



52 Follow

52 ways to lovingly follow Jesus

By

Dan Harding

Dedicated to my wife, Martine.

You are more like Jesus than I. More precious to me by the day.

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Following Jesus

Jesus loved life! He invited those who encountered him to not only discover true life but an entirely new way of living. To those seeking this new life, Jesus said, “Come, follow me”.

This collection of 52 of Jesus’ commands is offered as an echo of **Jesus’ invitation to you** to, “Come, follow me.” This invitation wasn’t simply a new moral or religious way of living. Rather, to follow Jesus includes an invitation into his new, ultimate experience of reality. He invites us into an intimate relationship with the true and living God. He further invites us to live, just like Him, empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, with the same sense of calling and destiny that He lived. Jesus was confident that this new life would be so radically different that he described it as being “born again”. This didn’t mean we would return to a physical womb, but a *recreation* of our desires, dreams and capacities from scratch by God’s Holy Spirit.

Each chapter should stand on its own. However, together, they give us a picture of not only Jesus and his message, but of ourselves and our great need for Jesus. For example, when Jesus calls us to forgive like he forgives us, we are first reminded of how merciful he is *towards us*. Secondly, we are confronted with how our own efforts to forgive others fall below even our own expectations of ourselves. Finally, as we contemplate these truths, Jesus gently teaches us that through faith in him, he not only forgives us of our *unforgiveness*, but teaches us and empowers us to become someone who forgives just like he does.

Jesus’ teachings have been organised into four key relationships. Firstly, Jesus teaches us how to relate to **God**. Secondly, he teaches us how to relate to our own **self**. Thirdly, he teaches us how to relate to **people** around us. Finally, he teaches us how to embrace **God’s mission** for you and I to this beautiful but broken world God has left us in.

You’ll notice that the assumption is that each of these relationships are *active* relationships. Jesus is calling us to allow his words to transform how we live, move and love in this world. While the language of *commands* is widely used, the purpose is not to lead you into perpetual guilt. Rather, his commands and teachings are designed to shepherd you into a life of true joy. A transition from our own darkness into his light. There’s no doubt his invitation is bold and if you’re willing to start out, then I want to affirm you for your courage!

Just like most things in life, following Jesus is best done *together*. Why not invite someone to go through this with you and share how following Jesus is challenging, growing or changing you?

Enjoy the journey!

Dan Harding +61 402 301 568

Going “All in”

As you learn about Jesus and seek to follow His direction it's common to get to a point where you consider going “all in”, where you want to experience what He calls His *abundant life*. Consciously stepping into this new life can be understood as ‘faith’ - deciding that you are going to trust Him from the inside out with every part of your life. He becomes your source and your destiny, your king and your saviour, your friend and your brother. Here is a simple prayer that echoes this desire:

*Dear God,
Please **forgive** me of my sin,
fill me with your Spirit,
and help me to **follow** Jesus with my whole life.
Amen*

If you decide to step into faith and pray this prayer or something similar then you will be blessed by God in at least three ways. You are **forgiven** by God of all your sins, you are **filled** with His Holy Spirit and you are given a new direction in life as you seek to **follow** Him completely.

Forgiven. Filled. Following.

God's forgiveness will provide not only relief from guilt and shame but also a new identity as a son or daughter in His family! God's Holy Spirit will fill you in a new and permanent way and you will begin to experience His power in both the everyday and the miraculous parts of life. This life is not only taught by Jesus, but modelled by him as well! His identity was shaped by his father too! He was also filled with God's Holy Spirit at his baptism. Jesus also modelled perfect obedience to God the father just like he calls us to. This life that he modelled to us can provide you with a new freedom as you learn to live from a growing understanding of just how deep God's love is for you and those around you.

So as you consider the call to follow Jesus on the following pages be ready for that moment when you are ready to go ‘all in’ and trust Him with your whole life. When that time comes may you humbly and courageously respond with a simple and transforming faith that God has **forgiven** you, **filled** you and will help you to **follow** with your whole life.

The practice of following Jesus

If you're new to Jesus and his teachings, you don't need to feel overwhelmed! We'd encourage you to take time to learn and experiment with the simple daily practice offered below. These suggested practices have been developed by fellow Jesus followers to help you not only discover God's new truths, but a whole new way of living. This is the joy of following Jesus - learning to find your primary identity, or "self", in Jesus. The Bible describes this daily process as "putting off the old self" and "putting on the new self".

However, these daily rhythms are not just for *you*, but for you to introduce to *others*. You can help others learn from Jesus themselves, or even encourage groups of people in these rhythms together.

Pray

Begin each time with a simple moment of prayer. At the very least, centre your mind upon Jesus. Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you, "Come, Holy Spirit". You may also ask for God's help in any your life or the lives of loved ones or the world beyond you.

Read

Continue by discovering God's truth by reading the Bible slowly and deliberately. Follow up with the accompanying reflection to help you unpack what Jesus may be saying to you personally. If you're in a group, you may each want to read parts of the passage out loud together and then recount the key parts of the story out loud. To make the most of Jesus' teaching, you're encouraged to memorise the scripture **highlighted in bold** each week! Additional readings supplement each teaching for people who want to dig deeper throughout the rest of the week.

Obey

Finish by reflecting upon what you read, expecting God to speak to you as you reflect on three simple questions. There are of course no "right" answers, just a willingness to listen and learn.

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Ask, "God, what are you calling me to do today?"

Going Deeper for Groups

Groups can go through this material using the simple method above. However, if the group need more prompting or are watching accompanying videos, there are simple questions for discussion. However you utilise this resource, remember that faith in Jesus is designed to be both *lived* and *shared*! Share what you learn!

Part 1: God

Be born again

Read John 3:1-8

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It will be tempting for anyone reading Jesus' teachings for the first time to simply compare him to the wisdom, philosophies or advice of other renowned thinkers, teachers and leaders of history. However, Jesus shows us right from the beginning of his season of teaching that He wasn't sent from heaven to add a few nuggets of wisdom to the growing collection.

In John 3, Nicodemus, a respected teacher in his own right, seeks to bring Jesus down to the level of "teacher", like we are also tempted to do. See, if Jesus is simply the latest enlightened teacher to come to our attention, then our lives are improved simply by upgrading our mind to the new knowledge he has for us. However, Jesus makes it clear that he didn't come to merely improve our life, enlighten our minds or offer a better religion. Rather, Jesus says he is offering us a whole new life given to us by God. Jesus describes entry into this new life as being "born again".

I've been present with my wife for seven (so far!) unique, incredible births. Not only is the physical process incredible to watch but I witnessed a child *seeing* for the first time a world they have previously only *sensed*. In the womb we know babies can *sense* touch, sound and even light from the world outside their mother. However, it's not until the mother's body expands, contracts and breathes their child from their cocoon that they fully experience and see this new world.

Once born, babies begin to breathe, move, see and "live" in a completely new way. A whole new set of previously dormant instincts take over. If placed on a mother's belly moments after birth it's common for a newborn who has only been fed from the umbilical cord to instinctively 'hop' up to their breast and latch on for a feed as though they'd been doing it everyday for nine months!

Similarly, before we have put our faith in Jesus we are able to sense faith, hope, life, love, beauty, courage and purpose. And yet God invites us not just to an expanded view of all that life offers, but to a completely new way of seeing. Just like a baby signals to his mother that they are ready to be born, our signal is simple - Jesus calls it faith. Upon that signal He promises to expand, contract and breathe us into not just a new life, but a whole new way of living. It's simultaneously a complete contrast to your old life as well as being the life that you instinctively knew you were always meant to be living. As you begin this journey, I would encourage you to be ready, willing and courageous to give God the signal of faith as soon as you are ready to be born again by God's Holy Spirit..

Daily Rhythm

Day 1: **John 3:1-6** *"...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"*

Day 2: 2 Cor 5:17 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..."*

Day 3: John 10:10 *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly..."*

Day 4: Matthew 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters..."*

Day 5: John 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness..."*

Day 6: John 1:4 *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."*

Day 7: Isaiah 43:18-19 *"...Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth..."*

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions. The **highlighted daily** above are suggested for groups who are reading together.

- Have you ever sensed there was a new way to live?
- If you consider yourself, "Born again", what has that meant to you?

Repent

Read Matthew 4:1-17

*"¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"*

Repentance is rarely discussed today for many reasons, but most of all I think we avoid it for one key reason - *change*. Repentance is a line in the sand between the OLD and the NEW. Jesus, likewise, offers a whole NEW way of living *if* we are willing to repent, leaving our old life behind.

Jesus says the Old Testament (the part of the Bible written before Jesus) was preparing people for His coming which would usher in a whole new way of knowing and following God. This new way of knowing God is for anyone who repents of their sin. They will be forgiven and receive God's Holy Spirit to dwell in and with them forever. They then know God because he is in and with them!

But all of this starts with repentance. If you were to read through the whole Bible you would see similar but nuanced views of repentance. Pre-Jesus it seems to indicate a change of direction towards God. Post-Jesus it seems to indicate a fundamental, deep change of mind about God and the way to know him - Jesus' key message.

In the gospel of Luke (chapter 15) we read a story known as "The Prodigal Son". However, it may better be called "the Repentant Son" as this is a story of a son who has completely rejected his family, but "comes to his senses". Once the reality of life apart from his family has dawned upon him, he changes direction and seeks to humbly come home in the hopes that he'd be accepted as a servant. However, as he approaches the family farm, His father - who has been looking for his return each day - sees him and runs to greet him with overwhelming love and gratitude that his son "who was once lost has been found". Once the son encounters the love of his Father he then experiences a change of mind. He realises that his dad's love was unconditional and nothing is being held back!

This is the same journey all those who come to God start on. We change our direction, give up making our own road and come looking for God. However, as we seek to do this Jesus makes it clear that the repentance he is looking for requires a whole new way of thinking about God. He is not a father to reject. Nor a father who seeks to punish us for our indignities or rebellions. Our father is the one who has been waiting this whole time and has prepared the way for our return and celeration.

As you read about Jesus, read every command as an invitation to change direction and come to Him. However, He is not a taskmaster to please or a guru to impress. He is the God who has sacrificed himself so that you can experience a new life and a whole new way of knowing Him.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 4:1-7 "...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"

Day 2: Romans 2:4 "...God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Day 3: 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is...patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish"

Day 4: John 4:4-42 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did..."

Day 5: Luke 19:1-10 "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor..."

Day 6: 2 Chron 7:14 "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves..".

Day 7: Matthew 3:8 "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *In your own words, what do you think Jesus meant by repent?*
- *What is stopping, or has stopped, you from repenting like Jesus invites you to?*

Follow Me

Read Matthew 4:18-25

¹⁹ **And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."**

Have you ever known someone who seemed to have a 'knack' for a particular task? Some kind of unique, 'miraculous' ability to do things that others find difficult? Jesus had a 'knack' for bringing thousands of people to faith in God - what he called "fishing" for people. With genuine desire to follow Jesus, many new Christians spend their energy striving to 'win people for Jesus', commonly resulting in many failed attempts. We feel that while Jesus, and a small group of super Christians have the 'knack', it's simply, "not our gift".

This frustrating experience very easily leads us to settle for a life that does not meet the expectations we once held for ourselves. While we started out with the best of intentions, our execution is where the issue lies. Unlike our old life that is totally dependent on ourselves and aimed at 'success' as a Christian; our new life of faith must be founded upon Jesus and aimed at becoming like him as the priority. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus makes it very clear that before we "fish" he wants us to "follow". In fact, at a basic level he makes a promise to all those who've put their faith in him. He promises that *if* we are willing to follow then he will make [ensure, promise, guarantee] us into fishers of people just like him.

Anyone who has taken up a new hobby knows that no matter how many YouTube tutorials you watch, expensive gear you buy or how positive your mindset is, you can still end up looking like a fool (e.g first-time surfing, fishing, drawing or driving). What we actually need is a coach, friend or professional who can walk alongside us, shaping us into the kind of person who makes it look effortless.

Following Jesus can be the same. Once we repent of our sin and are born again by faith we feel we are ready to *save the world!* However, like any other skill or hobby we pursue, we must lay aside our self-assured mindset and simply and humbly follow him. It is in this posture of learning and worship that Jesus himself ensures that our lives will make the impact we were called and designed to have.

In striving to *fish*, many Christians fail to *follow*. If, like any humble student, you are willing to learn from Jesus step by step, it's quite likely you could develop Jesus' 'knack' and become the master fishers we all desire to be.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 4:18-25 *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

Day 2: Luke 14:25-33 *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me..."*

Day 3: John 1:29-51 *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Day 4: John 12:20-26 *"If anyone serves me, he must follow me..."*

Day 5: Hebrews 12:1-6 *"...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely..."*

Day 6: 1 Peter 2:21 *"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you..."*

Day 7: 1 Corinthians 11:1-2 *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Who is one person that you have 'followed' throughout your life?*
- *What would it take to follow Jesus more fully? To go "all-in"?*

Worship and serve God alone

Read Luke 4:1-15

⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "**You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.**"

What are you like when you're hungry? Do you get agitated, distracted, grumpy, lazy? Whatever your version of hunger-affected life is, you probably aren't at your best. We often say that when we are hungry we have a "one track mind", we just want to eat! When Jesus was alone and *hungry* - at his weakest - the Devil tempts him to reorient his life from God to himself. If only Jesus would give up on worship and obedience to God, then the Devil would promise to meet his needs. Of course, this was an empty promise as the Devil cannot provide anything that Jesus, or ourselves, truly need.

Giving into temptation in a moment of hunger is no accident. There are many valid appetites that we feel in life - companionship and food, two of the most common - but none are meant to supersede worship of God. For Jesus, worship is really an assessment of our true and deepest feelings about God - our *appetite* for Him. To relate our spiritual health with our affections is not as far fetched as it may first seem! The truth is that our affections in life set our direction in life. If we love fitness we become fit. If we love God (worship) we become like Jesus, His son. Affection sets direction. Worship is thus like a spiritual GPS. As we set our love for God as our ultimate desire (destination) we find our lives aligning with God's purposes and full of God's power for life.

Anyone who has begun a new fitness regime is familiar with the sheer determination to push through the early stages of a previously foreign activity! However, once the weeks and months go by, you sense a new love for what you used to loath. As your appetite for exercise increases, you develop a new, natural momentum for exercise.

However, your appetite can also work in the reverse too! You may miss a few workouts or have a "cheat day" (or two) on the weekend, but still be enthusiastic for the coming week of training. However, if these shortcuts gain momentum, you risk losing the drive and natural desire to workout. Your appetite begins fading and if you don't get back on the treadmill, healthy eating and outdoor activity you risk losing your appetite for all the healthy activity you used to treasure.

This is the journey Jesus walked out in Luke. As he overcame his natural appetite and set His heart on God's purposes for His life we read that He left the wilderness, "in the power of the Spirit" and began to live out God's primary purpose for his life in a way that has impacted us even today.

Affections set direction. Make a conscious choice to live a life of heartfelt worship just like Jesus. This is not only the loving obedience God invites us to, but sets us on lifes greatest paths..

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 4:1-15 "...You shall worship the Lord your God..."

Day 2: Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23 "As for what was sown on good soil..."

Day 3: Joshua 24:14-15 "...choose this day whom you will serve..."

Day 4: Luke 10:38-42 "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things..."

Day 5: Mark 10:35-45 "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve..."

Day 6: Luke 6:43-45 "...for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Day 7: John 21:15-19 "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What or who has your affection in your current season of life?*
- *How might your direction in life change if your affections were fixed on God?*

Fear God, do not fear people

Read Luke 12:1-14

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”

Jesus' command on fear is easily misunderstood by his followers, especially given that he begins in saying, "Don't fear...", then, "be afraid, be VERY afraid" (verses 4-5). This can challenge our expectations of Jesus, the one we thought was here to bring "good news". Furthermore, we are often unaware of the place that fear has in the frailness of our human nature.

