regularly admitting this need is part of the ongoing Christian life.

This is something John would've been well-acquainted with. He wrote all his contributions to the Bible later in life, when he was likely 70-80 years old, and he knew what following Jesus for a lifetime looked like. You simply couldn't pretend to be without sin—you'd be a liar if you did. And yet we risk another lie if we do not pursue obedience: "If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth" (1:6). The life of following Jesus has both components, obedience and confession.

Now when you read "If we confess our sins…" you might wonder, "confess to whom?" John isn't specific because the rest of the Bible calls us to confess to both God and others. "I acknowledged my sin to you [God] and did not conceal my iniquity" (Psalm 32:5); "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). And we confess to others both when we sin against each other (Matthew 5:23-24; Galatians 6:1) and when our sin would otherwise go concealed; bringing something out of secrecy is the surest way to break its power over you.

The work of confession isn't easy, but it is lifegiving. In his classic book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer connects the goodness of the gospel to the freeing experience of confession:

> In [Christ] the love of God came to the sinner…All sham was ended in the presence of Christ. The misery of the sinner and the mercy of God—this was the truth that his Church was to live…Now our brother stands in Christ's stead…Before him alone in the whole world I dare to be the sinner I am; here the truth of Jesus Christ and his mercy rules…Our brother stands before us as the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us (111-112).

Take a moment to journal below: what is God bringing to mind for you right now? Is there anything specific you need to confess, anyone to whom you need to apologize? Or, how would you like to grow in your practice of confession? If you're not sure to whom you can confess sin, go out on a limb and ask someone of your same gender in your community group. Not in a community group? Email a pastor or staff member at your Vintage location.

NOTES

DAY 17

Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:9-15

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor,
so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10
And in this matter I am giving advice because it is
profitable for you, who began last year not only to
do something but also to want to do it. 11 Now also
finish the task, so that just as there was an eager
desire, there may also be a completion, according
to what you have. 12 For if the eagerness is there, the
gift is acceptable according to what a person has,
not according to what he does not have. 13 It is not
that there should be relief for others and hardship
for you, but it is a question of equality. 14 At the
present time your surplus is available for their
need, so that their abundance may in turn meet
your need, in order that there may be equality. 15
As it is written: The person who had much did not
have too much, and the person who had little did
not have too little.

First, some background. The "you" in this passage is the church in the city of Corinth, a church that Paul the Apostle worked with on and off over the years. One of Paul's big projects was collecting a large sum of money from Gentile churches to give to the church in Jerusalem, which faced immense persecution over a long period of time (starting in Acts 8), to both help them and to continue knitting together Jewish and Gentile Christians who were often divided due to ethnic tensions. That 'fund raiser' is what Paul is referencing when he encourages the Corinthians to "finish the task."

Now, read back over the passage and think through: what do you think this passage can tell us about generosity?

Out the gate, Paul roots our exercise of generosity in the example of Christ: Jesus was exceedingly generous and calls us to follow him. But note the way "rich" and "poor" have some flexibility in that passage; Jesus left heaven, which has a different sort of riches than we have here on earth, became actually poor, but then gives his followers not fiscal wealth but an eternal inheritance worth far more (Ephesians 1:11-14). This is all helpful language because it helps us 1. Appreciate the generosity of Jesus and 2. Help us consider salvation in him as far more profitable to us than earthly possessions.

After that, Paul gives some practical advice about generosity: it is profitable to us to be givers (v.10); we give out of what we have, not what we don't have (v.12); we give to provide for others and accept help when we need it as well (v.14). Finally, he quotes from Exodus 16:18 to summarize his thoughts on generosity. In Exodus 16, the people went out to gather manna, and no one had too much or too little because they shared it with one another.

The manna is an excellent example for our own practices of generosity—imagine the scene of God raining bread down on his people, and them turning and sharing it with each other. There are many ways you can practice generosity, and they all start with God's generosity towards us in life and, especially, through Jesus. The primary ways you can do this are:

- Hospitality – blessing others by welcoming them into your space.
- Relationship – blessing others through being attentive, encouraging, caring, and forgiving.
- Giving – sharing your financial and material resources with others, especially the poor and vulnerable in and outside your immediate community.
- Service – blessing others with your skills and abilities (we'll look more at this tomorrow).

Looking over that list, take a moment to journal your responses to these questions below: which ones are you least proficient in, or most likely to neglect? In what ways do you think God is calling you to grow in generosity? Feel free to turn that into a prayer—ask him how he intends to grow you, and ask him to help you increase in generosity.

NOTES

DAY 18

Serving

1 Corinthians 12:12-20

12 For just as the body is one and has many parts,
and all the parts of that body, though many, are one
body — so also is Christ. 13 For we were all baptized
by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or
Greeks, whether slaves or free — and we were all
given one Spirit to drink. 14 Indeed, the body is
not one part but many. 15 If the foot should say,
"Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body,"
it is not for that reason any less a part of the body. 16
And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye,
I don't belong to the body," it is not for that reason
any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were
an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole
body were an ear, where would the sense of smell
be? 18 But as it is, God has arranged each one of the
parts in the body just as he wanted. 19 And if they
were all the same part, where would the body be? 20
As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The church as the "body" of Christ is a recurring metaphor in the New Testament (see Romans 12:3-8 and Ephesians 4:1-16). It's used to describe our connection to Christ, the "head" of the church, a connection so intimate we're almost a single organism. And it's used to describe our connection to one another in the church: we need each other just as much as your hand and your foot need your spleen and your kidneys. Paul goes on to say, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

The metaphor is also used to describe our individual contributions to the whole body. "We who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts" (Romans 12:5-6). This is a remarkable affirmation that applies to all of us—we all have something to give to the shared life of the church.

This is true for you, uniquely you. Hear that. It's no less true for you than for that other person you view as more skilled, competent, or valuable. As the passage above describes, it is unfitting for a more common part of the body to look down on itself for not being a more prestigious part. "As it is, God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted" (v.18). Let it sink in: you have something to give to others, and they need you to do so (and you need them back). This is likely a combination of formal service (a volunteer role) and informal service (being a helpful friend), but in both you have a part to play in this body "building itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

It's also no less true for the person you wish would attend some other church. The mechanic, the jobless, the elitist, the single mom, the adult with Down's syndrome, the extrovert, the depressed—all equally made in the image of God, all equally precious to him, all given a gift to share with others.

Journal your thoughts below: In what ways would you like to start or grow in serving others in and outside the church? As you close your time in prayer, consider what, if anything, you might need to confess to God. Have you neglected to use your gifts for others? Have you valued certain people more than others? Bring this, and anything else, to the Lord in prayer.