In the beginning of Luke chapter 12 we see that the people pursuing Jesus were experiencing FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). No one wanted to miss out on *their* encounter with Jesus. They were so desperate to see him themselves, they were trampling each other! Fear had taken over their better judgement and natural concern for those around them. This reading implies that part of their impulse was due to the immoral spiritual control of the Jewish religious leaders of their day (the Pharisees). People were living in such fear that they had to either keep their real feelings to themselves, or privately whisper them to each other (verses 2-3). They were not free to follow their conscience or God in the way they saw fit. Their lives were controlled by fear!

We know that this kind of *ungodly fear* isn't the fear Jesus wants for us. It diminishes our humanity and makes us less than who we've been designed to be. This kind of ungodly fear seeks to control you and I to the point that we lose our *self control*, threatening ourselves and others.

In contrast, Jesus is inviting us into what we might term a *godly fear*. Fearing God himself might sound like merely replacing one terror for another, but the reality is far from it. Derek Prince says that, "What you fear *is* your God" [emphasis mine]. Your greatest fear in life will have the greatest influence upon your life. This is why we fear God and not men or women. We want God to drive the purpose and destiny for our lives, not those who seek to diminish and destroy our future. When we fear God we actually become more of who we're designed to be. We actually grow into a person who isn't controlled by fear, but begins to exude self-control. When we fear God, we come to realise that God's infinite power is far greater than any man or woman who seeks to control us. We then gain a godly perspective on fear, fearing only whom we should, not those we shouldn't.

This is like a child who is afraid of the dark. Rather than telling them, "there's nothing to be afraid of", we simply bring the presence of a greater power - mum, dad or another loved one - into their room. They then become assured that if mum or dad are there then they don't need to be afraid of the monsters because mum and dad are more powerful! Likewise, Jesus wants us to live without fear of anyone else who seeks to control our lives. God *is* greater, and by fearing him we are set free from every other power and fear that we might enjoy true freedom.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 12:1-14 "...do not fear those who kill the body..."

Day 2: John 14:15-31 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."*

Day 3: Isaiah 41:8-10 *"fear not, for I am with you;"*

Day 4: Joshua 1:1-9 *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened..."*

Day 5: Psalm 56:1-4 *"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."*

Day 6: Roman 1:16-17 *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God..."*

Day 7: John 20:19-23 *"...Jesus came and stood among them and said..., "Peace be with you."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Is there a person or thing that you feel an ungodly fear of?*
- *How might godly fear bring you freedom from this ungodly fear?*

Ask, seek, knock

Read Matthew 7:7-11

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸
For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened..."

Have you ever been courageous enough to boldly ask God for something from the bottom of your heart? If so, it's quite likely that it was in a season of desperation when it seemed like there was nowhere else to turn. While this is wonderful, it's not the picture Jesus is trying to paint as the normal, everyday way to pray. Jesus invites us to ask God for whatever it is we need, *whenever* we need it.

One of the simple reasons some of us fail to send our requests to God is that we can be too quick to question either our intentions or his. This is because the more we know Jesus the more we realise our faults and ill-intentions that lurk deep within us. This can make us too quick to silence the desires that arise within us each day. Likewise, much of our culture questions whether God really wants to meet our needs. Many even question, "Is he even listening anyway?"

In contrast to our cautions, Jesus simply says, "Ask, seek, knock! Got a prayer? Pray! Looking for answers? Explore! Want a new direction? Step!" It seems that he is encouraging us to throw our cautions and concerns to the wind and entrust ourselves and our mixed bag of intentions to God. One of the reasons Jesus seems so confident to encourage us to simply reach for what we want, is that He knows that our Father in Heaven isn't going to give us anything evil. Neither is he simply required to give us exactly what we ask for either! In fact, aside from not giving us stones or snakes for food, his fatherly nature is to give us *surprisingly good* gifts.

If I ask my kids what they want for breakfast they may say, "Ice cream"! In response I'd never give them gravel, but neither would I necessarily give them ice cream. While their desire is for ice cream, they are simply immaturely expressing their need for sustenance. So I might respond with a *good, healthy* answer to their request, "How about eggs on toast? Or honey and pancakes?" I'm doing what a good father aims to do, to meet the needs of my children with as much loving-kindness as I can. On the weekends I may even suggest, "Hey, how about pancakes *with* ice cream?!" The reason I'd add in the ice cream is simply because I am filled with joy when I meet not only their *needs* but also their *desires*.

Once we realise that God *is* good and only brings good answers to our requests, we won't fear our own ill-intent or God's malicious response. Rather, we become like a little child with a father who loves to cook for them! We simply ask, "Please God can I have some.....?". So, ask. Seek. Knock.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 7:7-11 "...Ask, and it will be given to you..."

Day 2: John 16:24 "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Day 3: James 4:3, 5:16 "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly..."

Day 4: Matt 21:18-22 "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith"

Day 5: Psalm 66:16-20 "...God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer"

Day 6: Romans 8:31-38 "how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Day 7: 1 John 3:19-24 "...and whatever we ask we receive from him..."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Do you find it easy to believe that God desires to give you good gifts?*
- *Is there something you need that you haven't yet asked god to provide?*

Love God with your whole self

Read Matthew 22:34-40

“37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Jesus breaks down the entire Judeo-Christian commandments by guiding us to love UP (love God) and love OUT (love those around us). Rather than being simplistic and child-ish, Jesus offers a profoundly fresh perspective on what it means to live the life we were designed for.

While both commands are well-known, the *first* commandment to love God with your heart, soul and mind often plays second fiddle to the *second* commandment. This may be because it's less practical and sometimes hard to measure or define. When you love others, people notice, but when you love God, you're the only one who can be sure of what's happening within yourself.

However, my suspicion is that we overlook the depths of this commandment because it challenges our core beliefs about ourselves. We prefer to assume that our heart's intentions are good, our soul is pure and our mind typically arrives at good conclusions. We so easily say, “Of course I love God”. And yet Jesus is reminding us that in fact, all of us see evidence of different loves rising and falling in our heart, soul and mind..

The reality is that for many of us, unless we follow Jesus' command to intentionally love UP, our love easily drifts to whatever, or whomever, we are surrounded by: “I love my job”, “I love my spouse”, “I love cars”, “I love food”! As good as work, romance, cars and food are, if we are not intentionally directing our heart UP, it becomes enraptured by whatever and whoever we are surrounded by. These people and things, rather than God, then dictate the direction and flavour of our life. This is why this commandment is the first and primary commandment. Jesus speaks directly to the core of our being, inviting us to align our deepest loves with God himself so that this love might shape every detail and direction of our life.

All that we will ever visibly *do* for God in this life, comes out of this simple mandate to love *God first*. The challenge is not to love God more than other people appear to, but to offer as much of our heart, soul and mind as we are able. As any newlywed or parent has experienced, the sensational “honeymoon phase” does fade, but in its place we have the opportunity to cultivate a deeper and richer love as we continually offer as much of our heart, soul and mind to those we are connected to. Similarly, we should learn to love God just as we started out, going ‘all in’, giving our whole selves to God. In this way, we never compare ourselves with others, or consider ourselves, “not good enough”. We simply love God with every part of ourselves we have to offer.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 22:34-40 " ...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..."

Day 2: John 14:15-21 *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

Day 3: John 15:5 *Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit"*

Day 4: Galatians 2:20 *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*

Day 5: Prov 16:1-9 *"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established."*

Day 6: Hebrews 13:16 *"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have..."*

Day 7: Romans 5:1-5 *"...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Who, or what, do you love in this life?*
- *What might it look like for you to love God above everything else?*

Abide in Jesus

Read John 15:1-17

*"...**Abide in me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me..."*

Our culture rewards people who appear to have become independently successful. People who seem to have "made something of their life" without the undue influence of parents, employers, partners or friends. People who can proudly "stand on their own two feet".

Even in a moral and spiritual sense many in our day feel compelled - and even encouraged - to create their own morality or spirituality. We feel justified to, "live my own truth". Even followers of Jesus like you and I can unintentionally adopt this mindset. We unwittingly make selective use of his teachings for our gain. Or use Jesus words to justify going off in our own direction, yet still expect that we will still produce ("bear") healthy spiritual fruit.

Jesus makes it clear that His plan for us is different. His path is not simply a "better" path than your previous one, but a different path that you walk together with Him. He wants to live and journey so closely entwined that you grow fruit by association, not merely exceptional performance. True spiritual fruit should be more abundant the closer we abide with Jesus.

This is not an exclusively spiritual or religious model of life. We see it in the ideal parenting scenario, where our children learn by imitating us - using 'pretend' hammers, mixing bowls and computers to emulate those they look up to. Not only do children learn from parents and friends, but apprentices learn from tradespeople, athletes learn from coaches, junior doctors learn from their seniors and students learn from tutors.

One of the keys to learning in these relationships is being close enough to pickup the subtle tips, nuanced movements and what seems like intuitive timing involved in any activity of skill. Jesus says in John chapter 15 that we are to pay close attention to his "words" and "commandments" as He likewise has paid attention to His Father's. Without minimising the supernatural dynamics in following Jesus, Jesus reveals that the simplest way to abide in him is to simply learn from his person and teaching. Love how he loves. Think how he thinks. Serve how he serves. Give how he gives. Pray how he prays. This can only happen when we are close enough to *abide* in him.

While Jesus' example of abiding with His father required great sacrifice and discipline, he makes it clear that this kind of life is *full* of joy! It seems that the life we most earnestly seek is the life that's lived most intimately with him. So, abide in Jesus that your life might truly thrive.

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: John 15:1-17 "...Abide in me, and I in you"

Day 2: Matt 11:28 "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest."

Day 3: 1 Jn 4:16 "...whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

Day 4: 1 Jn 4:12 "...if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

Day 5: 1 Jn 2:6 "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way..."

Day 6: Gal 2:20 "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".

Day 7: 2 Cor 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.".

Obey

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Ask, "God, what are you calling me to do today?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions:

- *Do you feel like you have to prove yourself to God or others?*
- *If Jesus calls us to abide in Him, how does this change what 'success' might look like?*

Hear + understand Jesus' words

Read Matthew 13:1-23

"⁹ He who has ears, let him hear."

Whether you're someone who is simply interested in Jesus or someone who has gone "all-in", his very blunt, "he who has ears, let him hear", may even seem a tad insulting. *Of course* we would be hanging off every word Jesus says, right? However, the *hearing* that Jesus is talking about is not simply processing the voice of Jesus in our minds. Rather, it's the second part of a three part process that he outlines in the 15th verse of chapter 13. He observes that the Israelites (the ancient people that God chose to work through to bring His purposes into the world), his disciples and now us have all been given the opportunity to 'see', 'hear' and finally 'understand' God and His word. But, we may ask, "if there are three parts, why is Jesus highlighting 'hearing'?"

Like the wisdom that parents, mentors, coaches and teachers attempt to impart, our lives are full of moments and seasons where we wilfully ignore God's directives for our lives. The simplest way to ignore God is willful disobedience, "God, I know I'm not meant to steal this money, but I'm stealing it anyway". The more sophisticated strategy (or so we tell ourselves) is to pretend that we hadn't even *heard* God's directions at all. When God spoke to us his words simply went, "in one ear, and out the other". We *heard* nothing. This strategy justifies our disobedience by declaring not simply that "I don't understand *why* I shouldn't lust after another person's spouse?", but by declaring to God that, "You never even *told* me it was wrong to lust!" It's very similar to the original act of sin recorded in Genesis - we all look for reasons to justify why *our rebellion* isn't *our fault*.

In our grandparents era many children were told, "Children should be seen and not heard". This was a convenient way of distancing parents and carers from having to engage with the children they were responsible for. For if they had to engage with their questions or requests ("hearing" them), then they would have to spend time *understanding* them and acting in a responsible fashion. It was much simpler to simply see children but ignore everything they had to say and thus avoid the obligation to respond to requests that might inconvenience the life of a preoccupied adult.

There will come a time for all followers of Jesus where it's much easier to treat Jesus like a 19th Century child. He should be, "seen and not heard". We acknowledge his presence, even that we belong to the same family. However, we avoid fully engaging with his commands lest they call into question our comfortable, preoccupied, self-focused lives. Jesus' teachings are designed to be much more than meaningless mantras, artwork on our walls or bumper stickers on our cars. He and His teachings are to be seen, *heard* and *understood*, that we might lovingly obey him in all things. It's this kind of holistic life of faith that Jesus says will yield a "crop" - a fruitful life - that is 30, 60 and 100-fold what is expected from a life lived otherwise. So, go, be fruitful and truly live!

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 13:1-23 "He who has ears, let him hear."

Day 2: Matthew 7:24-27 "...who hears these words of mine and does them will be...wise..."

Day 3: 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 "...take every thought captive to obey Christ."

Day 4: 1 Samuel 15:22 "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice..."

Day 5: Luke 11:28 "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Day 6: 1 Peter 1:14 "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions..."

Day 7: Acts 17:10-11 "...examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Have you ever conveniently ignored God and/or wisdom?*
- *What has God been saying to you that you need to hear, understand and obey?*

Give to God & Government what is rightfully theirs

Read Matthew 22:1-22

“...Then he said to them, ‘Therefore **render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**’...”

Similar to Jesus’ day, our modern, Western culture has strong opinions on the power battles between religious and state institutions - what we often discuss today as the “separation of church and state”. Rather than taking sides in this hot topic of “religion and politics”, Jesus’ injects a nuanced perspective that elevates neither religious institutions nor the state, but God himself.

After a parable about not letting earthly responsibilities diminish our responsibility to God, the religious leaders sought to trap Jesus by forcing him to accept or reject the authority of their ruling, Roman oppressors. Critical to the context of this encounter is that the Roman emperor, Caesar, considered himself divine and had imprinted his likeness on the currency (e.g. a denarius coin) which the Jewish people were required to pay taxes in. In effect, this required Jewish people to hold and spend Roman currency that depicts Caesar as the divine authority over them. Therefore, if Jesus replied, “Yes, you should pay taxes to Caesar”, he could be shown to be a heretic for accepting Caesar’s authority over God’s. If, “No”, He would be seen as a dangerous revolutionary seeking to overthrow the ruling authorities of the day.

However, Jesus begins to turn the tables upon his accusers and reveals their hypocrisy by asking them, “whose likeness” is on the coins required to pay tax? The answer is obvious, Caesars image is on the denarius because it’s Caesar’s own, self-created *fiat* currency. Therefore, why wouldn’t Jesus permit the paying of a tax to the person who created the currency themselves?

In teaching that the “likeness”, or *image*, of someone identifies ownership, the leaders would have their sacred creation story roaring in their minds. God said at creation that he made every man and woman in *the imago dei* - the image of God. If the same logic of currency applies, then wouldn’t our very lives belong to God himself? If he created us all, and placed *his* divine image on us, then no matter what currency any earthly ruler demanded of us, the entirety of our being should be given over to his holy authority.

Jesus thus affirms that Christian submission to God’s authority should foster submission to the earthly authorities that he permits (civil, church and family). Any citizen of heaven should thus aim to be a wonderful citizen on earth. However, Jesus also has a plan for transforming everyone and everything in the world. He seems to indicate that the greatest challenge to world peace is not simply a narcissistic, unjust system, but *ourselves*. His command to respect the authorities around us is as much an invitation to overthrow our unruly *self government*. As we learn to submit ourselves first and foremost to God’s heavenly authority, Jesus can teach us how to work within the earthly authority to redeem what, and who, he has permitted to rule.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 22:1-32 "...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's..."

Day 2: Rom 12:1 "...present your bodies as a living sacrifice..."