NOTES

DAY 19

Sabbath

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

12 Be careful to remember the Sabbath day, to keep
it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you. 13
You are to labor six days and do all your work, 14 but
the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.
Do not do any work — you, your son or daughter,
your male or female slave, your ox or donkey, any
of your livestock, or the resident alien who lives
within your city gates, so that your male and female
slaves may rest as you do. 15 Remember that you
were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your
God brought you out of there with a strong hand
and an outstretched arm. That is why the Lord your
God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

You might recognize this; it's the fourth of the Ten Commandments. Those occur twice in the Old Testament, first in Exodus 20:1-17 and then reiterated in Deuteronomy 5, where we find an interesting point made about the Sabbath. God tells Israel to keep the Sabbath day holy, as a set-apart day for the Lord, because they used to be slaves.

That's not the only reason, though. Both Exodus 20 and Genesis 1-2 point out that the pattern for the Sabbath is found in the creation of the world. "God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation" (Genesis 2:3). The Sabbath is the first thing declared holy in the Bible, a sacred rest with and unto God woven into the very fabric of creation.

But the Sabbath was also given to Israel as a gift because they had been slaves in Egypt. A slave gets no days off. They toil, endlessly, without any hope of relief. When God liberated his people from slavery, he invited them every week to shake off their shackles, to remember that they didn't have to work every day because they weren't slaves anymore, to enjoy the goodness of God and the world he has created. This was equal parts a rehearsal of their new identity as God's free people and a regular practice for trusting that God would provide for them even if they didn't work every single day (ex. Exodus 16:27-30).

And we might not be Egyptian slaves, but we need exactly this same thing. We need regular reminders that we belong to God now and we operate within his economy; we need regular practice to trust God even when there's a deadline at work coming up or dirty dishes on the counter. We need the gift of rest because our lives are so incredibly fast-paced, but more than this, we need the gift of rest to God (v.14). Resting unto God means rest that is found in him and oriented to him, rest that seeks the good and blessed life of being with God.

Of course, on the other side of Jesus's sacrificial death for us, we have some flexibility in how we do this. Prior to Jesus's death, God's people were bound to strict observance of the Sabbath (though, by Jesus's day, Israel's religious authorities had made the Sabbath a dogmatic exercise rather than a day of worship). Jesus assured us "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), the New Testament clarifies that we have freedom to observe Sabbath outside a 24-hour period on Saturday (Colossians 2:16), and the early church moved their Sabbath observance to Sunday in honor of Jesus's Easter Sunday resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

As you consider how to Sabbath, or how to grow in your Sabbath practice, keep in mind that we tend to Sabbath the same way we "rest" in other areas of life, but resting unto God requires relearning how to rest. Most of us choose some hobby, self-indulgence, or means of distraction for "rest" (and are, almost always, not all that rested after we do these things). To rest unto the Lord, we need to avoid both a religious sort of asceticism, where you make yourself miserable avoiding work, and a religious sort of hedonism, where "rest" is simply a treat-yourself mentality.

Take a moment to consider, how would you like to start or grow in your practice of the Sabbath? Remember, this is *not* a legalistic exercise in which good spiritual standing is gained by sabbathing. What would you like to learn about resting *unto* the Lord? Ask him to meet you in your engagement with the Sabbath.

NOTES

DAY 20

Family

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved
children, 2 and walk in love, as Christ also loved us
and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant
offering to God.

In Ephesians 5:1-6:4, Paul covers the way that the gospel impacts every conceivable human relationship. You'll see general statements about living in holiness towards one another (5:3-18), encouraging other followers of Jesus (5:19-20), and mutual submission (5:21), coupled with specific commands to wives and husbands (5:22-32) and children and parents (6:1-5). This passage speaks to all of us because we all have at least one of these relationships.

Husbands and wives are called to leave behind their unique manifestations of self-centeredness; both are called to love one another "as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us." Children are called to obey and honor their parents rather than surrender to their most basic instincts of secrecy and rebellion. Parents, in turn, are called to be worthy of such honor and enable their children's obedience; fathers specifically are told not to "stir up anger" in their children and to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" rather than according to their own whims and folly.

All of this, quite literally, hits close to home. For most of us, if not all, our family contains our most fraught relationships. These are people who remember your most embarrassing moments, who see the real you instead of the curated version, who know your vulnerabilities and how to hit where it hurts. And all this is further complicated by the profound familial love that accompanies our wounds and weaknesses.

This makes family relationships prime gospel territory for two reasons. First, these are the people who will see all your faults and (mostly) reject any fake, polished version of you; the real you is the one understood by the gospel, "Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and that means *me*" (Day 4). Second, you interact with these people so much that it provides plenty of opportunities to practice the gospel message, to bless one another and to forgive each other just as you have been forgiven in Christ (Ephesians 4:32).

Take a moment to find and read Ephesians 5:1-6:4; not every section will apply to you, but there's plenty that will. What relationship(s) does this bring to mind for you? Write out a prayer below, asking God to work in that relationship and to help you "walk in love" within it.

NOTES

DAY 21

Other Spiritual Disciplines

1 Timothy 4:7-10

7 But have nothing to do with pointless and silly
myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. 8 For
the training of the body has limited benefit, but
godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds
promise for the present life and also for the life to
come. 9 This saying is trustworthy and deserves full
acceptance. 10 For this reason we labor and strive,
because we have put our hope in the living God,
who is the Savior of all people, especially of those
who believe.

We're finishing our section on Living the Gospel with a miscellaneous category: other spiritual disciplines. For a definition, spiritual disciplines are practices that help shape and grow our life with God, and we've already looked at many.

This metaphor has limitations to it, but think of spiritual disciplines like exercise for your soul. Just like your body needs a variety of workouts—cardio, walking, stretching—your soul also needs a variety of tactics to nourish your relationship with God. The metaphor breaks down when you consider the relational dimension though; where exercise is achievement oriented (ex. running a certain distance), relationships wither when they are reduced to mere achievements.

Note how Paul, in his letter to Timothy above, uses a similar exercise metaphor, though he points out that bodily training only has so much value. In an age when fitness is both a common pastime and a multi-billion-dollar industry, that point is perhaps hard to swallow, but Paul references the inherent limitation to your bodily health—one day it will run out. Thus, sculpting your body without nourishing your soul will leave you sorely unprepared for eternity.

In addition to the many spiritual disciplines that we've already looked at—prayer, Sabbath, etc.—here are a few to add:

Fasting

Some folks refer to fasting as exercising your 'no' muscle. Again, this is training not for physical gain but for going deeper into life with God by engaging in the sort of self-denial that Jesus said is inherent to following him (Luke 9:23-24). Food is the typical subject, but you can also fast from things like screen time, social media, shopping, hobbies, etc. A good place to start is with a fast between breakfast and dinner one day. Every time you think of eating repeat Matthew 4:4 to yourself. (Note: if you have a disordered relationship with food, fasting from something else will likely work better for you.)

Silence and solitude

On Day 8: Prayer, we saw how Jesus had a habit of getting away from the demands of ministry to pray in solitude. The goal here is making time to simply be with the Lord through quiet retreat, and this practice is a unique sort of balm for us residents of the Internet Age. A regular time of prayer and Bible reading during the day is a perfect starting point, but getting outside for a walk or park visit is the easiest next step. You can also weave moments into your every day, such as intentionally staying quiet on your commute. You might pray in this time, but you might find it even richer to practice intentional listening. Ask God, "What do you want to tell me?"

Simplicity

Much like fasting, simplicity invites us to reflect on the hold that things have on our hearts and to let go of these things as an act of worship. Generosity (Day 17) is in some respects a practice of simplicity, of choosing to have less so you can give more. To continue growth here, you might reduce or eliminate specific indulgences (ex. eating out frequently), unnecessary possessions or luxuries (ex. streaming services), or even commitments and hobbies (ex. fantasy football). Downsizing your possessions, spending, even pastimes will give you more latitude to be generous and time to be present with God and with others.

For more on these, check out the Further Resources list at the end of the study. Now, take a moment to journal below. In what ways do these practices sound attractive to you? What does your soul feel thirsty for? How do you hope to "train yourself in godliness"? Close your time in prayer—consider, like Day 8, setting a timer to sit in silence—and ask God to meet you in your exercise of spiritual discipline.

NOTES

SECTION 4

Advancing the Gospel

KEYSTONE HABIT + *Love One*

DAY 22

Advancing the Gospel

Matthew 28:16-20

16 The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the
mountain where Jesus had directed them. 17 When
they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted.
18 Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority
has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to
observe everything I have commanded you. And
remember, I am with you always, to the end of the
age."

The above encounter with Jesus happened after his resurrection and shortly before his ascension. This was the mission he gave his apostles before his return to heaven, the directive that animates God's people, the church. We call this the Great Commission, and there's no better place to start when considering how to Advance the Gospel.

Advancing the gospel involves sharing and living out the good news of Jesus with those around us. While Knowing the Gospel covers the *inner* life with God and Living the Gospel covers the *shared* life with God, Advancing has to do with the *outward* life with God, particularly in reaching out to others with the good news of the gospel.

Over the next few days, we'll look at various dimensions of this outward-facing life, which seeks to share the gospel with others, love and serve our neighbor, participate as fellow residents of wherever we find ourselves, and to help other disciples grow in following Jesus. But first, we need to see in Jesus's words above both the command and the promises.

Jesus has commanded all those who follow him to be about the business of helping others follow him. This is not a command reserved for followers who have achieved a certain level of faith; too easily you can read Jesus's command and assume it's meant for someone other than you. Yet deeply comforting are the two promises that surround the command; first, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (28:18), and second, "remember, I am with you always" (28:20). Nothing is outside his perfect, sovereign control, and he is always abundantly present to us as Immanuel, God *with* us.

Take a moment to read back over Matthew 28:16-20 slowly, even if you're very familiar with it, and journal below. How do Jesus's words here make you feel? Write about the good and the bad, the things you long for and the things you dread. Then close in prayer, and consider praying the words of Isaiah 6:8: "Here I am! Send me."

NOTES

DAY 23

Keystone Habit: Love One

Matthew 5:14-16

14 "You are the light of the world. A city situated on
a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and
puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand,
and it gives light for all who are in the house. 16 In
the same way, let your light shine before others, so
that they may see your good works and give glory to
your Father in heaven."

Today is our keystone habit for Advancing the Gospel: Loving One. By that we mean loving one person for the express purpose of showing them Jesus, and it's a keystone habit because Loving One is the irreducible component of Advancing the Gospel—without sharing the gospel we cannot hope to advance it—and because it requires so much of the other components of Advancing like Participation, Service, and Discipleship.

To begin, Jesus's parable here in Matthew 5 provides a good index point for how you feel about sharing the gospel. Before anything else like sorting through your worries or learning best evangelism practices, you must first ask: is this thing I have to share truly a light in the darkness? Put another way, you might ask yourself if the good news of Jesus is actually good to you. Sharing the gospel starts with receiving and resting in the gospel yourself, again and again.

This is especially true because of what this "light" is. Jesus equates the follower's light to their good works (5:16), or the exercise of righteousness and neighbor love characteristic of Jesus's followers (John 13:35). The source of this light is Christ himself; John's Gospel says of Jesus, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:4-5). We have no light in and of ourselves to shine, the light we put on display is Christ within us and working through us.

This clarifies the goal of sharing the gospel: helping others see Jesus. "No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket," Jesus says, "but rather on a lampstand" because its purpose—your purpose—is to provide light for others. Not to have all the answers, or to seem like a good Christian, or to be respected, but to shine the light of Jesus so that others can see him. And while this is enhanced and made credible by your good works, it inevitably requires actually talking about Jesus—as Paul says in Romans 10:14, "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"

You might look at your life and the many people in it and wonder, where do I start? That's why our church uses the phrase Love One, to provide a starting point by focusing on just one person through praying for them, pursuing intentional relationship with them, and actively looking to share the gospel with them. To be clear, this is not to reduce that person to an evangelism project—your love for them must be genuine, without strings attached.

Here's a practical step to go along with this: consider setting an alarm for 2:47pm every day (in reference to Acts 2:47), and when it goes off, pray for your Love One. This one exercise will keep your Love One on your mind more often and likely make you more attentive to opportunities to spend time with them and engage in meaningful conversation.

Now, take a moment to journal below: Who is, or could be, your Love One? Why do you long for them to know Jesus, and what do you think Jesus might have for them? How do you feel about letting "your light shine before" them? Let all of this inform your prayer today for that person.

NOTES

DAY 24

Participation

Jeremiah 29:4-7

4 This is what the Lord of Armies, the God of Israel,
says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to
Babylon: 5 "Build houses and live in them. Plant
gardens and eat their produce. 6 Find wives for
yourselves, and have sons and daughters. Find
wives for your sons and give your daughters to
men in marriage so that they may bear sons and
daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease. 7 Pursue
the well-being of the city I have deported you to.
Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives,
you will thrive."

Jeremiah was a prophet when there could hardly have been a worse job. By that point, God's people had rebelled against him for several centuries, and God's patience had run out. Israel was on the cusp of being exiled from their homeland, and God sent Jeremiah to tell them so, with the warning "You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you" (Jeremiah 7:27). Jeremiah lived to see the fruit of Israel's refusal, the horrid destruction of Jerusalem, which he recorded in Lamentations.