Day 3: Rom 13:1-7 "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities."

Day 4: Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-4 "Honour your father and mother..."

Day 5: Jeremiah 29:7 "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you."

Day 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:12 "Respect those who labour...be patient with all."

Day 7: Luke 2:41-52 "Jesus...came to Nazareth and was submissive to them."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Is there an authority that you find it hard to respect (government, school, church, family)?*
- *Do you live your life as though you are "under" the authority of God?*
- *What earthly authority is God asking you to find new ways to respect?*

Lovingly obey Jesus

Read John 14:1-24

“...If you love me, you will keep my commandments...”

In theory, if the all-powerful God of the universe expects us to obey his every command, there shouldn't be many reasons to rebel. However, Jesus presents a far more compelling and intimate path to delighting the God who created us.

Jesus continuously articulates the outcome of obedience so clearly that it is almost impossible to misconstrue his intentions. Jesus says in verse 23 that He and His father will make their “home with” those who “love” him and “keep” His words - those who obey him. This image of sharing a house or family with Jesus and His Father gives us the perfect analogy for imagining the intersection of love and obedience.

In any family household or relationship there is a tension between loving feelings and loving action. Most children grow up loving their parents but then are rudely shocked when, at some point in their development towards adulthood, they are given ‘chores’. They begin to wonder, “How is it that the person we experienced such pure love with now expects us to do work for them?” At some point in that development process we begin to willingly work in and for the household regardless of the level of loving affection we feel towards our parent(s). We begin to see that these jobs aren't only good and necessary for the household to thrive, but strengthen and reflect the values of the ideal family within which we exist.

The ideal scenario in each household is that we fulfil our jobs not just because they are necessary (washing up, vacuuming, mowing) but because we joyfully fulfil our roles out of pure love. This is not only great for us, but the very thing that God himself seeks - a family that acts out of, and for, love. It's what we could term *loving* obedience.

It's not simply ‘better’ to have a God that asks for loving, rather than blind, obedience. Obedience that is simply ‘ticking the box’ may produce some positive outcomes, but it falls far short of the compelling, abundant life that Jesus invites us to. This is why Jesus invites us to a faith that is beyond mere subservience to a superior being.

The faith that Jesus aspires for all of us is a faith guided by loving obedience to a loving, and powerful, Father-God. To lovingly obey Jesus is to participate in the ideal household, securely loved by our heavenly father and lovingly obedient to him in return.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: John 14:1-23 *"I am the way and the truth and the life."*

Day 2: Hebrews 5:8-9 *"Although he was a son, he learned obedience..."*

Day 3: John 1:1-18 *"In him was life and this life was the light of men..."*

Day 4: John 6:68-69 *"To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."*

Day 5: John 7:38 *"Whoever believes in me...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

Day 6: Revelation 3:14-22] *"I discipline those whom I love."*

Day 7: 1 John 5:3 *"...His commandments are not burdensome..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Are you the kind of person who enjoys doing what you're told?*
- *In what way might you follow Jesus' commands as an expression of loving obedience?*

Obey and teach God's law

Read Matt 5:17-48

*"¹⁷ Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them..."¹⁹ **Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."***

When reading Jesus' teaching, many Christians misunderstand the place of the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures (the "Law" and "the Prophets") in two key ways. Firstly, some mistakenly believe that since Jesus spoke so strongly against established religious leaders that he was seeking to trash God's old laws in favour of his more "love"-based approach. Secondly, some declare that because Jesus championed God's laws in teachings like the one above in Matthew 5, obeying them is still necessary to get your "ticket to heaven".

Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 5 is meant to clear that up. To the first misunderstanding Christ wasn't trying to "boil down" God's law, but rather to "sum it up". Jesus wasn't aiming to diminishes God's original laws, but to affirm and crown them. In fact, rather than replacing God's laws, he encapsulates, or fulfils, all of God's truth in one actionable word - love.

Imagine you had been diligently saving and investing for many years to buy a home, only to receive news on the day you were applying for a loan that your Great Aunt died and left an inheritance so large that you never need to work again! While you could leave your wise habits behind, wisdom would encourage you to continue to save and invest despite the generous gift you'd received. Likewise, just because all our sin has been forgiven through Christ, and he has declared that a heart of love for God and others is the ultimate goal, there is nonetheless beauty and wisdom to be found in God's ancient laws!

To the second misunderstanding Jesus indicates that there are some in his kingdom who do *not* obey and teach God's laws - "the least" in his kingdom. This reinforces Jesus' fundamental message that the only way you can enter his kingdom is by faith - not by earning your "ticket" by religiously obeying every law. In this way, through Jesus we can more deeply understand what God's laws were ultimately aiming for. If Jesus and his call to a life of love is the sum of all God's law, then we need to treasure it not just to become righteous, but to discover just how good, loving, kind and beautiful God and the life he's called us to truly is!

Once we meet Jesus God's law becomes far richer and more compelling than we ever could have imagined. Because in Jesus we not only understand both God and his laws more deeply, but we can grasp what a gift Jesus is. He brings a clarity to how we understand God, our world, our situation and just how much God deeply loves every one of us.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 5:17-19 *"whoever does them and teaches them will be called great..."*

Day 2: Deuteronomy 6:4-7 *"You shall teach them diligently to your children,..."*

Day 3: Romans 7:1-12, 8:1-8 *"For God has done what the law...could not do."*

Day 4: Romans 13:8-14 *"Love does no wrong to a neighbour;...love is the fulfilling of the law."*

Day 5: Galatians 5:10-22 *"Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!"*

Day 6: Galatians 5:23-29 *"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came,..."*

Day 7: John 1:14-20 *"...law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What "laws", spoken or unspoken, do you and those around you live by now?*
- *In the Bible, obedience to God always follows His grace and love. Why is this important?*

Part 2: Self

Don't be troubled or afraid

Read John 14:15-31

²⁷ "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**"

Every one of us has unique troubles and fears. For some it's the pace of change and uncertainty. While for others it's health challenges, financial hurdles or family disunity.

Yet even when our day-to-day circumstances are stable, fear of what could potentially go wrong in the future can still cripple some of us. Though we live in the most prosperous, secure and peaceful time in history, society is more anxious and stressed than ever. Fear is crippling individuals and families and deep down we all know, "Life isn't meant to be like this!"

Jesus agrees. He desires our world to be in peace, not chaos. However, in John 14:27 Jesus doesn't give his attention to the troubles and fears that we are so easily distracted by. Rather, Jesus put his attention - and now calls our attention - to our heart.

If we had it our way we'd probably ask God for magical powers to banish all external troubles and hardships from our lives. However, Jesus gives us a greater challenge, the challenge to see internal transformation in our heart - the very centre of our being.

Jesus says in John chapter 14 that he accomplishes this internal heart transformation by the presence and power of his Holy Spirit. He gifts us his Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Him. And it's his Holy Spirit's presence in our life which brings us peace. This is why every one of us who follows Jesus in faith can have peace amidst any trouble or any fear.

Jesus is offering us an entirely new strategy to address fear in our lives. Simply trying to minimise the troubles and fears *around* us isn't enough. Rather, we need to take moments each day to appreciate God's presence and peace *within* us.

This is more than just a private gift for you and I. God's peace is a powerful gift that, if treasured well, will begin to ripple out to calm the troubles and fears of the world around us.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 12:1-17 " ...But I will warn you whom to fear..."

Day 2: John 20:19-23 "Jesus came and stood among them and said..., "Peace be with you."

Day 3: Colossians 3:15-17 "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,..."

Day 4: Philippians 4:4-7 "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,..."

Day 5: Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,..."

Day 6: Isaiah 26:1-4 "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you,..."

Day 7: Acts 4:23-31 "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant...all boldness,..."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *In what environment or situation do you feel most afraid?*
- *Who did Jesus leave with us and how could His presence change your fears in the future?*

Let your light shine

Read Matthew 5:1-16

*“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 who is in heaven.**”*

In today's Christian culture we often talk about God as “light” and at Christmas we have many carols about how Jesus is the “light of the world”. So when we hear Jesus say in Matthew 5 verses 13 and 14 that those who follow Him are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” it raises some questions! If *he* is the light, how can we also be light?

Jesus assures us that since His followers are forgiven and filled with His Holy Spirit their lives have a new capacity to shine! In this scripture he says this shining is expressed in good works - acts of love, generosity and compassion. Yet these good works are not done in order to draw attention to ourselves and show how good we are. Rather, in Jesus' mind, the kind of life that shines is the one that shows *how good God is*. The goal isn't to simply be “good” *people*, but to reveal the goodness of *God!*

Every day we rub shoulders with people in streets, beaches, parks and workplaces that sense the world's darkness and are looking for God's light! Many are awaiting a light to shine on them and say, “Yes! God is real. He sees you. He *is good* and *he loves you.*” This is why Jesus says to let our lights shine. It's for His glory and the good of those around us.

Despite the great need for light, Jesus doesn't expect us to light up the whole world, just our own 'house' (Matthew 5:15). You'll notice in homes both in your street and around the world that each house has unique lighting based on dwelling size, style and the needs of those who live there. Similarly, the people we live, work, study and play with need God's light shone in unique ways that only we are likely to understand.

It just might be that God has put you in your current family, workplace, team or neighbourhood to shine in a unique way to these particular people! So what kind of light has God given you and how can *you* let it shine?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:13-16 "let your light shine before others..."

Day 2: Luke 11:33-36 "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket..."

Day 3: Ephesians 2:1-10; 5:7-20 "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus..."

Day 4: Philippians 2:12-18 "...shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life..."

Day 5: 1 Peter 3:8-17 "...always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you..."

Day 6: Luke 4:18 "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives..."

Day 7: Colossians 1:9-14 "...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What does your unique light look like?*
- *How can you let this light shine?*

Deny yourself

Read Luke 9:18-36

²³ And he said to all, "**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.**"

Jesus' challenge to deny ourselves appears to be in complete opposition to our culture. So much of our media, advertising and conversations are about *indulging* ourselves not *denying* ourselves!

In fact, some go further and say that to deny ourselves rather than following our deepest desires is harmful and repressive. However, denying self isn't diminishing self. Rather, it's about following Jesus' example of placing the needs of others before ourselves.

This is the point at which the contrast between Jesus and culture is strongest. If only you matter, then denying yourself makes no sense. However, if those around us matter like God says they matter, then there's truly something divine in the idea of denying our own desires and following in Jesus' example.

We know from the record of Jesus' life in the Bible that he didn't *want* to be crucified. Yet, He went through it to fulfil His Father's plan to unite us all together as one family. He believed that his sacrifice would free us from the divisive and destructive power of sin in our lives.

Take time to think of someone who has put your needs above their own. It may have been a mother, father, relative, sibling, friend or mentor. These people are similar to the 'heroes' we mythologise in our greatest books and movies. The ones who saved us from ourselves and the perils around us. While our day-to-day culture encourages indulgence, the timeless stories that we revere across all nations and tribes are almost always about heroes that deny *themselves* for the sake of *others*.

This is why the story of Jesus has transcended 2,000 years of history. He is exactly what our hearts know we need - someone to not just *show* us the way, but to *make* a way for us in the world.

I encourage you to take Jesus' invitation seriously. Embrace his challenge to take up your own opportunities to act with heroic love for the sake of those around us. It's never just about denying or diminishing ourselves. Rather, it's about dedicating our lives for the sake of others, just like he has modelled for us all.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 9:23 *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his..."*

Day 2: Philippians 2:1-13 *"Christ Jesus, who...emptied himself..."*

Day 3: Ephesians 4:20-32 *"...put off your old self, which belongs to your former...life..."*

Day 4: Romans 12 *"...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God..."*

Day 5: Mark 10:35-45 *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve..."*

Day 6: Galatians 5:16-26 *"...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh..."*

Day 7: Luke 18:18-30 *"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What is required for you to move from living for yourself to living for Jesus*
- *How you can take up his cross (cause) and follow his example*

Rejoice and be glad

Read Matthew 5:1-12

*“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. **Rejoice and be glad, for a great reward awaits you in heaven.** And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”*

Most people want to experience joy and happiness! Whether it's long weekends, overseas trips, daily mindfulness, “chilling out” or simply soaking up “good vibes” whenever we can, modern life has deemed pursuing joy a worthy cause. However, despite all this, few of us would say that we are deeply satisfied or carry an ongoing sense of internal joy.

Jesus makes it clear from the beginning of Matthew chapter 5 that Heaven offers unique rewards that provide us with the deep internal satisfaction and joy that our earthly pursuits - no matter how noble or “good” - can ever match.

However, heavenly rewards do not produce the satisfaction that we often seek. Our earthly nature largely seeks rewards for competing against others for immediate and temporary satisfaction - “I want it now!”. However, Jesus wants to open our eyes to the reality that Heaven rewards faithful followers of Jesus with delayed but eternal satisfaction. It is these greater rewards that Jesus says have the power to produce a truer and greater joy within us.

Jesus is making it clear that **the rewards we choose to pursue will determine the joy we experience in life.** If we choose to pursue immediate and temporary *earthly* rewards we will receive immediate and temporary joy. If, however, we choose to pursue delayed and eternal *heavenly* rewards we will receive eternal, heavenly joy.

This brings us to the key, transformative point Jesus is making. While heaven's rewards are delayed, Jesus' firm promise that we will receive them is designed to transform our present earthly reality no matter how dire or unjust the circumstances. Even if you were to be mistreated, ridiculed or maligned for following Jesus, you can experience deep internal joy, knowing that deeply satisfying, eternal rewards await you in Heaven.

So, next time you think or pray, “God, where are you? I'm doing exactly what I think you've asked me to do and you've repaid me with sickness/ridicule/rejection? What's going on?!” Allow Jesus to remind you that this is not unusual for his followers. Take the opportunity to **exercise your choice to rejoice. Choose to rejoice** in Jesus' promised heavenly rewards rather than complain about the lack of immediate, temporary rewards that can never truly satisfy!

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:12 "Rejoice and be glad"

Day 2: James 1:1-4, 12 "...friendship with the world is enmity with God..."

Day 3: 2 Corinthians 1:1-10 "God...comforts us in all our affliction..."

Day 4: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "...do not lose heart."

Day 5: 1 Peter 1:3-9 "Do not repay evil for evil..."

Day 6: 1 Peter 4:12-19 "...rejoice...as you share Christ's sufferings..."

Day 7: Philippians 4:1-17 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *How does a life focused on eternal rewards free you to understand and fulfil God's mission for you as a follower of Jesus and member of His family?*
- *How can you remind yourself of the great hope and eternal promises of God?*

Do not even sin in your heart

Read Matthew 5:27-30

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

In Matthew chapter 5 from verse 21 through to verse 48 we see Jesus radically altering who we identify as a “sinner” and what qualifies as sin.

Jesus’ listeners, like many of us, liked to think that sin - murder, anger, adultery, false promises etc - are primarily a problem that *other people* struggle with and will be judged for. Just like His listeners, we use our own categories of sin to declare ourselves “good” and others “sinners”. However, Jesus expands our definitions of what sin is and reveals that sin isn’t “out there” with *them* but “in here” with *me*.

To illustrate, Jesus says that if you have imagined a sexual fantasy with someone you’re not married to then you are to be judged as equally sinful as *the person who acts out the adulterous fantasy in real life!* In a world of readily available media that facilitates or intentionally promotes sexual fantasy, this may seem quite confronting or even impossible to live out.

Jesus is leading us to conclude that these sins that we desire to enact but restrain ourselves from physically committing (adultery, murder, theft, lying etc) are the sins that reveal not only the *reality* of our hearts but also the *capacity* of our hearts.

See, Jesus’ command is not just to remove anything in your life that causes you to sin but to transform the desires of our heart entirely. He knows that if we will allow Him access to the very centre of our lives, he can transform our hearts to operate with the full capacity that he originally intended.