Yet, as with all the Old Testament prophets, a word of judgment always came with a promise of blessing. Jeremiah foretold of a far-off day in which God would heal his people's sickness completely through a New Covenant, and of a blessing in the here-and-now, just on the other side of exile, as we see in the passage above—God would take care of his people even in their exile. Interestingly, God told them not to become a withdrawn people, isolated from the communities to which they had been driven, but urged them to be a part of the place in which they would find themselves—in short, to participate.

Today we find ourselves in a different part of the biblical story. While we aren't exiled from our homeland, there are many similarities. Followers of Jesus are citizens of a kingdom they await (Philippians 3:20), long-term visitors of whatever earthly kingdom they currently inhabit (1 Peter 2:11), and they are called to participate in the life of the world around us throughout the New Testament. We're told to love our neighbor regardless of who they are (Mark 12:31), to live and work amiably with others (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), to fulfill our obligations to the government (Romans 13:1-7), to pray for those in authority over us (1 Timothy 2:1-2), to serve the needs of the poor and marginalized (James 1:27), and to show hospitality (more on that tomorrow). And God uses this sort of engagement to the benefit of others. As 1 Peter 2:12 exhorts, "Conduct yourselves honorably" so that others will "observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits."

Thankfully, most of us will not have to add a single thing to the calendar to participate in the life of our communities and neighborhoods. Between work, school, extracurriculars, voting, hobbies, recreation, even shopping, we all have at least one circle of people outside biblical community that we can participate in. Of course, we all can grow in this; if you don't already, you might find a place to be a regular and learn the names of people who work there (ex. coffee shop, restaurant, grocery store), or choose to attend PTA or neighborhood association meetings simply to meet folks, or try doing out in public with others what you normally do in or alone.

You'll find several more intersection points over the next few days as we look at hospitality, work, and serving our neighbors. For now, take a moment to journal a prayer below—how do you think God has called you to "seek the well-being" of where he has put you?

NOTES

DAY 25

Hospitality

Hebrews 13:1-2a

[1] Let brotherly love continue. [2] Don't neglect to show hospitality.

It's a short one today, but there's something remarkable in the text here that we miss in our English translation. This passage is from the tail end of Hebrews, where the author (whose identity is unknown) lists a handful of encouragements and challenges for followers of Jesus. In 13:1-2, the author makes an artful point in the original Greek with two similar words: *philadelphia* and *philoxenias*. The first is from *philos*, a friendly sort of love, plus *adelphos*, "brother" or "sibling," succinctly translated "brotherly love." The second is built similarly, from *philos* again but this time with *xenos*, meaning "stranger." The translation "to show hospitality" is perfectly fitting, since this is what the word truly meant. Yet within it we can see an ancient understanding of hospitality: "the love of strangers." Such love for strangers, hosting and feeding and caring for them, was vital in a time before hotels and AirbnB, when traveling was difficult and accommodations were few.

"Let *philadelphia* continue. Don't neglect *philoxenias*." Since the early church was referred to as "the brethren" (ex. Acts 1:15), the first sentence refers to love among followers of Jesus, a love that the author knows will simply grow anywhere that the people of God are gathering together. Thus it doesn't say to start loving one another but to simply continue doing so, to put no obstacle in the path of love among the people of God.

But the one we're prone to miss, the one that we need be careful to not neglect, is the love of strangers. Perhaps you've encountered the way Christian communities can become insular, exclusive, and homogenous. This is the natural bent of humans as they settle into shared life together. Yet this is something that followers of Jesus must watch out for especially because loving strangers, including those across customary economic and ethnic boundaries, was an everyday component of Jesus's ministry, a priority which Jesus handed onto his apostles and their successors. For example, the qualifications for elders or pastors in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 both list hospitality as a requisite character trait for those who would lead God's people.

So, how might God use you to be hospitable to others? Banish from your mind the images of Pinterest-chic hosting you see online and the burdensome performance mentality they bring with them. In *Habits of the Household*, Justin Earley helpfully points out that "hospitality is not entertaining"(63), as in, the goal is a truly shared life, and entertaining presents a less-than-true version of your life. Hospitality is simply using whatever spaces you have access to, whether your home or other places through work, recreation, or participation to "welcome others as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). Meals are the most essential element of hospitality; strangers become friends over food. But there are many other ways to do this, through various activities, hobbies, holidays, and the like.

Journal out your thoughts: how do you think God is calling you to show hospitality to others? Are there ways you feel gifted to be hospitable, or things about hospitality that feel daunting to you? And what are some specific rhythms that can you adopt to make a practice of hospitality? Close your time in prayer, and consider being open to whatever God might call you to in the practice of hospitality.

NOTES

DAY 26

Work

Colossians 3:23-24

23 Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as
something done for the Lord and not for people,
24 knowing that you will receive the reward of an
inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord
Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

11 Seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own
business, and to work with your own hands, as
we commanded you, 12 so that you may behave
properly in the presence of outsiders and not be
dependent on anyone.

Perhaps you work a job, perhaps you don't. Perhaps you're a caregiver and your hard work goes unpaid. Whatever the case, consider for a moment the curious theological intersection point of work.

Work deals with creation, since Adam and Eve were called to work the fruitful land before sin entered the world (Genesis 2:15), and it deals with the Creator, who invented work and himself is always at work (John 5:17). It deals with sin, since work is now cursed under sin to be frustrating and filled with futility (Genesis 3:17-19; Ecclesiastes 2:22). It deals with mankind, since every one of us will either work to secure our regular needs or be provided for by someone else who does, and with our ethics, since work presents ample opportunity to either obey or disobey the Lord. Finally, it deals with this present era, the era of the church, in which most followers of Jesus will pursue some kind of career or vocation for most of their lives, and through this pursuit they can let their light shine before others (see Day 23).

That's a long way of saying this: work is intensely theological. And yet we often struggle to view work this way, defaulting instead to a compartmentalized approach in which our faith remains tucked away in the non-working hours of our week. As we've seen the past few days, the workplace is a key space for sharing the gospel. Yet even this is not the full way in which followers of Jesus can engage in their work. No, it starts with what Paul said in Colossians 3:23-24 above—with seeing everything we do as a potential act of worship (remember all the way back to Days 1 and 10).

Imagine, what if you did every task in your day, for whomever you do them, as if for the Lord? And this is no heavenly standard to feel crushed under; consider Romans 8:15, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" Christ has secured your standing as a beloved child of God, who you can now call Abba, the Aramaic equivalent of Dad.

The invitation to do all things as if for the Lord isn't some expectation of unfailing excellence. It's an invitation to do things well but without fear, and more, to do them honestly, ethically, dignifying yourself and others, without envy or undue stress, trusting the Lord and obeying him above any earthly authority. It's an invitation that is consistent with the second passage above, also from Paul, that describes the sort of work to which we are called: humble, diligent, honorable. And for clarity, when he says to not "be dependent on anyone," he's not against any sort of dependency (we are all dependent at some point in life). Certain Thessalonian Christians had stopped working, thinking that Christ would return any day now, and had become a burden on the church in Thessaloniki (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13).

Take a moment to think about your job, or whatever you put your labor towards. In what ways do you hope to grow in doing all things as if for the Lord? What would it be like to trust God with all your work responsibilities and expectations? What rhythms might you adopt (prayer, Sabbath, etc.) to help you do these things? Write some of that down and take a moment to pray over your work, particularly that God would be glorified in all that you do.

NOTES

DAY 27

Justice and service

Isaiah 58:6-8

6 Isn't this the fast I choose:
To break the chains of wickedness,
to untie the ropes of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free,
and to tear off every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
to bring the poor and homeless into your house,
to clothe the naked when you see him,
and not to ignore your own flesh and blood?
8 Then your light will appear like the dawn,
and your recovery will come quickly.
Your righteousness will go before you,
and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.

Like Jeremiah, Isaiah was a prophet in Israel towards the end of the kingdom, though unlike Jeremiah he didn't live to see God's people taken into exile. Right out the gate, in Isaiah 1, you see the sort of mess God was dealing with. "Listen, heavens, and pay attention, earth, for the Lord has spoken…'The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's feeding trough, but Israel does not know; my people do not understand'" (Isaiah 1:2-3). Particularly troubling to God was their attempts at covering up their lack of faith with faithful-looking activities. "Stop bringing useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of solemn assemblies—I cannot stand iniquity with a festival" (Isaiah 1:13).

The text above has the same sort of challenging tone to it. In place of their regular fasts—whether performative or perfunctory—God called Israel to turn to him by doing something near and dear to his heart: justice. We all bring assumptions to the idea of justice, but in the Bible, justice is simply the making right of wrongs, with two components: retribution, which punishes an evil doer, and restoration, which brings wholeness to those who were harmed.

Both are true components of God's justice, yet his restorative justice is emphasized throughout the Old Testament, particularly towards those on the margins of society who are most easily harmed, dismissed, and forgotten. Israel was called to be a just and merciful people because their God was just and merciful and because they had experienced his mercy firsthand. "He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving him food and clothing. You are also to love the resident alien, since you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

Restorative justice is all over the New Testament, too. Jesus repeatedly called his followers to care for the poor and marginalized, to give to those who ask (Matthew 5:42), to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (Matthew 25:35-40), to especially lookout for vulnerable communities like widows and orphans (James 1:27). And, as in the Deuteronomy text just quoted, we do this because God has been abundantly merciful towards us through Christ (Luke 6:36), who gave his life away that we might receive all things through him (Romans 8:32).

Perhaps the Israelites in Isaiah's day chose fasting over care for the poor because the latter is harder than the former. Knowing who to help and how, connecting with someone who is different from you, truly caring for them, meeting needs sufficiently, trusting one another—none of this is easy. Yet care for those on the margins is deeply connected with the gospel. By doing so we remember that Jesus made himself poor that we might become rich in him (2 Corinthians 8:9), that the well-off and the needy stand before God on equal footing as sinners in need of a savior, and that God's heart is uniquely towards the poor (James 2:5). In fact, on at least one occasion Jesus likened a failure to care for the poor with a failure to belong to his kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46).

If you're looking for a place to start, check out opportunities to participate with one of the partnerships at your Vintage location. Consider what rhythms would be necessary to do so. To close, take a moment to read back over Isaiah 58:6-8, and journal: what about that passage is compelling to you? What about it is challenging? And how do you hope to grow in your pursuit of serving those in need around you? Close your time in prayer, thanking God for his mercy towards you in Christ.

NOTES

DAY 28

Discipling Others

2 Timothy 2:1-2

[1] You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that
is in Christ Jesus. [2] What you have heard from me in
the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful
men who will be able to teach others also.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in
all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another
through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,
singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Today is the last day in Advance, and here we're looking at how to pass along to others what you've received from others—in other words, discipleship. But, as we saw at the beginning of this section, this is nothing like the *final* step in your own discipleship, as if you must reach a certain level before doing this. Making disciples is a simultaneous component of your own discipleship.

That's why we've got two passages today. The first is from Paul's second letter to a young pastor named Timothy, encouraging him to disciple others who will be able to disciple others, too. But, lest we think discipleship is only for pastors like Timothy, we have another passage from Paul, Colossians 3:16, that's quite clear: we are all intended to teach, even admonish (or correct) one another. We see an excellent example of the latter in Acts 18:24-26, where a young, well-meaning leader named Apollos was preaching about Jesus yet didn't have all the basics of the faith ironed out. Two other followers, Priscilla and Aquila, took him aside after hearing him preach and "they explained the way of God to him more accurately." Particularly fascinating is the fact that Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, was intentionally named first (uncommon in that era), perhaps because she was the more adept discipler.

2 Timothy 2:1-2 captures the self-replicating aspect of discipleship; we pass along to others what we've received from others, in an unbroken chain two-thousand years long that trails back to Jesus telling his disciples "Go, therefore, and make [more] disciples" (Matthew 28:19). Colossians 3:16 captures the way in which we all participate in this work. This de-centralized approach, where it's not all up to a small group of leaders, challenges the assumption that discipling is a formal, teaching role done in special settings. It certainly can be, but much like the rest of life this sort of work is mostly done on the move, in the in-between moments. "More is caught than taught," as the saying goes, because we humans learn most naturally through participation with one another. And this organic, "as you are going" sort of work is available to anyone. Regardless of where you find yourself on the journey of faith, freshly started or decades in, there's someone to whom you can pass along what you've received.