Really, Jesus is inviting us to truly “live our best lives”. Despite our ability to control any external, observable sin (e.g. adultery, sexual perversion), when we foster sinful sexual desires in our hearts it condemns us to live internally like our worst selves. However, when we learn to foster a life free from sexual perversion in our hearts, our newly found purity encourages us to become like Christ - truly loving those around us without entanglement or ulterior motives. Not only is this Jesus’ invitation to us, but this is the life we all know we are designed for and desire to live!

God’s heart for his people is not just that they be single and celibate or married and faithful, but pure in heart just like him. As you pursue this renewed heart be mindful that you are working *with* God, not just *for* him. He gives both his Holy Spirit and his truth in the Bible to renew our hearts to be like his. So, I encourage you to take the step of asking him to renew your heart from the inside out.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:27-30 "...adultery...in his heart"

Day 2: Hebrews 3 "...their hearts always turn away from me..."

Day 3: Matthew 15:1-20 "...their hearts are far from me"

Day 4: Ephesians 4:17-32 "...let the Spirit renew your thoughts..."

Day 5: 1 John 3 "...we will be like Him..."

Day 6: James 4:1-10 "...God will come close to you"

Day 7: Proverbs 4:23 "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- What kind of 'heart' do you want for yourself?
- What steps can you take to see God renew your heart from the inside out?

Speak simply + truthfully

Read Matthew 5:33-37

“37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.”

When was the last time you stretched the truth, said something you regretted or felt compelled to outline your accomplishments in order to persuade someone to trust you?

These rashly, brashly spoken words can teach us much about the state of our hearts. In vain attempts to be liked, loved and accepted we aim to convince ourselves and others that we are more successful, powerful, knowledgeable, and well-connected than we truly are. Though well-intentioned, Jesus says that our words can betray our sinful desire to always appear “bigger” than we are.

In verses 33-37 Jesus holds up a mirror saying, “Stop aligning yourselves with things bigger than yourselves [heaven, earth, cities] to make out that you are ‘somebody to be trusted’” Rather, learn to live and speak with such simplicity and truth that people come to trust you at your word. We shouldn’t need to appeal to our religion, education, family of origin, successes and fame to convince people we are trustworthy. We should just simply say, “yes” or “no” and leave it at that.

Jesus wants the promises we speak to be the promises that we keep. And each time we keep one of our promises or commitments we are actually becoming more like Him. And this is His hope for us, that not only our actions, but our words come to shine bright like His - appealing, inspiring, freeing and encouraging to those around us - without the need for embellishment of any kind.

Jesus is perfectly trustworthy. When He says, “yes”, we know He is to be trusted. He has offered us His solemn word that all those who put their faith in Him will be forgiven of their sins, filled with His Spirit and led in a new life of following Him.

Taking Him at his word is called FAITH, and his invitation is to simply say, “yes”! Not, “yes, I’ll be the best Christian ever”. Nor, “I’ll never sin again!” But, “yes, I believe I am who you say I am. You are who you say you are”.

This is the greatest, “yes”, any of us can speak. If you have not said, “yes”, to faith in Jesus, take time to consider if this is what you want. If so, make your own decision to put your faith in Jesus and follow him with your whole life.

You can find some simple guidance on doing this in the *Going ‘All In’* section at the beginning of this resource.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:33-37 "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'"

Day 2: James 3 "The tongue is small...but boasts great things"

Day 3: Ephesians 4:11-25 "Speaking the truth in love..."

Day 4: 1 John 3:18-24 "Let us not love in word or talk but in deed..."

Day 5: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 "My message and my preaching were plain"

Day 6: Hebrews 6:13-20 "God guaranteed it [His character] with an oath"

Day 7: Proverbs 12:17 "He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- How can we speak more truthfully and simply?
- How can we aim to live in such a way that our lives and words align?

Practice righteousness in secret

Read Matthew 6:1-4

*"**Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**"*

Take a moment to consider, "What's the best piece of advice I've ever received?" "Measure twice, cut once", "Get a haircut, get a real job", "Buy low, sell high", "Be good to your mother"? When Jesus, the most influential person who has ever lived and the Son of God, says, "Beware!", He's warning us that to ignore his advice could be devastating.

In this instance, Jesus is warning us against living out faith in any way that seeks status or reputation as a "spiritual" or "good" person. While there are few of us who ever intend to live this way, it's all too easy to offer an answer, a donation (6:2-4), a prayer (6:5-15) or an invitation primarily because it portrays us in a "good light".

Jesus says that whenever we play this reputation game, caring more about who others perceive us to be than who we really are, it's our loss.

As Jesus taught elsewhere, He does willingly reward us for the life we've lived, but He often rewards behaviour that others don't even recognise. In fact, if you read Matthew chapter 6, especially verses 1 to 24, you will see that God is encouraging us to practise our faith secretly, where there's not even the opportunity for our intentions to become warped or reputations to be boosted.

He then says that if we can practise righteousness, prayer, giving and the life of faith *in secret* then promises we will one day receive a reward that will make a boosted status or elevated reputation seem like a waste of time!

As you reflect upon Matthew 6 and how you are expressing your faith, ask God for a renewed passion for loving Him in secret - praying prayers no one hears and meeting financial needs anonymously. Alongside the joy of unquestioned intentions, we can revel in the knowledge that each small, secret act secures some kind of mysterious, heavenly gift that will make all others pale in comparison!

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 6:1-8 *"...your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Day 2: Matthew 23: 1-8 *"...all their works they do to be seen by men."*

Day 3: John 13:1-17 *"[as I] have washed your feet, so you ought to..."*

Day 4: Mark 1:35-39 *"Before daybreak...Jesus got up and went to...pray."*

Day 5: Luke 18:10-14 *"...those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Day 6: 1 John 3:16-24 *"we know he lives in us by the Spirit he gave us..."*

Day 7: 1 Peter 5:6 *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- What "secret" activities is God calling me to?
- What are the rewards that these secret acts (prayer, giving etc) return?

Learn from Jesus how to rest

Read Matthew 11:25-30

*²⁸ **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

If you've ever tried to "measure up" to someone else's expectations for you then you'll know how tiring it is! This weariness characterised how many people in Jesus' day were experiencing their relationship with God. Jesus pinpointed the root cause of these beliefs in the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day. Their moral and religious expectations for people promised a path to God, but ultimately led to burdened and weary souls.

Even today, if the average person were asked, "What kind of person goes to Heaven?", they are most likely to respond, "A good one". This expectation sounds straightforward, but it usually leads to one of two outcomes, either **hiding** from God or **striving** for God!

We may hide due to an old addiction that resurfaces, a surprise end to a relationship or some moment of passion when our resolve to act "good" doesn't match up with the requirements that God, government or self expect. Amidst failure, "hidiers" tend to walk away from church, prayer and sometimes even faith itself.

If you've ever played "hide'n'seek" with a two-year-old you may have seen them stand in a corner facing the well with their hands over their eyes "hiding"! Whenever we try to "hide" from God, the reality is he knows exactly where we are, what we've done and is probably have a little chuckle at our efforts. The good news is that Jesus, God's son, came to find "hidiers" and heal their hearts.

Others amongst us, full of good intentions, find ourselves striving to meet our expectations of being "good enough". We hope that unlike those around us, we will find a way to "make the cut". If you've ever run this race to be "good enough", you know that as close as you think you get, you never quite "arrive".

Jesus calls us away from both hiding and striving into rest. I imagine this state is like the child above who "hides" in a corner,. However, rather than "hiding in plain sight", we are to be "resting in plain sight" - eyes wide open, facing out, ready to be 'found' in our state of perfect rest.

It's to both the striving and the hiding amongst us that Jesus, the Son of God and saviour of the world, gives His invitation. "Come, lay down your burdens and learn from me how to rest." I'm the one you've been looking for. There's no need to hide your sin from me since I've come to heal you. There's no need to earn my favour since I don't reward the morally superior. You can stop aiming to be good for me and allow me to be good towards you. Come and learn from me how to rest.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 11:25-30 "Come to me...and I will give you rest."

Day 2: Hebrews 4:8-16 "...let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest."

Day 3: Mark 6:6-12 & 30-32 "...come away...and rest a while"

Day 4: 1John 3:19-24 "...by this we know that he abides in us..."

Day 5: Psalm 4:8 "In peace I will both lie down and sleep"

Day 6: Psalm 23 "...I will fear no evil; for you are with me."

Day 7: Exodus 33:12-23 "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest..."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Are you a "hider" or a "striver"?
- What does it look like for you to rest in Jesus?

Clean the inside of the cup

Read Matthew 23:23-28

²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! **First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.**"

Have you ever taken a coffee cup out of the dishwasher to make yourself a cuppa only to realise that while it looked clean on the outside, the inside is still full of unremoved grime or detergent? Jesus says that this externally gleaming, but internally grimy cup is representative of a person that spends an inordinate amount of time striving to meet moral or religious expectations, but internally is at least as dark as those they claim moral superiority to.

This teaching of Jesus comes right before his execution on the cross. It's interesting to note that at this culmination of all of his teaching he is actually asking for what's humanly impossible - to not just purify our behaviour but to perfectly cleanse our heart.

When our family is on "kitchen duty" there is inevitably one sibling who doesn't meet the "washing up" expectations of another. The repeated reprimand is, "Oi! This bowl isn't clean. Wash it again. If you don't wash all the food off it properly one of us could get sick!" While this rarely leads to an illness, the warning mirrors Jesus' warning. If we are content to scrub the outside of our lives, but leave scraps to rot internally, a sickness will manifest within us. Jesus calls this sickness, 'sin'. It's his primary goal to free us from not just the effects of sin, our external behaviour, but the sickness itself, our internal sinful nature.

This is the essence of Jesus' message. Not simply that we are to love those around us, but that we need God's love to invade our heart. Not simply that we be generous to those in need, but that we invite the truly generous God to dwell within us. Not just that we sacrifice for the good of others, but that we grow a heart like that of Christ who made the ultimate sacrifice for us all.

It would be wonderful to see a future in which Jesus followers are recognised for their good works. However, the ultimate destination is that followers of Jesus are understood as people with good hearts - restored by God's internal cleansing rather than their external striving.

Understanding Jesus' teaching here is not only essential to understand his message to *us*, but also the message he wants us to share and live out with *others*. Once we realise that our own, well-intentioned efforts are destined for failure without an internal cleansing, then we can apply the same gracious judgement to those around us. Rather than speaking condemnation upon others based on their behaviour, we declare to them that the internal cleansing that Jesus speaks of is available and effective for us all. In fact, if they let *him* clean them, they can cease striving to cleanse themselves. Let's aim to live, and model, a life that is clean *from the inside out*.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 23:1-39 *"...clean the inside of the cup..."*

Day 2: Matthew 15:1-20 *"...the words you speak come from the heart..."*

Day 3: Philippians 2:1-18 *"God is working in you..."*

Day 4: Colossians 2 *"Let your roots grow down into Him..."*

Day 5: Colossians 3:12-17 *"...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..."*

Day 6: 1 John 1:5-10 *"God is light, and there is no darkness in him..."*

Day 7: Ezekiel 36:26, Hebrews 8:10 *"And I will give you a new heart..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- In what ways have you tried to appear clean on the "outside"?
- What could it look like to have God cleanse you from the inside out?

Turn the other cheek

Read Matthew 5:38-39

³⁸You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. **But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.** ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

When someone tells you to ignore a *minor* injustice done to you by, "turning the other cheek", how do you feel? Usually, it doesn't feel great. The advice sounds good to *give*, but is difficult to *receive*. While we easily recognise that it's an upgrade from "an eye for an eye", it often feels like we have to simply "suck it up".

Fortunately, if we read the context we understand that Jesus isn't calling us to retreat from revenge into a begrudging pacifism. Rather, He's calling us to advance His Kingdom in an incredibly practical and disarming way.

See, when we exercise our personal **right to retaliate** - what we defensively label "justice" - against someone who has sinned against us we enter into *their* world - a kingdom dominated by darkness. However, when we follow Jesus by exercising our **responsibility to love** someone who has sinned against us we invite them into *God's* world - a kingdom of light.

The contrast between kingdoms highlights the difference between a faith based on *rights* for ourselves versus a faith based on *responsibility* towards others.

It is true that "individual rights" and "natural justice" are necessary foundations for our society and its legal systems to uncover major injustices and abuse. However, God's plan for our everyday personal lives is to operate according to a completely *uncommon* foundation - a generosity towards those who take advantage of us.

Our willingness to smile and wave to the person who cuts us off on the highway, to give a compliment on social media to those who harass us or to leave a tip for the waiter who treats us poorly is bringing light into environments that are often dark.

There is an urgency for us to embrace this life of responsibility that Jesus marks out for us. Without our willingness to advance his love and light in this way, the only guaranteed outcome for the future of those around us is continued darkness. So give up your own rights and take up your responsibility to love others like God has loved you.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:38-39 *"...if anyone slaps you on the right cheek..."*

Day 2: Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not grow weary in doing good..."*

Day 3: 1 Peter 2:23 *"He did not retaliate when he was insulted..."*

Day 4: Proverbs 15:1 *"A gentle answer deflects anger..."*

Day 5: Luke 23:34 *"Father forgive them for they don't know..."*

Day 6: John 10:18 *"No one can take my life from me..."*

Day 7: Romans 12:9-21 *"Repay no one evil for evil..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *In what ways has my desire for justice been a desire for retaliation?*
- *In what areas of life can I exercise my responsibility to love?*

Watch + pray to avoid temptation

Matthew 26:36-45

⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ **Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.**"

It's easy to cruise through life parroting the iconic phrase from the first LEGO movie, "everything is awesome". Sometimes, everything *is* awesome. That is, of course, until it isn't.

Unlike some of our idealistic views of reality, Jesus knows that eventually all of us will be "caught out" by temptation. Like us, three of Jesus' closest companions - Peter, James and John - got completely caught out the night their leaders was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.

While Jesus prayed for the strength to submit to arrest, injustice and ultimately death, they slept. While Jesus knew what was coming, His followers didn't. Despite having told them trials were coming, they may have thought, "Everything is awesome. Jesus is on our side and He is winning. We're unstoppable!" Yet Jesus knew that literally overnight one of His most ardent supporters, Peter, would - in moments of *fleshly* self-preservation - deny that He even knew who Jesus was!

Like Peter, James and John, we need to be alert to the reality that our strength of spirit and bold intentions ("everything is awesome"!) can be exactly what blinds us to just how weak our flesh is.

If we can grasp this reality, we can see that Jesus wasn't just preparing Himself for the path ahead, but modelling the way for those who would follow Him. He both "called out" their weaknesses and simultaneously modelled the solution - passionate, *pre-emptive* prayer.

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray in chapter 6 of Matthew ("teach us to pray Lord"), they likely wanted to know the secrets of praying like Jesus. They wanted access to the privilege of praying with God in such an intimate and powerful way. It would have appeared to be a new level of spiritual life - one they all wanted access to.

However, it seems that in the garden on that fateful night, Jesus revealed to them that it's not just a spiritual privilege to pray, it's a personal, physical *necessity*. When your spirit is willing but your flesh is weak, Jesus says you need to pray. This prayer is not only to avoid temptation, but to overcome our flesh, and follow Jesus wherever he may lead.

Like Jesus, and his disciples, what's at stake is our purpose. To complete his purpose on earth, Jesus needed to pray. To overcome the temptation to give up on *your* purpose, *you also* need to pray that you may overcome the weakness of your flesh and live the full life Jesus calls you to!

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 26:31-46, 69-75 "Watch and pray..."

Day 2: Matthew 6:5-13 *"Our Father in heaven..."*

Day 3: Romans 7:14-8:4 *"Who will free me from this life...?"*

Day 4: Romans 8:5-17 *"...the Spirit gives you life..."*

Day 5: Romans 8:18-30 *"...the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness."*

Day 6: Galatians 5:1-26 *"So Christ has truly set us free."*

Day 7: Romans 8:28 *"...in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Where in your life is your spirit willing but your flesh weak?*
- *How might prayer help you overcome your flesh and temptation?*

Be on your guard against all Covetousness

Read Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" **15 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."** 16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Jesus spoke a lot about treasure. This wasn't because *he* was obsessed with silver and gold, but because *we* are. Knowing that material riches are capable of robbing us of true riches, he reminds us that our hearts both reveal and determine what we truly treasure. It's not that all rich people are covetous (envious of others things), but that *all* our hearts are susceptible to the pursuit of temporary rather than eternal riches.

The "rich fool" (as he's come to be known in Christian culture) in Jesus' story sought to silence the deepest, healthy desires of his soul by telling it to, "relax, eat, drink, be merry". We may not all be wealthy, but many of us can relate to masking the deep, God-given desires of our heart with all manner of temporary luxuries. While for centuries people binged on food, drink and sex, we're taking it to new levels. We have unimaginable access to endless menus, shows, pornography and sports to escape our deepest needs. If we aren't secure in our own home and lifestyle we're able to visit the far-flung corners of the earth at relatively low cost! Rather than opening our lives to those who live around us, we can now 'connect' online with endless strangers we'll never meet.

Much of this stems from a covetous spirit. We perceive what others have - a perfect, dramatic or adventurous life; sexual fulfilment; earthly fame; global adventures; large followings or popularity - and we hope that our own possession of such things will fill the gap in our own souls. We tell our souls, "put aside your God-given inclinations and be satisfied with this popular, short-term solution I've found". We tell ourselves, "You just need a little *more* 'me-time' this week."

To these hungry souls Jesus says, "beware"! Covetousness is not just a sign of deep and damaging insecurity, but it leads to a wasted life. In allowing our souls natural desire for good and God to be replaced with covetousness we miss out on the deepest treasures God has in store for us. Rather, Jesus encourages us to "be rich toward God". Much could be said about what this entails, but maybe the simplest explanation is to allow your soul to feast on God, his goodness, his word (the Bible), his Holy Spirit and the life his son Jesus offers to all through faith.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 12:13-21 "*...be on your guard against all covetousness...*"

Day 2: Matthew 13:45-47 "*...kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls...*"

Day 3: Philippians 4:10-13 "*...I have learned whatever situation I am to be content.*"

Day 4: Galatians 6:6-9 "*...for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*"

Day 5: Luke 6:27-36 "*Give to everyone who begs from you...*"

Day 6: James 3:13-8, 4:13-17 "*...What is your life? For you are a mist...*"

Day 7: Galatians 5:16-26 "*For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit...*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What items, experiences or people do we want to possess in our culture?*
- *What could it look like for you to be "rich toward God"?*

Part 3: Others

Love your neighbour as yourself

Read Matt 22:34-40

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

In discussing modern morality, Christians often spruik that we should, "Love the sinner but hate the sin". Christian theologian C.S. Lewis initially considered this saying quite silly until he realised that he had inadvertently been loving one sinner in this manner his whole life - himself. He says:

"You are told to love your neighbour as yourself. How do you love yourself? When I look into my own mind, I find that I do not love myself by thinking myself a dear old chap or having affectionate feelings. I do not think that I love myself because I am particularly good, but just because I am myself and quite apart from my character. I might detest something which I have done. Nevertheless, I do not cease to love myself. In other words, that definite distinction that Christians make between hating sin and loving the sinner is one that you have been making in your own case since you were born. You dislike what you have done, but you don't cease to love yourself. You may even think that you ought to be hanged. You may even think that you ought to go to the Police and own up and be hanged. Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained."

This powerful realisation offers us an incredible internal challenge. If we are so adept at love, why are we so willing to offer it to ourselves but so challenged to offer it beyond ourselves? As C.S. Lewis discovered, self love is natural to all of us. This is why Jesus so confidently bases his command on two universal facts. Fact one, we have a seemingly unlimited capacity for self-love. Fact two, we do not love our "neighbour" as Jesus modelled, or even as we desire ourselves!

Given our lack of 'natural' capacity, we require not just a "better" love, but a new nature. This internal 'gap' between our original nature and our preferred one is the gap that Jesus came to not only reveal but to recover. His sacrificial death in our place removes not just the guilt of our sin, but to give us a new, "resurrected" life just like his. This new nature has a capacity for love that our old nature didn't. This is an ancient idea that God introduces in Genesis. He says we are all created in His image and designed to live accordingly. Jesus' invitation to follow him in a life of love literally returns us to the kind of life we were originally designed to live!

So, do you graciously "see the best" in yourself despite your sin? If so, how might you learn from Jesus how to love others in the same way you have loved yourself?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 22:37-40 "**...You shall love your neighbour as yourself.**"

Day 2: Luke 3:10-12 "*...If you have two shirts, give one to the poor...*"

Day 3: James 2:1-13, 14-26 "*...never think some people are more important than others...*"

Day 4: 1 Tim 1:1-17 "*...Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*"

Day 5: Matthew 18:21-35 "*...shouldn't you have mercy...as I had mercy on you?*"

Day 6: Ephesians 4:31-2 "*Be kind, ...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*"

Day 7: Phil 2:1-11 "*...look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *How do you desire to be treated by others on your worst day?*
- *What needs to change in your life for you to live like this towards those around you?*

Invite the poor to your parties

Read Luke 14:12-24

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ **But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,** ¹⁴ **and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."**

There's something satisfying about knowing that Jesus loved to party and expects people like us to also be known as "party people". However, Jesus clarifies that the way we party and who we party with reveals the intentions of our heart. When we consider who we invite to the beach, a BBQ, movie night or dinner party we often see that much of what we do in life, even our hospitality and celebrations, are done for "kickbacks".

In this encounter Jesus calls us to rethink how we party and who we party with. He's calling for us to not just change up the guest list but to re-organise how we host people in our lives so that it's almost impossible to receive any earthly reward whatsoever. This new approach to hospitality disregards the praise of the elite and successful in favour of heavenly rewards that no earthly currency or reputation can compare.

If you've ever shared a meal in a home with a newly arrived refugee you'll know the powerful psychological, emotional and physical impact an invitation can have upon an individual or family. While they often arrive in a foreign country without friends or family, their neighbours share birthday parties, cups of tea with friends or a sunset bbq on the weekends. Part of missing out on invitations to these common gatherings is that New Australians often lack the normal benefits they can offer the hosts - no fancy wine or organic steaks to bring, no gossip to share or social media klout to boost our own accounts.

Yet Jesus says that partying with those who have nothing to offer us are the very ones he is giving us a new and abiding love for. Furthermore, when we come to love and welcome those whom he loves, he guarantees an *earthly blessing* and a *heavenly reward*!

What would it look like for you to let Jesus re-organise your calendar and plan your guests list?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 14:1-24 "*...when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled...*"

Day 2: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 "*...God chose things the world considers foolish...*"

Day 3: James 2:1-13 "*But if you show partiality, you are committing sin...*"

Day 4: Matthew 25:31-46 "*For I was hungry and you gave me food...*"

Day 5: Mark 12:28-34 "*...Which commandment is the most important of all?*"

Day 6: Romans 12:9-21 "*Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*"

Day 7: Psalm 68:6 NLT "*God places the lonely in families;*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- When has someone shown meaningful hospitality to you?
- How could you re-organise your time to include someone that is often excluded?

Be reconciled

Read Matthew 5:23-24

*“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. **First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**”*

In Jesus' day religious people would make sacrifices as both an act of worship to God as well as a securing of forgiveness for their sins. Though Jesus was about to offer himself as a once-forever divine sacrifice to secure permanent forgiveness of our sins, he uses the system he was replacing as a poignant reminder that the reconciliation he offers us is not a token religious act but a relational one. Unlike a merely transactional forgiveness, Jesus highlights that the damage sin does is not just between us and God but also between ourselves and those around us.

Jesus spotlights the need for reconciliation by using the word 'brother' to show that if you are a person of faith, then those who share your faith are in effect part of God's family with you. As siblings in God's family it's incongruous with God's "family values" that one of his children can be at peace with him, but at war with a sibling. How could someone who claims to be reconciled with God not be willing to reconcile with other men and women whom God has also reconciled to himself and brought into His family?

We know how serious a point Jesus is making because we presume from the details of the story that He is teaching this in Galilee, which was approximately 80 miles from the temple in Jerusalem - the only place where a Jewish altar for animal sacrifice existed at the time. So Jesus is declaring that God sees personal reconciliation as such a significant spiritual act that if you arrived in Jerusalem to worship God but realised that someone has a valid complaint against you back home, then you must quickly double-back to "set things right". Without doing this, Jesus said they should not claim they had "set things right" with God and walk home feeling justified.

Since Jesus' death has made it clear that his personal sacrifice was the last sacrifice that would ever be needed, we no longer need to make sacrifices at any altar or payments to any account to be forgiven. However, whenever we pray or worship the God who has reconciled us to himself, Jesus would have us consider if there is anyone else that we have not yet reconciled with? If there is, then Jesus would advise us to "go" and hear them out, display compassion and understanding and ultimately apologise and forgive wherever necessary. This is how we live out the reconciliation we have received in Jesus.

Is there someone in God's family that you need to reconcile with?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 5:23-24 *"First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer..."*

Day 2: Colossians 3:1-17 *"...if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other..."*

Day 3: Matthew 6:9-15 *"...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..."*

Day 4: James 5:13-16 *"...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..."*

Day 5: 1 Cor 5:18-20 *"...reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."*

Day 6: Hebrews 12:12-17 *"Strive for peace with everyone..."*

Day 7: Proverbs 25:21-22 *"...for you will have burning coals on his head..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- What damage has unresolved conflict brought to your life?
- What could be possible if you were to courageously risk reconciling a past relationship?

Love your enemies

Read Luke 6:27-36

35 **But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.** 36 *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*"

When people are asked about their guiding principle in life, it's not uncommon to hear them say something like, "Love everybody". Even modern day companies like Google have built momentum around their early motto, "Don't be evil." However, while these statements contain a sense of virtue, they actually fall incredibly short of Jesus' disruptive call to "love your *enemies*".

When we say we want to 'love everybody', we are usually expressing our intentions, feelings or aspiration to simply have good vibes towards everyone we happen meet day-to-day. While this is certainly to be encouraged, it doesn't require any of us to love in such a way that we are actively, sacrificially bringing kindness into the lives of those around us. And while living by the principle of "don't be evil" sounds noble, it would certainly be possible to retain deep resentment towards another and still meet the requirements of "don't be evil".

To corporations and individuals alike, Jesus offers a far nobler and divine invitation. He says we are to love - bless, pray and lend to - even those who hold evil intentions towards us. Simply possessing loving feelings or sympathy towards those whose hearts are filled with hatred doesn't cut it. Rather, we are to live with a proactive, hands-on kind of love.

This kind of unnatural love can only be attained by **the love within you being greater than the evil around you**. This is why Christ's command seems at odds with our natural understanding and experience and of reality. Without possessing Christ's love within us, it's an entirely unreasonable request. However, if by faith we can obtain his love in our hearts, it then becomes possible to embody this other-worldly love for those who have wronged us in our everyday lives. In this way, we approach Christ's goal for us of becoming, "merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

When this internal-external alignment does not happen, we become hypocrites, failing to live as we know we ought. We might know God's love in our hearts, but fail to act accordingly. Alternatively, we might aim to love like Christ, but performing out of duty, rather than true love. This too is a misaligned, hypocritical life.

Jesus, however, is the perfect embodiment of this lovingly aligned life. Despite rejecting him, His love didn't just dwell *within* him, but flowed *out* onto the cross to set us free from sin and self! Truly, he has embraced us even while we were still sinners, enemies of the truth that emanates from him. What would it take for us to love our enemies as He has loved us?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 6:27-36 *"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend..."*

Day 2: Acts 9:1-19 *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."*

Day 3: Matthew 8:5-13 *"Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."*

Day 4: Luke 10:25-37 *"And who is my neighbour?"*

Day 5: Acts 7:54-60 *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."*

Day 6: Luke 23:23-43 *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Day 7: 1 Samuel 24:1-22 *"...I will not put out my hand against my lord..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Describe the greatest "enemy" in your life.
- What would need to change for you to love your enemy as Christ has loved you?

Judge not, that you be not judged

Read Matthew 7:1-5

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Has anyone ever said to you after you gave them some advice or correction, "Stop judging me?" Doesn't Jesus say, "Don't judge". Well, yes, but he offers more than that. He gives three reasons to rethink our instincts to "judge" others.

Firstly, if judgement on all sin is what we seek - *for others* - then He says judgement on all sin is what we'll get - *for ourselves*. This form of "natural justice" simply seeks to identify and punish sin wherever we find it. Echoing Jesus' other sayings we can summarise, "Judge others as you would have them judge you."

Secondly, Jesus reminds us that God's unique perspective on sin means He is privy to see it within us *all*. His stark reminder is that God can see more sin in us than we can ever find in someone else.

Thirdly, The use of the word "brother" also makes it clear that we share the same heavenly Father as the men and women we judge. They are as much loved by God as we are and have been gifted to us as family forever. Like most real-life brothers and sisters, there should be more grace for a sibling than a stranger.

So, when we sense the urge to judge someone Jesus encourages us to pause. Begin by reminding ourselves of the standards we want to be judged by ourselves, the sin in our own lives and the fact that we share the same Heavenly Father and this man or woman is part of this same family. Jesus says after we grapple with our own sin, that we are able to see "clearly" how to aid our sibling. The final reminder that their sin is merely a "speck" is quite likely a subtle nudge for us to question if their sin that originally upset us so much is even worth mentioning at all.

To conclude our contemplation of judgement, take a moment to pray and reflect upon the following question, "*How do I want to be judged?*"

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 7:1-2 "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*"

Day 2: Galatians 6:1-10 "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*"

Day 3: James 4:1-12 "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*"

Day 4: Romans 14:1-13 "*For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God*"

Day 5: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 "*...who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness...*"

Day 6: John 8:1-11 "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone...*"

Day 7: James 1:19-27 "*...be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Describe a time when you have been "judged" unfairly.
- Given your current thoughts and life, how would you like to be judged by God and others?

Don't replace God's commands with your traditions

Read Matthew 15:1-20

*"**For God commanded, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'**"*

Given the present distaste for authority and family structure, Jesus' striking words are still relevant to modern day followers despite the historical context that sees Jesus addressing the evils of an old religious practice called "corban".

In Jesus' day *corban* involved adults voluntarily pledging money or materials to the temple. However, there was an unjust loophole. While technically "given" to the temple treasury, donors were still able to access those funds provided they were used exclusively for their own personal needs. This enabled greed to masquerade as generosity. Rather than "honouring" [meeting the financial need of] parents as God commands, corban enabled people to be honoured in the community as "generous" while being able to self-righteously declare to their parents that, "While I'd love to meet your financial needs [honour], I've pledged all my savings to God and I couldn't possibly break my promise to him!".

Even today, Christians have found subtle ways to seek honour at the expense of honouring the family God may have placed us in. It could be going into debt to fund a church program instead of meeting family needs. It could be a full week of church activities instead of sharing even one meal with a spouse, parent, sibling, child or relative who is isolated. It could be endless availability to mentor or pray with other Christians, but a lack of interest for those in your own household.

Our modern desire for maximum independence has led us to dishonour or ignore any forms of structural authority - especially that of mothers and fathers. If we are to follow Jesus then we need to acknowledge that Jesus affirms God's ancient design of honouring those "above" us, especially our parents.