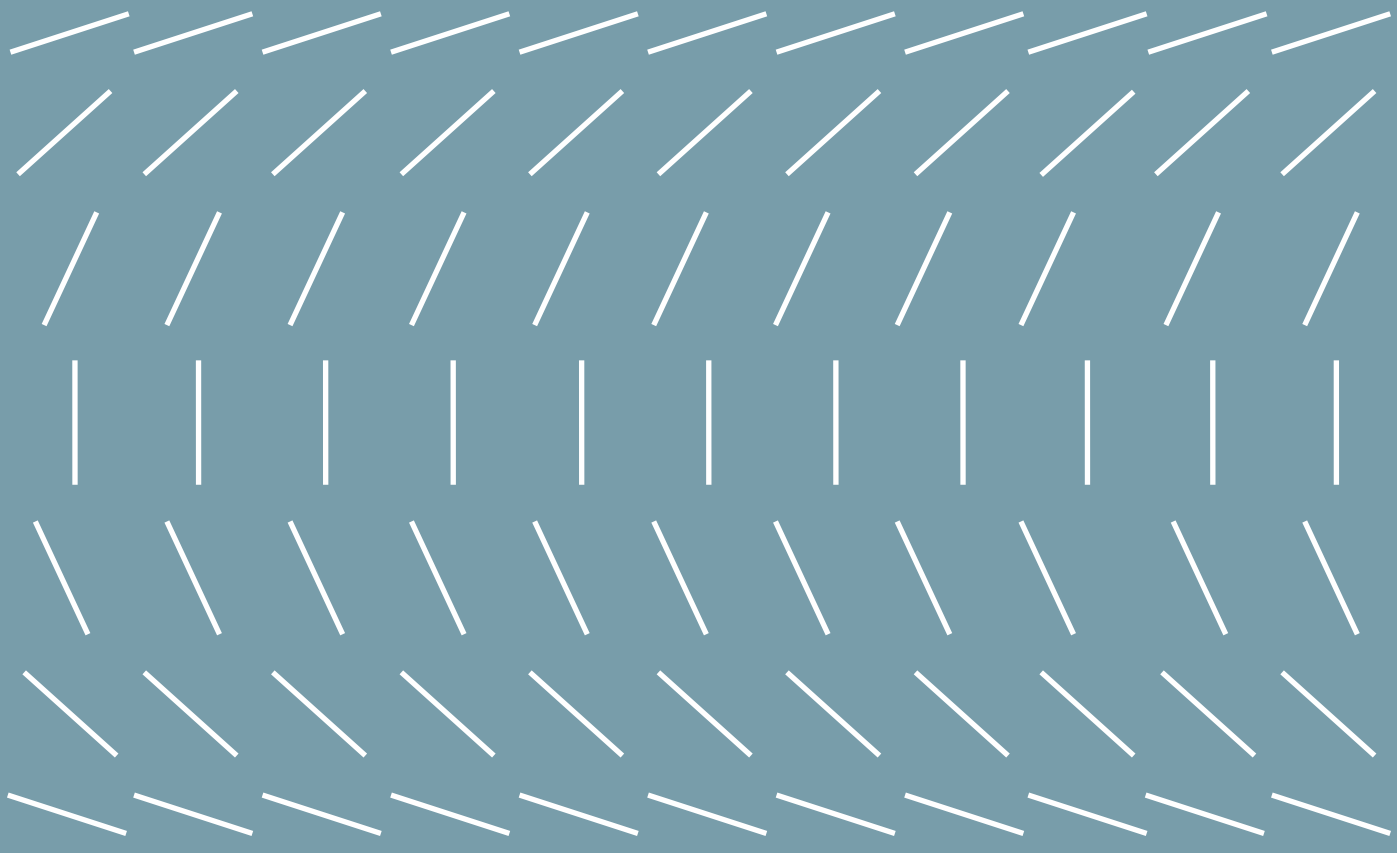
Much of this will happen in contexts we've already looked at like biblical community (Day 14) and family (Day 20). A community group provides an ideal context for discipleship, though it will flourish best if your regular co-ed community gathering is a springboard for deeper conversation with one person or a few people of your same gender. Meanwhile, for many of us, the most accessible group of people for discipleship are the people we live with, and parents specifically are charged by the Lord to raise their children according to his ways (Deuteronomy 6:7; Ephesians 6:4). In all cases, discipleship takes intentionality. This doesn't relegate discipleship to intimate conversations in a coffee shop. As with parenting, many of the most important moments happen randomly, when you're driving to the grocery store or there's a mess on the floor. Discipleship intentionality simply means being ready for, and acting upon, the opportunity to make the moment about more than the grocery store or the mess on the floor, to connect that moment to the deeper ways of God and how they intersect with even our most mundane moments.

In his little book, *Discipling*, Mark Dever defines discipleship as "helping others follow Jesus by doing deliberate spiritual good in their lives" (pg. 45). With whom in your life could you do that? Who could you be available to and intentional with in order to help them follow Jesus more? And what are ways (rhythms and habits) that this could be woven into your daily life? Take a moment to journal below and close in prayer, thanking God for the people he has sent to pass along to you and receive from you.

NOTES

SECTION 5

Conclusion



DAY 29

The Fruit of Discipleship

John 15:1-8

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.
2 Every branch in me that does not produce fruit
he removes, and he prunes every branch that
produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. 3
You are already clean because of the word I have
spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I in you. Just as
a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless
it remains on the vine, neither can you unless
you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the
branches. The one who remains in me and I in him
produces much fruit, because you can do nothing
without me. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he
is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They
gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are
burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain
in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done
for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this: that you
produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."

For these last two days of the devotional, we're wrapping up our study by ending where we began. On Days 1 and 2 we saw that we were made for life with God and that the beginning of this life isn't about what you need to do but about what God has already done for you. The above passage, taken from Jesus's final discourse with his disciples the night he was betrayed, illustrates this with a beautiful metaphor. "I am the vine; you are the branches."

Like branches grafted onto an existing vine, we are plucked from our natural state and introduced into life in Christ. He is our source and sustainer, nourishing us with what we cannot produce on our own. To mix metaphors, life with God is like being plugged into Jesus, and apart from him we can do nothing.

But, when we are in him, what is it that we are supposed to do? According to Jesus, we are meant to "bear fruit." But you may be wondering, what on earth does *that* mean? Bearing fruit is a common phrase in the New Testament for the results of lives marked by the work of Christ, and it's used to describe the making of new followers of Jesus (Colossians 1:6), obedience to God through repentance (Luke 3:8), and good works in the lives of followers that reflect the goodness of Jesus into the world (Matthew 13:23; Colossians 1:10). Such a life is evidenced by many of the practices we've looked at over the past 28 days.

Yet we must always be careful to not get things out of order: being grafted into Jesus (i.e. securely in right relationship with God) comes before the bearing of fruit. That means we can't bear fruit to earn our place with God because we can only bear fruit if our place with God is already secure. And while this fruit includes or is evidenced by our efforts at spiritual disciplines, these efforts don't produce our own life but help us get closer to the source of life in Jesus. This helps us see how Jesus is the absolute center of all we do.

So, let's take Jesus's invitation here to "remain" in him. That word can also be translated "abide," which is a lovely old word related to biding, which means to wait, which captures some of the resolve, devotion, and patience it takes to remain tapped into Jesus as the source of life. We've spent many days looking at the sorts of practices that help with this, but take a moment to think and write out: what do you hope for your life with Jesus? In what ways do you want to "abide" with him day after day? Close your time in prayer by asking him to abide with you, knowing that he himself is Immanuel, God with us.

NOTES

DAY 30

A Disciple of Jesus

Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord
of heaven and earth, because you have hidden
these things from the wise and intelligent and
revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, because
this was your good pleasure. 27 All things have been
entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the
Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father
except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires
to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all of you who are
weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take
my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am
lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest
for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden
is light."