While appearing to religiously "put God first" in our own personal lives may gain us public honour with many, it does not justify ignoring God-given obligations to those we are responsible to and for. Since God has uniquely placed us as a spouse, child, parent or sibling, it's his plan that we seek to honour our family in an authentic, meaningful way.

So, are there any "Christian" practices that have limited you from honouring the family God has placed you in? Have your families imperfections given you an excuse for not honouring them?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 15:1-9 *"For God commanded, 'Honour your father and your mother,'..."*

Day 2: Exodus 20:1-19, Deuteronomy 5:16 *"...that your days may be long..."*

Day 3: Ephesians 6:1-4 *"Honour your father and mother..."*

Day 4: 1 Timothy 5:1-8 *"Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him..."*

Day 5: 2 Timothy 3:1-5 *"In the last days...people will be...disobedient to their parents..."*

Day 6: Romans 13:1-13 *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities..."*

Day 7: Proverbs 1:8, 23:22 *"Listen to your father...do not despise your mother..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Discuss the relationships you've had with your parents or guardians.
- Why do you think God is so strong about the need for children to honour their parents?

Humble yourself like a child

Read Matthew 18:1-4

*"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. **Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**"*

While our culture often idolises the vigour of youth, most kids "can't wait to grow up"! It's rare to meet a middle-aged man or woman who truly wants to be a kid again!

We know from the additional details in the gospel of Mark (see Mark 10:15) that the disciples held similar beliefs. To them, childhood and children were a necessary inconvenience. However, Jesus counters his apprentices with two points that are fundamentally at odds with **their, and our,** natural mindset: (1) God deeply values children and childhood, and (2) the humility of a child's state in life reflects the humility required for anyone to come into a relationship with God.

One of the most beautiful and vulnerable aspects of a child's life is their reliance upon benevolent "grown ups". On their journey into understanding self, others and the world children require sustenance, shelter and oversight. In this way, no child is truly "self made". Their very survival and success in the world is entirely reliant upon others.

Similarly, Jesus says it's impossible to enter into God's Kingdom on our own efforts. None of us are "self made". We rely on God's love to seek us out, Jesus' sacrifice to redeem us and His power to restore us to a new path.

So while many leaders, gurus and coaches implore us to "step up", Jesus calls us to "step down" into child-like dependence upon Him. This is why Jesus insisted that we didn't need just a new *direction* in life, but a completely new start in life. This new life requires the humility to learn new desires, hopes, beliefs and loves. This is what is required to live in the kingdom Jesus invites us to. To literally turn back the clock and be reborn by God into a completely new, humble, child-like faith.

What needs to change for you to become like a child, humbly trusting Jesus for all your needs?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 18:1-14 *"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest..."*

Day 2: Mark 10:13-16 *"Let the children come to me; do not hinder them,..."*

Day 3: Deuteronomy 6:1-9 *"You shall teach them diligently to your children..."*

Day 4: Luke 9:44-48 *"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me,..."*

Day 5: Psalm 127 *"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,..."*

Day 6: Ephesians 6:1-4 *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger..."*

Day 7: Luke 22:24-30 *"...I am among you as the one who serves."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Describe how children were generally treated throughout your upbringing?
- How could your attitudes towards children more closely align with those of Jesus?

Forgive those who sin against you

Read Matthew 18:21-35

"²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

The decision to forgive can be costly. To cancel the debt you're owed and to let go of anger or resentment towards another requires personal sacrifice. Despite the cost, many of us are happy to pay the price and feel satisfied that we've taken the higher, moral ground. However, when we encounter a "serial offender", our goodwill runs dry and we resent being expected or asked to forgive.

When our resolve dissipates Jesus' call to forgive "seventy-seven times" might feel unfair or even harmful. We may justify withholding forgiveness by saying, "They need to learn a lesson!" Or "I'm not a doormat!" No matter how justified we feel in saying this, in essence, we are deciding that our decision to *not* forgive someone not only benefits them (!) but is somehow the right moral decision for us.

It's at this point that we need to ask ourselves, "Has someone *not* forgiving *me* ever helped me overcome my sin?" The answer is obvious. Forgiveness provides the most transformative outcome in the life of the sinner. While it doesn't guarantee future behaviour, true forgiveness introduces the concept of *mercy*, not receiving what we deserve. Mercy prepares us to meet *grace*, being given what we don't deserve. And it is grace that provides the environment and the fuel for internal *transformation*.

Forgiveness is thus not just about moral virtue, but about inviting those who have offended us into a whole new way of thinking, living and relating. A life marked by mercy not malice. A life marked by grace, not guilt.

Our ability to consistently offer this costly forgiveness to others correlates strongly with our own experience of forgiveness. It may be our parents, spouse or friend who enriched our hearts with grace. Or maybe it was and is Jesus. His sacrificial forgiveness of us is not conditioned upon our ability to immediately obey him in every way. Rather, his merciful offering of grace to us is the fuel for our merciful offerings of grace to others - even seventy-seven times.

Who has graciously forgiven you? Who do you need to pray for help to graciously forgive?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 18:21-35 "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"

Day 2: Luke 17:1-10 *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,"*

Day 3: Colossians 3:12-17 *"if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other;"*

Day 4: Ephesians 4:1-6 *"...with patience, bearing with one another in love,"*

Day 5: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 *"...you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him..."*

Day 6: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 *"We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."*

Day 7: Genesis 37:1-36, 45:1-15 *"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Who has chosen to forgive you in your past?
- Who do you need to ask God for help to graciously forgive?

Do not throw your pearls to pigs

Read Matthew 7:1-7

"6 Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

One of Jesus' repeated sayings was, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". By this saying he meant that not everyone was willing or able to receive the spiritual truth he sought to give them. Likewise, despite our deep desire to communicate God's love to the world, we will also encounter people who are either not interested in God or are so antagonistic to us that they even seek to cause harm to those who share about him.

Over-earnest Christians may be surprised to hear that the same Jesus who gave up His life for all humanity does not expect *us* to persist in conversations or relationships that are unproductive or harmful.

If you've ever seen a pig eat, they don't seem big on details or nutrition. They consume whatever is in front of them as though it's their last meal! When we encounter people who are looking to "demolish" us or our message, we need to expect the outcome to endanger both ourselves and our message. In these instances, whether we are sharing the gospel or providing much-needed personal advice, we are best off listening to as much as we can, learning whatever we can and keeping our "pearls" for someone else who is willing to savour them.

This wisdom may not suit the over-earnest, soap-box Christians amongst us. However, it's important to observe that **Jesus didn't chase people, they chased Him**. While he calls us to take His message to the nations, he sees no need to subject ourselves to constant rejection and reproach. In fact, we see the practice of the earliest Christian missionaries (e.g. Paul in Acts 13:46; 18:6; 19:9) lived out Jesus' example. Likewise, we are called to be *followers* of Jesus and his example, not simply over-earnest *pushers* of Jesus who unwisely persist with antagonistic or destructive people..

Are you spending your time on people who aren't interested in God? Could there be others who are waiting to hear about him from you?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 7:6 *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs,"*

Day 2: Matthew 15:21-28 *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David;"*

Day 3: Proverbs 9:1-12 *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"*

Day 4: Ephesians 4:25-27 *"do not let the sun go down on your anger,"*

Day 5: John 12:37-50 *"I did not come to judge the world but to save the world."*

Day 6: Romans 11:1-12 *"But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works;"*

Day 7: Proverbs 26:1-11 *"Answer not a fool according to his folly..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- How many of your sins against God has he forgiven?
- Is there a sin perpetrated against you that you have thus far chosen not to forgive?

Do unto others...

Read Matthew 7:12-13

¹² **So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."**

Our culture often restates this saying of Jesus as, "do unto others as you would have them do to you". We call this command the Golden Rule because it's not just a summary of all of the Law and Prophets (the pre-Jesus part of the Bible) but Jesus says it *is* the Law and the Prophets. Put simply, relating to others as we would have them relate to us *is* a summary of every doctrine, teaching, command, poem, prayer and story in the Bible.

Significantly, the summary of God's revelation to mankind isn't, "Thou shalt *not*" but rather, "Thou *shall*". While Jesus clearly affirms God's ongoing *negative* directives to avoid sin, "Do not get drunk", "Do not lie" and "Do not have sex with someone you're not married to", He summarises God's desire for humanity as a *positive* directive to love.

Today's world says if you can simply avoid doing "bad stuff" (e.g. "Don't be evil") then you are a "good" person. However, Jesus speaks of a higher way of living. A way in which we don't just avoid the Devil, but pursue Jesus - imitating God's design for humanity as modelled by Jesus.

Significantly, this pursuit of Jesus includes a willingness to love people regardless of the response we receive. Jesus didn't wait for us to reciprocate. His example guides us away from the passivity of the status quo to the brilliance of a life marked by proactive, no-strings-attached love for others.

If there was ever a time when the world needs every Jesus' followers to live this kind of proactive life it is now. This strategic possibility would make the love of God accessible and tangible to all. It's this golden strategy alone that can truly set us free from our greatest limitation - our selves.

In what way can you mirror God's love to others, treating others as you would like to be treated?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 7:12 *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them,"*

Day 2: Luke 6:27-36 *"...bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."*

Day 3: Romans 13:8-10 *"Love does no wrong to a neighbour;"*

Day 4: Galatians 5:13-26 *"...watch out that you are not consumed by one another."*

Day 5: 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 *"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast..."*

Day 6: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 *"...encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient..."*

Day 7: Lamentations 3:22-23 *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Are you trying to love or share Jesus with people who are simply disinterested or damaging?*
- *Is there someone in your life who is open to God and his love whom you could reorient your time and energy?*

Don't separate what God joins

Read Matthew 19:1-12 NLT

³ "Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?" ⁴ "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' " ⁵ And he said, "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' ⁶ **Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.**"

Surprisingly, this scripture is not just for married people! Every marriage needs *other* men and women - both single and married - in their life not just to survive but also to learn to thrive.

This is not just like the support one gives to a boss or a team member to help accomplish a common cause. Rather, this is to support what Jesus calls a "one flesh" union - a newly created entity made up of two previously separate individuals that God personally joins together as "one". If we look around our own families and neighbourhoods many of these once-happy unions are now torn apart. So, while God does the *joining*, it is fallible human beings who are responsible for the *dividing*.

If we're willing, we have a responsibility to not only help married couples live out the unified expression God designed for them, but also to avoid being complicit in splitting them apart. While there are times when divorce may be a valid option, we may be an unwitting participant in a divorce in a number of ways. We could be a third-party that actively breaks the marriage covenant. Alternatively, we could passively contribute to a divorce by watching from the sidelines without being willing to intervene or encourage reconciliation.

As followers of Jesus, we need to shape our conversations about marriage, family and children around the heart and design of God. His concept of "one-ness" is close to His heart and a picture of His design for not just marriage but friends, family and church. Furthermore, once we have come to know Him personally, He makes it clear that He has united himself with us forever! It's from this place of union with God that we are able to offer the same to our spouse or the married couples around us.

Is there a marriage - yours or someone else's - that you can join God in championing the "one flesh" union he created?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 19:4-6 *"...let no one split apart what God has joined together."*

Day 2: Hebrews 13:1-7 *"Let marriage be held in honour among all,..."*

Day 3: Ephesians 5:25-33 *"love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up..."*

Day 4: Genesis 2:20-24 *"...a man shall hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

Day 5: Proverbs 31:10-31 *"Her children...call her blessed; her husband also...praises her:"*

Day 6: 1 John 4:7-21 *"Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

Day 7: Song of Solomon 8:6-7 *"...love is as strong as death..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What model of marriage have you most commonly seen growing up?*
- *In what way can you honour the marriages of those around you?*
- *If you are married, how can your love for your spouse imitate God's model for marriage?*

Love one another as I loved you

Read John 13:31-38

³⁴ **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

When Jesus teaches us to love others it is always in the context of His personal love towards us and His historical sacrifice for us all.

If His love for us is a guide for our own lives of love, it's worth taking time to contemplate, "How has Jesus loved me?" It may be his creation of you personally, the spiritual gifts he has given, the forgiveness he has had towards your sin, the promises of Heaven, the strengths he gave you, the people he placed around you or simply the gift of his presence within you. Take a few minutes now to write down the specific ways you believe he has loved you.

Once you've compiled a list of how Jesus has loved you, compile a second list of what you have done to deserve His love. Taking time to think it through.

Once that's done, compare the lists! If you're like anyone else in the world, one list will be a lot longer than the other.

This list isn't just something to be grateful for! Rather, this list is a visual guide for you to love others *just like* Jesus has loved you.

Just like Jesus' list of love towards us is long, we should aim to compile a long list of genuinely loving actions towards those around us. And if your list starts to grow and you start to wonder, "why bother continuing to love them? They ignore me anyway!". Then let Jesus' words remind you that for the Christian, there is meant to be a BIG gap between the list of the lover and the receiver, just as Jesus has modelled to us.

When people observe how you interact with other Christians do they sense your deep, God-given love for them? Do they see that you have been taught by Jesus how much God loves them?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: John 13:31-38 "*...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*"

Day 2: John 3:16-21 "*For God so loved the world,[a] that he gave his only Son,...*"

Day 3: John 14:15-31 "*You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*"

Day 4: John 15:9-17 "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you,...*"

Day 5: John 17 "*...that they may be one even as we are one,...*"

Day 6: John 21:1-23 "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*"

Day 7: Psalm 129:1-24 "*How precious to me are your thoughts, Oh God!*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Have you ever sensed God's deep love for you? If so, describe what that was like.*
- *When people observe how you interact with other Christians do they sense your deep, God-given love for them?*

Go to Christians who offend you

Matthew 18:10-20

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector... 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

If you've lived for a day with another Christian you'll know that even followers of Jesus - even the "best" ones - sin against each other. The question isn't *if*, but *when*. Given Jesus' constant reminders to love each other, it may come as a surprise that he teaches us in Matthew 18 that we are to "go" and tell them their fault. For Jesus, just like his 'great commission' to take his good news to the world, restoring relationships with those who sin against us is meant to be dealt with proactively. As a prelude to this teaching and an explanation for how important it is to, 'go', Jesus tells the "parable of the lost sheep", one of Jesus most famous stories. In this parable Jesus outlines that like a shepherd who has 100 sheep, but one goes missing, God's heart is to pursue anyone who wanders and become separated from him *and* his people. With this story as a backdrop, Jesus makes it clear that we are to do likewise! When there is conflict, separation, or even just a wandering, we are to pursue that person. The goal Jesus has for us isn't to simply "call them out" on their sin, but to "call them back in" to relationship and family.

The last sentence in this passage, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" is critical to understanding why this should matter to us. This passage is usually quoted with a focus on an expectation that Jesus' presence is promised wherever "two or more" Christians gather. However, the context encourages us to remember how important it is for him to have *all* his "sheep" living together in harmony.

If our focus is merely expecting Jesus to be with *us*, we have missed the point. If Jesus is present wherever two or more are gathered, then we shouldn't want anyone to miss out! Rather, Jesus is calling our focus to those who are *not* present with us due to our unwillingness to restore our relationship with them. Furthermore, Jesus may even be hinting that if you value your own experience of me without sharing my heart for the "lost sheep" who are separated from you, then you may not know me as well as you think!