As we've said before, a disciple is simply a student of Jesus, and here the teacher extends an invitation to those who would become his pupils: come to him. In all the practices that we've looked at in this devotional, particularly in the three Keystone practices of Sunday service, biblical community, and Loving One, the objective is simple and all the same, to come to Jesus and to find our life in him.

Here in this passage, Jesus speaks to the shared human experience. He knows you are burdened with many things, weary from the daily toil of life. He speaks to those under the curse who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow (Genesis 3:19); he knows we languish in our striving, yearning for a secure and permanent access to boundless life. This is what he offers us in himself—this is his easy yoke.

A Jewish rabbi's "yoke" was his way of life based on his understanding of God's word. Jesus invites us to learn his way of life as the incarnate Word through careful attention to his teachings, values, and ways. To the already burdened this may sound like additional weight to carry, just more things to add to the to-do list. But imagine for a moment all the things that might fall off your to-do list as you fall more in love with Jesus. Some of those things might be "written" tasks that don't conform with his ways, things that bring anxiety, distraction, or disobedience into your life.

Many more, though, are "unwritten" things we do but never tell ourselves (or admit) that we spend time doing, things like "have a sleepless night worrying about something I can't control" or "spend my lunch break being jealous of a coworker" or "work extra hard this week so I can feel valuable."

These, and countless more, are things that Jesus offers to free us from. One of the reasons Jesus can call his burden light is because his way makes our many other burdens fall off our shoulders. His is the anti-burden which lightens all loads.

With that in mind, and to close your time in this devotional, how do you hope to continue taking up Jesus's yoke? Specifically, what comes next after you finish this devotional? Your options are not limited to this, but one recommendation is to look back over the practices we've discussed here and pick a few to focus on in the year ahead. You'll find our Personal Discipleship Plan assessment in the first appendix. In the second you'll find a list of further resources under each of those practices to help your focus and growth.

But for now, take a moment to read back over Matthew 11:25-30 and then return to that question: how do you hope to continue taking up Jesus's yoke? Take a moment to sit and pray, asking God how he's leading you further into life with him.

NOTES

APPENDIX I

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP PLAN

This discipleship plan is a tool designed to help you grow in following Jesus this year. It's organized according to our church's mission statement:

> **Vintage Church exists to make much of Jesus. We do that by making disciples who know the gospel, live the gospel, and advance the gospel.**

To be clear, this is not because our mission statement is a perfect summary of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It's simply our summary, and it has a few helpful facets:

- It's ultimately all about Jesus — we exist to make much of him.
- It's centered on the good news of Jesus's gospel, which we all need every day.
- The categories of Knowing, Living, and Advancing cover the various dimensions of the Christian life.

Before we get too much further, though, this plan is not about the 1000 things you really should be doing as a Christian. We are a gospel-centered people through and through, so following Jesus is not about what we do but about the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. What we have in mind is growth in your Christian life at whatever place in life you find yourself, with intentional effort to not neglect any one area.

Below you'll see general practices like Bible reading, prayer, and sabbath, along with three big ones called Keystone Habits. A Keystone Habit is a habit upon which other habits depend like a chain reaction, or a habit that has a multiplying effect. This is not to say the other habits matter less, but to say that growth in these three will aid your growth in all the rest.

HOW THE DISCIPLESHIP PLAN WORKS

Below you'll find an assessment designed to help you plan your discipleship efforts this year. Take some time to sit with it, work through the reflection questions, and consider how you think the Lord might want to work in your life. We will be discussing the discipleship plan in community groups at the start of the year, and in addition to that, the last question asks you to identify someone to talk over your discipleship plan with — don't skip this step since it will provide someone you can bounce ideas off initially and check in with throughout the year.

Lastly, this assessment will be most helpful if you pair it with our 30-day discipleship devotional. We've designed it to walk through each of the components in this plan to 1. Help you reflect on the role each plays in your discipleship and 2. Supply you with strategies for growth in each of these areas.

Discipleship Assessment

Before you start reading through this plan, take a moment to pray, asking that God would work through your life this year.

KNOW THE GOSPEL

Knowing the Gospel means learning more about God, his word, and how to live with him, but this isn't just head knowledge; it's allowing the mercy of Christ to touch every part of your soul and daily living. Knowing focuses on the inner life with God.

Practices for Knowing the Gospel

Sunday Service (keystone habit)

Sunday service is the keystone habit for Knowing because it involves all the following. But this has in mind something other than your mere attendance on Sundays; this looks like thoughtful, tuned-in engagement and participation, to the best of your ability.

Prayer — regular points of prayer throughout your day like meals, waking and going to sleep, while reading the Bible, etc.

Regular Bible reading — whether your own study through the Bible or using a devotional

Worship — yes singing on Sunday, and any other regular rhythms of praising God in song, prayer, devotion, awe, or generosity

Sacraments — being baptized and celebrating the baptism of others; taking the Lord's Supper.

Ongoing study — reading helpful books, attending classes through Vintage or other resources, listening to podcasts, etc.

Having read through the above, what does your engagement in these practices currently look like? Which ones are going well, and which aren't? Which ones feel refreshing and restorative, and which don't? This is not an exercise in shame but in honesty that brings clarity.

How would you like to grow in Knowing the Gospel this year?

TIP No.1

Shorter Goals ▸

Studies show that short-term goals tend to be more attainable than year-long goals. Take one of these practices and focus on it for the next three months. Then, set a reminder for yourself to pull this plan back out in three months and pick another one to focus on for the next three months.

LIVE THE GOSPEL

Living the Gospel is about embodying the teachings of Jesus in our everyday lives. Living focuses on the *shared* life with God, shared both with God and with others.

Practices for Living the Gospel

Biblical Community (keystone habit)
Biblical community is the keystone habit for Knowing because it involves or encourages all the following. Our primary way of doing this at Vintage is through community groups, but you can build similar community that aids your discipleship to Jesus through other means.

Obedience — following Jesus by learning his teachings (Matthew 28:20) and listening to his commands (John 14:23).

Confession — vocally admitting our disobedience to God and to others, asking for forgiveness, and practicing repentance.

Generosity — with our time, talents, and treasure (money or possessions).

Serving — using our talents and abilities, even just our presence and attention, to bless others.

Sabbath — regularly practicing the Sabbath to rest unto the Lord (Exodus 20:10).

Family — developing your family rhythms (meals, waking and going to sleep, Sabbath) and relationships (kindness, service, honoring) for discipleship.

Other Spiritual Disciplines — things like fasting, silence and solitude, simplicity, and more.

What does your engagement in thse practices currently look like? Which ones are going well, and which aren't? Which ones have you never tried before?

How would you like to grow in Living the Gospel this year?

TIP No.2

Find a friend and set a rhythm ▸
This is why Crossfit is successful (fanatically so), because doing things that take discipline with others and regularly radically improves your follow through. Whether in your community group or elsewhere, find a friend who wants to grow in the same thing as you and set a rhythm for when you'll talk about it, encourage one another, or spend time learning together.

ADVANCE THE GOSPEL

Advancing the Gospel involves sharing and living out the good news of Jesus with those around us. Advancing focuses on the *outward* life with God, a life that reaches out to those around us.

Practices for Advancing the Gospel

Love One (keystone habit)

Loving One is the Keystone Habit for Advancing the Gospel because doing this either involves the below practices (ex. participation) or requires the same sort of intentionality (ex. work and faith). Loving One means intentional prayer for and relationship with one person in the hopes that they would become a follower of Jesus.

Participation — finding ways to enjoy and love your neighbors, neighborhood, city, and surrounding communities.

Hospitality — using whatever spaces you have access to, whether your home or other places through work, recreation, or participation to "welcome others as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

Work — reflecting and acting upon the ways your faith affects how you approach your occupation (true for students, stay-at-home parents, and the retired too).

Justice and service — working to help with the many needs in the world around us, particularly for the underserved and marginalized.

Discipling Others — whether through intentional one-on-one discipleship, mens/womens groups, reading Scripture with someone else, etc., this is you obeying Jesus's command to "Go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).

What does your engagement in these practices currently look like? Which ones are going well, which aren't, and which feel most daunting?

How would you like to grow in Advancing the Gospel this year? Remember, all three are connected — learning more (Knowing) and involving others (Living) are two excellent strategies for growth in Advancing.

TIP No.3

Habit cues ▸

The easiest way to learn a new habit is to use a cue, something that reminds you to do it. Try this: set an alarm on your phone for 2:47pm every day (in reference to Acts 2:47), and when it goes off, pray for your Love One. Like keystone habits, this one exercise will keep your Love One on your mind more often and likely make you more attentive to opportunities to spend time with them and engage in meaningful conversation.

WRAPPING UP

Having worked through the above three sections, what do you hope for your relationship with God and discipleship to Jesus this year?

Here are the practices again. Based on what you wrote out above for growing in Knowing, Living, and Advancing, mark the practices you'd like to focus on this year. Feel free to use Tip #1 above and pick something to focus on for the next three months, then set a calendar reminder for three months from now to return to this list and pick another one to focus on.

Know the Gospel

- ☐ *Sunday Service (Keystone)*
- ☐ *Prayer*
- ☐ *Bible reading*
- ☐ *Worship*
- ☐ *Sacraments*
- ☐ *Ongoing study*

Live the Gospel

- ☐ *Biblical Community (Keystone)*
- ☐ *Obedience*
- ☐ *Confession*
- ☐ *Generosity*
- ☐ *Serving*
- ☐ *Sabbath*
- ☐ *Family*
- ☐ *Other Spiritual Disciplines*

Advance the Gospel

- ☐ *Love One (Keystone)*
- ☐ *Participation*
- ☐ *Hospitality*
- ☐ *Work*
- ☐ *Justice and Service*
- ☐ *Discipling Others*

Who would you like to share this plan with? This can be a trusted friend or a pastor/staff member at your Vintage Church location.

Now take a moment to close in prayer. Ask that God would use your above plan, that he would add to it or simplify it however he sees fit, and that he would work in your life in whatever way he pleases.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Know the Gospel

SUNDAY SERVICE (KEYSTONE)

- Chapter 1, "You Are What You Love" in *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K.A. Smith (if you read nothing else on this list, read this)
- *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* by Mike Cosper

PRAYER

- *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* by Paul E. Miller
- *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep* by Tish Harrison Warren
- *The Every Moment Holy* series.

BIBLE READING

- Accessible devotional: *New Morning Mercies* by Paul David Tripp
- For reading through the whole Bible: the Windows and Mirrors podcast, available via Spotify or Apple Podcasts.
- For studying through a specific book of the Bible: the God's Word for You or Good Book Guide study series (both of which have a guide for most books of the Bible).
- For reading with kids: *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (younger kids) and *The Biggest Story Bible Storybook* (slightly older kids).

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

- *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* by Mike Cosper
- *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K.A. Smith
- *Preparing for Baptism* by Tim Chester

ONGOING STUDY

- For learning the whole story of the Bible: *The True Story of the Whole World* by Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew
- For learning more about Christian beliefs in general: *The New City Catechism* and *The New City Catechism Devotional* (there are also catechism flash cards and a kids version).
- For learning about specific topics: the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series (each are phenomenal, short, and digestible).

Live the Gospel

BIBLICAL COMMUNITY (KEYSTONE)

- *Made for People: Why We Drift into Loneliness and How to Fight for a Life of Friendship* by Justin Whitmel Earley
- *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best* by Irwyn Ince
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

OBEDIENCE

- *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* by Dallas Willard
- *Ten Words to Live By: Delighting in and Doing What God Commands* by Jen Wilkin

CONFESSION

- Chapter 1, "Vulnerability" in *Made for People: Why We Drift into Loneliness and How to Fight for a Life of Friendship* by Justin Whitmel Earley
- *Recovering Redemption: A Gospel Saturated Perspective on How to Change* by Matt Chandler and Michael Snetzer

GENEROSITY

- *God and Money: How We Discovered True Riches at Harvard Business School* by John Cortines and Gregory Baumer

SERVING

- Chapter 9, "Service" in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard J. Foster
- Chapter 6, "Dorothy Day: We Must Love One Another or Die" in *A Short Guide to Spiritual Formation* by Alex Sosler

SABBATH

- *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to stay emotionally healthy and spiritually alive in the chaos of the modern world* by John Mark Comer
- Chapter 6, "Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath" in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero

FAMILY

- *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms* by Justin Whitmel Earley
- *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy and Kathy Keller
- Chapter 6, "Teach Your Children Well" in *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K.A. Smith

OTHER SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard J. Foster
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* by Dallas Willard

Advance the Gospel

LOVE ONE (KEYSTONE)

- Incredibly approachable resource for evangelistic conversations: goodgodgospel.com
- *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* by Rebecca McLaughlin

PARTICIPATION

- *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* by Andy Crouch
- *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf

HOSPITALITY

- *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* by Rosaria Butterfield

WORK

- *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf
- *Work and Our Labor in the Lord* by James M. Hamilton Jr.

JUSTICE AND SERVICE

- *Ministries of Mercy* by Timothy Keller
- *Compassion (&) Conviction: The AND Campaign's Guide to Faithful Civic Engagement* by Justin Giboney, et al.
- *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* by Latasha Morrison

DISCIPLING OTHERS

- *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* by Mark Dever

ADDITIONAL NOTES

ADDITIONAL NOTES


VINTAGE
CHURCH