Like a shepherd who has lost one of his precious sheep, Jesus calls us to, "*Go now! Lay out the fault that you may be restored as family. Remember, they are missing out on not just relationship with you, but time with you in my presence*". In short, don't keep the beauty and power of Christian community to yourself. Jesus came for us all and desires us all to be *together* as one.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 18:15-20 *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault..."*

Day 2: Galatians 6:1 *"...if anyone is caught in any transgression..."*

Day 3: Luke 15:1-7 *"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."*

Day 4: Luke 17:20-21 *"...behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."*

Day 5: Proverbs 19 *"...it is his glory to overlook an offence..."*

Day 6: John 17 *"...that they may be one even as we are one,..."*

Day 7: Ephesians 4:1-6 *"...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What kind of offences do friends/family separate over?*
- *What stops us from restoring these relationships?*
- *Does Jesus' presence amongst his people motivate us to repair?*

Part 4: God's Mission for You

Seek first the kingdom of God

Read Matthew 6:25-34

*²⁵ But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.***

Have you ever had a friend who fell “head-over-heels-in-love”? They suddenly seem to have a “skip in their step” and a permanent smile on their face. This is because they are completely focused upon the pursuit of intimacy with their new flame. The world could be falling apart and they’d barely notice!

This single-minded focus that overpowers all other concerns is similar to the life that Jesus calls us to. Instead of a life of worry about our personal needs and desires (which God promises to meet), Jesus calls us to direct all our attention, energy and emotion towards the pursuit of God’s desires for ourselves and the world around us. We often fail to respond to this call because we accept the myth that worry and self-interest will benefit us.

This is a lie.

In fact, it’s only when we entrust our own “kingdom” to God and focus on his kingdom that our life is transformed into what we always hoped it could. In Romans the Apostle Paul sums up the difference between these two kingdoms: “For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink [our daily concerns], but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17).

The path to experiencing this Kingdom is to recognise that we are easily occupied with our own kingdom. While it’s not uncommon for a Christian to declare, “I love God with all my heart”, it’s quite common to find their daily and weekly priorities full of activities that exclusively build their own kingdom.

Are your “ToDo lists”, schedules, calendars and habits building your, or God’s, Kingdom? Are there any activities that you could add to your days or weeks that would enable you to best be “living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”?

Why not take a few moments to write down two separate lists. Focus the first list on ideas that would help you prioritise God’s kingdom over yours. In your second list, focus on regular activities that you could potentially eliminate from your week in order to focus on the activities in your first list. Ask God for wisdom to know how to embrace your new schedule that seeks to put God first in how you spend your time and energy.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 6:25-34 *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..."*

Day 2: Matthew 13:44-46 *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field..."*

Day 3: Luke 13:18-20 *"What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?"*

Day 4: Romans 12:1-2 *"I appeal to you...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice..."*

Day 5: Romans 12:3-8 *"Having gifts that differ...let us use them..."*

Day 6: Titus 2:11-14 *"...who have believed in God may...devote themselves to good works."*

Day 7: Joshua 24:14-24 *"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What activities in your week that is primarily about prioritising your own, small kingdom?*
- *Write a list of activities that prioritise God's kingdom over yours.*
- *As a **part** of a response to Romans 12:1-2, determine what activities on your first list you can eliminate, or alter, so that your can give more time to the second list.*

Be wise as serpents, innocent as doves

Read Matthew 10:16 -25

¹⁶ **"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."**

It's been said that Christians can sometimes be so *heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use*.

On one hand this can leave to naivety, neglecting to take life's dangers and challenges seriously. This could lead to unnecessary suffering for both ourselves and those around us. Conversely, throughout history some Christians have felt so emboldened that they "have the truth" and "God is for us" that they sin by dethroning God and acting in the role of judge, jury and executioner in all areas of life. Knowing our capacity for both naivety and harm, Jesus calls us to learn to *slither* in wisdom and *glide* in innocence.

We must learn to *slither* because not everyone around us is as well-meaning as we like to assume. Thus, while we courageously live lives marked by love, we are nonetheless to use every bit of wisdom, skill and strength we have available to protect ourselves and those around us. This includes a strategic and circumspect approach to our relationships, business, finances, family and mission.

However, while we are to take on the "wisdom of the serpent", Jesus does not expect us to harm or intimidate those who oppose us. There are many people in this world who react with venom to any opponent. However, as we slither *through* obstacles and around opposition, at no time are we to be found guilty of malice in our heart or harm with our hands. We are to glide over even the most challenging of circumstances as innocently as a dove.

We see this perfectly illustrated in both the life and death of Jesus. He navigated many complex social and theological challenges with incredible wisdom and yet never took advantage of these opportunities to harm anyone. Rather, we are to draw people to their best future - one united with their heavenly father.

Likewise, may we be willing to find a way to *slither* through conflict, traps and temptations while remaining committed to learning to glide over attack, judgement or criticism. Let's not be naive and sinful, but wise and innocent. Let's learn to slither and glide just like Jesus.

Is there a situation in which you need to ask God for wisdom and innocence?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 10:16-23 "*...be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*"

Day 2: Romans 16:17-19 "*...watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles...*"

Day 3: Ephesians 5:8-20 "*...making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*"

Day 4: Colossians 4:2-6 "*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,...*"

Day 5: James 3:13-18 "*...righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*"

Day 6: 1 Peter 2:11-17 "*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable,...*"

Day 7: Titus 2:7-8 "*...having nothing evil to say about us.*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Describe a person who has suffered due to their aggressive behaviour or foolish decisions.
- Is there a situation in which you need to ask God for wisdom and innocence?

Shepherd other followers of Jesus

Read John 21:15-19

*"¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "**Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."**"*

Some of humanity's greatest stories immortalise the significance of someone's *last words*. In the gospel of John we read Jesus' direct, even bold, *last words* to Peter who was the first leader of the fledgling family we now call Christians.

After establishing that their relationship is founded upon love, Jesus directs Peter to "feed My lambs" and "tend my sheep" as an expression of this love. Though not always glamorous or popular, this role as a shepherding, servant leader is the pre-eminent model for Jesus' church throughout history.

The earnestness with which Jesus instructed His friend shows that this role is incredibly significant in His mind. Jesus' command also indicates a simple, uncomfortable principle for even the most mature of His followers - every one of Jesus' sheep needs a shepherd! Despite the strengths within each of us, we are prone to wander and in need of a human shepherd to constantly guide us back to Jesus' path. Even in seasons where we are surrounded by a "great bunch of Christian friends", we often still need someone to guide us in critical moments when we're vulnerable to prey, sickness or wandering!

We even see this in the lives of modern Christian leaders, reminding us that not only do sheep need a shepherd, but that every shepherd is also a sheep. Despite 2,000 years of Christian learnings, every pastor in today's churches also needs to be pastored if they are to stay healthy. Every mature man or woman needs another man or woman to lovingly guide them to a life and faith that nourishes them as Jesus promised it would.

So, pause for a moment and reflect on whether or not you have a shepherd in your life? If you have that sorted, then you can then start to ask God, "God, are there any sheep around me that You are calling me to humbly shepherd?"

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: John 21:15-19 *"Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said...,"Tend my sheep."*

Day 2: Galatians 6:1-10 *"...you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."*

Day 3: 1 Peter 5:1-5 *"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders."*

Day 4: Hebrews 10:19-25 *"...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good..."*

Day 5: John 10:1-18 *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life..."*

Day 6: Acts 20:25-31 *"...care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."*

Day 7: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21; 11:1 *"...you do not have many fathers...Be imitators of me..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Has anyone ever "shepherded" you in a healthy way? If not, who could do that for you? Ideally, this person would be in a church that you are also a part of.*
- *Is there anyone in your life that God may want you to help guide in their own life and faith?*

Ask God to send people on mission

Read Matthew 9:35-38

"³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Every harvest season in regional Australia there is more fruit and vegetables ready to be picked than there are workers to pick it. While there are plenty of city-dwellers who are unemployed or experiencing financial strain, few venture out to reap the benefits of the annual harvest.

Likewise, there are entire Christian industries dedicated to promoting the 'ripe' opportunities to share the message of Jesus with entire people groups who have never heard the good news of his love. Unfortunately, there are many Christians seeking a purpose for their life who never consider the invitation of Jesus to be sent out into this huge 'harvest'.

There may be many reasons for this disconnect between our desire to make an impact in life and the opportunities that are available to us, but one of them is motivation. Jesus makes it clear that his motivation for the mission he is sending us on is compassion (verse 36).

While many well-intentioned Christians seek meaningful work or a way to "make an impact" and "leave a legacy", Jesus' compassionate intent is a primal instinct to protect, empower and guide "sheep without a shepherd".

How do we cultivate this kind of compassion which compels us to "go"? It's by learning to see people like Jesus saw them. It's by encountering the heart of God for people just like us around the world. While we were *once* lost, there are billions of people who are *still* lost. What does it mean to you to have been found by God? How much joy would it bring you if they likewise were *found* by God?

If God isn't sending you out, would you pray that those he has called will go. For the sake of the harassed and helpless sheep who are still without the Shepherd.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 9:35-38 "...pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers..."

Day 2: Acts 13:1-3 "...after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent..."

Day 3: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 "pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead..."

Day 4: Acts 4:1-31 "...filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God."

Day 5: John 17:20-26 "...but also for those who will believe in me through their word..."

Day 6: Matthew 28:16-20 "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Day 7: Isaiah 6:8 "...who will go for us?...Here I am! Send me."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What does it mean to you to have been found by God?*
- *Is God sending you out to help 'find' others? If yes, pray for courage. If no, would you pray that those he has called will go?*

Lead by being a servant

Read Matthew 20:20-28

“²⁶ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Social media has highlighted something inherent within humans throughout history - many of us enjoy the spotlight and the power that comes with it! Despite the incredible challenges and sacrifices any leader must make, people of every generation throughout recorded history seem to have an inbuilt desire to be seen as “great” amongst their peers.

Even in churches and Christian conferences it’s all-too-common to see heroes fashioned out of self-made millionaires, authors and CEO’s. The message seems to be that every man, woman, boy and girl should aspire to be an executive, thought leader or “influencer”.

However, the reality is that this style of leadership is not going to be suitable for the breadth of personalities, skills and interests that we all have. Furthermore, if everyone of us is a leader/boss/business owner then who is left to follow, manage or do the essential work!

The good news is that Jesus offers a type of leadership that every single one of us is capable of excelling in - servant leadership. This is a type of leadership that operates in a completely unique manner.

Jesus describes to his closest followers that the leadership they sought was one which *exercised authority over* others. However, Jesus was introducing them to a leadership style that *exercised humility alongside* others. This was not a belittling of our own selves, but an elevation of others. While our natural instinct is to climb up the corporate ladder, Jesus firmly believed, taught and modelled that to be considered a “hero” in His kingdom required that we *lift others up*. Christian leaders should not prioritise overcoming competitors or colleagues but to compassionately serve those who need it most.

Finally, we can be assured of the power of this counter-cultural leadership mindset when we see the outcomes. Jesus-like leadership has Jesus-like outcomes. When we lead spiritually we see spiritual fruit. Love abounds, joy increases and peace reigns. This is the fruit we need in the church today. This is the fruit we need in construction, family, business, education, health and every other marketplace. This fruit is the kind that comes from the servant leadership modelled to us perfectly by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Who is the greatest servant leader you have known? In what way could you lead others by serving them?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 20:20-27 *"Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant..."*

Day 2: John 13:1-17 *"...he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet..."*

Day 3: Philippians 2:1-11 *"Jesus...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,"*

Day 4: Luke 24:22-27 *"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things...?"*

Day 5: 1 Peter 5:1-11 *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God..."*

Day 6: Mark 10:35-45 *"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant..."*

Day 7: Acts 20:17-38 *"...care for the church of God, which he obtained with his blood."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Who is the greatest servant leader you have known?*
- *In what way could you lead others by serving them?*

Choose the narrow way

Read Matthew 7:12-14

¹³ **Enter by the narrow gate.** *For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.* ¹⁴ *For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Every day, millions of people who live close to their place of work or study drive or take public transport to and from work instead of walking. While this is *the path of least resistance*, it's not necessarily the best path. If more of us simply chose to walk 30-mins a day to/from work both society and our own lives would be completely transformed.

Likewise, we would think that the clarity and contrast that the message of Jesus provides us would make it "obvious" to everyone that choosing his narrow path is by far the best decision. However, experience tells us otherwise. We are all prone to choose *the path of least resistance*, especially in spiritual terms.

If the benefits to the narrow path are so great and the consequences of the wide so dire, why do people turn a blind eye to God's path? While some may say they are weary or discouraged and in need of respite, for others the rejection of God's path is because our lives are actually too easy.

We often imagine it's in the tough times that people choose the easy way to relieve themselves of their burdens. However, it's often the easy times when we choose the easy way because of our unwillingness to give up our ease! In contrast, many people in a particularly challenging season are led to pursue God's difficult, "narrow" path since (a) life is already tough and (b) their suffering has gifted them with clarity of mind and a perspective that sees life as fragile and death as imminent.

This clarity contrasts with the fog of a life of leisure that the world encourages us to pursue. It's from this foggy life of ease, shortsightedness and naivety that Jesus is calling us back from!

Is there a way in which you have chosen, or are choosing the wide path? What would you have to risk if you chose the narrow path of Jesus?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate..."

Day 2: Romans 8:31-39 *"If God is for us, who can be[a] against us?"*

Day 3: Hebrews 11 *"And without faith it is impossible to please him,..."*

Day 4: Philippians 3:4-14 *"For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things..."*

Day 5: Hebrews 10:19-25 *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,..."*

Day 6: John 14:1-14 *"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.""*

Day 7: Habakkuk 3:17-19 *"...the fig tree should not blossom...yet I will rejoice in the Lord;"*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Is there a way in which you have chosen, or are choosing the wide path?*
- *What would you have to risk if you chose the narrow path of Jesus?*

Remember me in the Lords' Supper

Read Luke 22:14-23

*"¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "**This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.**" ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

There have been innumerable movies in which one of the pivotal scenes includes two lovers or friends saying their final goodbyes and exchanging keepsakes declaring they'll "always remember" each other. Likewise, Jesus asked his friends and followers to 'remember' him via a keepsake, a gift that we call "Communion" or the "Lord's Supper". This simple meal involves bread (or a wafer/biscuit) and wine (or juice) representing his body and blood given in our place on the cross.

This request that we 'remember' him could be easy to dismiss as a sweet but unnecessary nostalgia. However, spouses, family members and friends constantly find that we forget birthdays, anniversaries, shopping lists and promises on a regular basis! Humans may be creatures of habit, but we also seem to be creatures who all too easily forget even the most important things!

It's precisely because of the fact that we are naive to our tendency to forget that this easy-to-ignore command is critical to the life and faith of all of Jesus' followers!

As a gift from Jesus, this memory involves our whole being - our head, our heart and our hands. Communion reminds of the historical fact of his sacrifice. Communion reminds us of the love for us that kept him on the cross. Communion reminds us that the life of love that he is calling us to is nothing that he hasn't also lived himself!

Just like when friends are separated by great distances for years or even decades at a time, we treasure their memory not just because we treasure the past, but because we anticipate the time when we will be reunited with them! Similarly, the simple meal that Jesus invites us to participate in together has an orientation towards the future. It reminds us that one day we will be present together with Jesus in a more intimate and tangible way.

Certainly this future is one worth reminding ourselves of! Jesus' insistence upon us remembering him implies that we are also treasured by him. It seems that he too anticipates the day when *he* gets to be with *us*.

What does the Lord's Supper mean to you? If you don't regularly share the Lord's Supper with others, who could you share it with more regularly?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 22:7-38 *"This is my body...given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

Day 2: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 *"...is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me"*

Day 3: 1 Corinthians 10:14-31 *"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body..."*

Day 4: John 6:35-40 *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger..."*

Day 5: Hebrews 9:1-28 *"how much more will the blood of Christ...purify our conscience..."*

Day 6: Romans 8:1-4 *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ..."*

Day 7: Revelation 19:6-9 *"Blessed are those who are called to the...supper of the Lamb!"*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Why would Jesus want us to remember him via this simple meal?*
- *What does the Lord's Supper mean to you?*

Make God's house a place of prayer not profit

Read Mark 11:15-19; 24-25

*"¹⁷ And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, '**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations**'? But you have made it a den of robbers."*

When people visit your house, how do they describe it? The "tidy" house, "crazy" house or "fun" house? Every house, family or group can be defined by the atmosphere someone experiences when they visit.

Jesus had a confrontational encounter in a Jewish temple ("My house") that was supposedly dedicated to the worship of God. It only took a moment to realise hypocrisy was at large and rather than being a place of worship it had become a place where profit was made by charging pilgrims dishonest amounts for the necessary sacrifices for worship.

One of the underlying disgraces of such behaviour is not just a misuse of a building, but an ignorance of the power of God's presence. Since the temple was a place where God's presence was said to dwell, hijacking the temple for profit was a direct rebellion against God himself.

In the twenty-first century Christians don't have physical temples because Jesus teaches us that God's Holy Spirit dwells within us, His family - His church. As a family whose 'house' hosts the presence of God we are to be conscious that this gift of God's presence is meant to lead us to be a community of "prayer for all nations". This is not just a case of praying prayers and asking for miracles but is a divine request that the presence of God within us might be made available to every tribe, nation and race through faith in Jesus.

It's unsurprising that followers of Jesus should be focused on praying for others to come to know Him. That's why He came. That's what He has called us to. To share the presence of God that we've been gifted with!

Have you acknowledged that the presence of God is dwelling within you? Have you taken seriously the call to pray, especially with other believers, for those who are yet to experience that privilege?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Mark 11:12-18 *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations."*

Day 2: Luke 11:1-13 *"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

Day 3: Acts 2:42-47 *"...they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...and the prayers..."*

Day 4: Acts 3:1-10 *"Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer,..."*

Day 5: Acts 4:23-31 *"...when they had prayed, the place...was shaken,..."*

Day 6: Acts 12:1-19 *"So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made..."*

Day 7: Acts 16:13-15 *"...to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Have you acknowledged that the presence of God is dwelling within you?*
- *Have you taken seriously the call to pray, especially with other believers, for those who are yet to experience that privilege?*

Beware of false prophets

Read Matthew 7:15-23

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves...²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Jesus doesn't give too many warnings, so when he does, we need to listen! This warning isn't of any person who claims to speak on behalf of God, but of people who *claim* to speak on behalf of God but are *intentionally fabricating their 'prophecies'* in order to devour others! Jesus offers some practical help in identifying the false prophets by contrasting the difference between those we should listen to and those whose words we should reject entirely.

Firstly, Jesus warns us against listening to people who verbally claim to follow him but do not live out the will of his (and our) heavenly father. Jesus both models obedience to our father and also teaches that all true followers of him doesn't just speak well of Jesus, but similarly lives their life in obedience to their heavenly father.

Secondly, Jesus warns us against anyone who claims to obey God, but doesn't actually *know* him as their father. Rather than doing *God's will* in God's name, false prophets do *their will* in God's name. This comes from them not actually knowing God personally. If they did, they wouldn't possibly waste time on their own passions at the expense of God's people. Jesus emphasises his warning by declaring that these people aren't only dangerous, but they are not in his kingdom at all. Rather, they are living in the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus is so confident of the intentions of false prophets that he calls them 'ravenous wolves'. This is not just for effect. Rather, Jesus says they're like a wolf who kills one sheep to take on its appearance so that it can ravenously attract and devour more sheep! Jesus isn't aiming to shelter you from new ideas, but from wolves who mimic Jesus in order to destroy his followers.

To protect yourself you don't need to look for wolves around every corner. Rather, look for leaders who not only obey Jesus in both the great and small parts of life, but who lead *you* to do the same. Furthermore, godly men and women like this not only draw you to "do the will of your Father who is in heaven" but to truly "know" him personally. This is because true sheep love their shepherd. The more time you spend being led by people like this and the more you get to *know* Jesus, and our heavenly father, the less likely you are to be tempted by the bait wolves set in order to devour you. Take time right now to think of a leader you can follow, know and emulate in order that you may be led closer to, not further from, God himself.

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matt 7:15-23 "**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing...**"

Day 2: 1 John 4:1 "Beloved,...*test the spirits to see whether they are from God...*"

Day 3: Acts 17:10-12 "...*examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*"

Day 4: 2 Peter 1:16-21 "*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man...*"

Day 5: 1 Corinthians 11:1 "*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*"

Day 6: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; "*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach...*"

Day 7: Titus 1:5-16 "...*there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers...*"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *How have you identified false prophets/leaders in your life in the past?*
- *What kind of leaders can you more closely align yourself with?*

Beware of false teaching + religion

Read Matthew 16:5-12

*"5 When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 Jesus said to them, "**Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"...11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Have you ever felt like your faith wasn't quite as strong as someone else's faith? Or your spiritual knowledge was trailing behind what others seem to possess? While a follower of Jesus should desire a fruitful, growing spiritual life, Jesus warns us that there is a vulnerability on this journey. Just like a false prophet can lead us far away from a life of relationship with God, a constant desire for "something more", can lead us to false teachings or religious practices that can be just as devastating!

After witnessing Jesus' miraculous provision of food for 4,000 and then 5,000 (Matthew 14 and 15), the disciples seemed anxious, "We have no bread...again! Maybe it's *our* time to provide the bread? Is Jesus comparing us to other, corrupt, religious leaders?" However, Jesus makes it clear that they've misunderstood him (verses 9-12). He isn't expecting *them* to miraculously provide bread or "do better" next time by planning ahead, but to realise that only *he* can truly meet all their needs. Jesus wants to ensure that they never overlook his "bread" (truth) for the damaging teaching of their other religious leaders. Even a morsel of their "leaven" (so-called truth) would infect and dilute the truth Jesus offers.

We'd all imagine that if we were one of his disciples, his miracles would have led us to trust in him. However, history tells a different story. Our tendency to 'add' to God's truth goes back to Eden, where Eve first added, "Do not touch it", to God's law about the forbidden fruit. Like Eve, when we find ourselves in a season where we feel we need to perform morally or spiritually, we are vulnerable to pursuing additional, novel teaching or practices that give us the sense that we have "arrived" spiritually.

If faith was a man-made process like baking bread, then yes, you need to add ingredients to make the dough work. However, if a life of faith is found entirely in Jesus and his teachings, then it's not that you don't *need* to add anything, but that if you *do* add anything, you *infect* the whole batch!

To any of us who feel the need to manufacture or pursue additional teaching, Jesus warns us, "Don't add anything to my teaching! If you do, you'll become like them, not me!" Jesus' warning is thus more about us than the heresies around us. If we stop trusting in Jesus and the purity of his teaching, we grow an appetite for other teachers and teachings that only provide a false satisfaction. Remind yourself that **there is no substitute for Jesus.**

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 16:5-12 "...beware of...the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees"

Day 2: Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39 "...Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"

Day 3: 1 Corinthians 2:2 "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ..."

Day 4: Galatians 3:1-9 "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by...faith?"

Day 5: Romans 2:8-9 "it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Day 6: Romans 1:16-18 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God..."

Day 7: John 14:25-29, 16:7-11 "the Helper, the Holy Spirit...he will teach you all things"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- Do you feel like your faith in Christ is or is not "enough"?
- In what circumstances are you tempted to substitute faith in Jesus for faith in someone or something else?

Be prepared for my return

Read Matthew 24:36-51

*“⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ **Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**”*

Modern Christians tend to focus on Jesus' entry into the world as a baby more than they do his promise to return as King. While Christmas is truly worth celebrating and a great time to share his message, Jesus himself calls us to ensure that we are 'ready' for his return. Given how adamant he is, it's worth considering, "Exactly how do I get 'ready'?"

While we tend to think preparation involves learning, via courses or books, if we read around Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Jesus gives us a few clues to getting ready.

Firstly, we are to be "awake" and "ready" for Him to return *at any time*, given that no one knows the day or hour to expect him. Secondly, this state of readiness is characterised by action, not idleness. In Matthew 24 and 25 this action seems to be a matter of fulfilling the roles and tasks that God has called us to do in our own lives and to faithfully become the kinds of people that mirror the life and love of Jesus.

In a very simple way, this is like a parent asking their children to clean their room at the end of each day. "OK Guys, I'm going to cook dinner and when I come back I want everything to be perfectly in order!" Anyone who has made that request knows that the issue isn't that the average child will simply refuse to do their job but is most likely to either fight with a sibling or just get distracted!

Like children, we need a reminder to "stay on target and stop mucking around!" We are easily distracted from not just our calling in life but also our identity - followers of Jesus called to live lives marked by love! So let's be "ready" for Jesus' return by doing the things, and being the people that, he has called us to!

What are you confident that God has called you to do? How can you more clearly reflect a heart of love for God and others as you await Jesus' return?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 24:36-51 *"...for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Day 2: Luke 12:35-40 *"Stay dressed for action[a] and keep your lamps burning,"*

Day 3: Titus 2:11-15 *"waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of...Jesus Christ"*

Day 4: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 *"we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling..."*

Day 5: Mark 13:32-36 *"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows..."*

Day 6: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 *"we have a building from God, a house not made with hands..."*

Day 7: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:28 *"...the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *What do you think about Jesus' claim to 'come again' to earth?*
- *How can you more clearly reflect a heart of love for God and others as you await Jesus' return?*

Lay up treasures in heaven

Read Matthew 6:19-24

*"¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"*

Have you ever visited a new friend and been given "the tour" of their house? It's not usually a way of showing off, but often a way of vulnerably sharing their life with you.

Often the tour involves one special thing that your host is particularly proud of. It could be a car in a garage, a beautifully-manicured lawn, a high school sports trophy, a new TV, a piece of art or simply their favourite book. Oftentimes this moment of pride is them revealing their most treasured possession to you. It's the item that has really captured their heart.

While Jesus isn't against cars, gardening, sports, technology, art or books, he is calling us to a perspective that puts each of these things in the shadow of heaven's greater glory. Whereas every one of these items will either fade or fail, heaven's treasures - faith, love, hope, salvation and more - are ours not just for life but for eternity!

In fact the focus isn't about our treasures as much as it is about our hearts and their appetite for God. In 2 Chronicles 16:9 we read, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him."

Jesus seems to be echoing God's desire to give his strongest support to those whose hearts are blameless towards him! In other words, the more our hearts deeply desire God and his rewards, the more he is able to fuel us to accomplish his purposes in this world.

Are there any 'treasures' in your life that have captured your heart over-and-above God? Are there heavenly treasures that you need to grow an appetite for?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 6:19-24 *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Day 2: 1 Timothy 6:3-20 *"we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything..."*

Day 3: 1 Peter 1:3-25 *"...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading..."*

Day 4: Colossians 3:1-17 *"...have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above..."*

Day 5: Philippians 3:12-21 *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior..."*

Day 6: Luke 12:22-34 *"Instead, seek his[c] kingdom, and these things will be added to you."*

Day 7: 2 Chronicles 16:9 *"...the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth..."*

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *Are there any 'treasures' in your life that have captured your heart over-and-above God?*
- *Are there heavenly treasures that you need to grow an appetite for?*

Go, make, baptise and teach disciples

Read Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:15

“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

When someone leaves this earth after a full life, we often say that they have left a good “legacy”. Right before Jesus ascended into heaven he left more than a legacy, He left a directive that would transform history and eternity.

The directive, often called ‘the Great Commission’ is roughly in a few parts: “go” and “make disciples” by “baptising them” and “teaching them” to obey all His commands. In reality this is simply a mirroring of what Jesus had done for His followers.

He had literally come down from heaven to find people who were looking for him. As people responded to his gospel message and invitation to, “come, follow me”, he baptised them (though Jesus didn’t baptise himself, he had his disciples do it. See John 4:1-2) and taught them to obey all that the Father had commanded him to teach.

Each of Jesus’ followers are called to not only follow Jesus personally, but to follow his example by giving the same invitation to every person, in every nation, on every continent, throughout the entire world. As we find people who want to become disciples (followers) of Jesus, we are to initiate them into their new life by baptism and continue to teach them how to live like him in every way we know how!

It’s sobering to realise that this rag-tag band of followers were not Ivy-league elites, but regular people. It’s not only bewildering that Jesus believed that they were capable of fulfilling his directive, but also that **he likewise trusts regular people like you and I as well.**

So rather than focusing on the enormity of the *task* He has given to us, I encourage you to reflect upon the enormity of the *trust* He has placed in us. This kind of divine trust doesn’t just provide a sense of security but is meant to provide the kind of courage that propels us out of our limitations, comfort zones and habits into a future where we find ways to help others find and follow Jesus just like us.

How do you feel knowing that God trusts you to fulfil his mission? What difference does it make to know Jesus has promised to be present with you wherever you go?

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Matthew 28:1-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

Day 2: Romans 10:1-15 "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"

Day 3: Matthew 4:18-25 "...he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Day 4: John 15 "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you..."

Day 5: Luke 10:1-24 "And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.""

Day 6: John 4:1-38 "...I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."

Day 7: Luke 24:46-47 "...the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed...to all nations..."

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *How do you feel knowing that God trusts you to fulfil his mission?*
- *What difference does it make to know Jesus has promised to be present with you wherever you go?*

Receive God's power for mission

Read Luke 24:36-53

*"⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ **And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.**"*

It's remarkable that the ragged bunch of individuals who first followed Jesus had any impact upon the world at all. They were ordinary, competitive and sometimes even downright selfish.

Unsurprisingly, Jesus taught that their success in taking His "good news" beyond their homeland was not reliant upon their own strengths, skill sets, personalities or unique strategies. Rather, Jesus guided them to seek the power of God's Holy Spirit.

As with all of the teachings of Jesus, He never calls people to something that He has not pursued himself. His command to wait to receive God's power was simply an invitation to receive the same power that He also possessed.

Even though Jesus was sent from heaven by our Father, it wasn't until after He was baptised that he became "full of the Holy Spirit...[and] led by the Spirit" and living "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:1,14). It wasn't until the Holy Spirit fully indwelt him that He began to publicly fulfil God's call upon his life. Likewise, if we are to do the *work of Jesus* then we need the *power of Jesus*. To fulfil the call God has for you, you need to be full of, led by and empowered with God's Holy Spirit just like Jesus!

This is not simply a nice idea. Rather, throughout history many people have had stories where they experienced a supernatural in-filling of God's Holy Spirit that transformed their life, faith and love forever. While this new life and power can come at the moment of salvation or even days, weeks or years later. When he comes, *you know it!*

If you cannot recall a season where you've been full of, led by or empowered by the Holy Spirit then ask for that today. Simply ask out loud for the Holy Spirit to fill you up. You might even want to repeatedly pray this simple phrase, "Come Holy Spirit".

Daily Rhythm

Pray

Centre your mind upon Jesus. Pray, "Come, Holy Spirit". Ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Read

Read God's Word each day. If possible, read it slowly, out loud more than once.

Day 1: Luke 24:1-53 "...stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Day 2: John 14:5-21 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper..."

Day 3: John 20:11-22 "...he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.""

Day 4: Acts 1:1-11 "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the end of the earth."

Day 5: Acts:2:1-21 "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..."

Day 6: Ephesians 3:14-21 "...grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit..."

Day 7: Luke 4:1-4 "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit...was led by the Spirit in the wilderness"

Obey

Ask yourself three simple questions, expecting God's Holy Spirit to guide you:

Head: Consider, "What stands out? What do I learn about God and people?"

Heart: Ask, "God, what are you saying to me today?"

Hands: Decide, "What am I going to do in response to what God is saying to me?"

Going Deeper

Engage more deeply in group discussion or personal reflection with the following questions.

- *If you've ever experienced a supernatural encounter with God's power, share it!*
- *Does knowing God's given his Holy Spirit to empower you on his mission change your approach?*
- *If you don't sense God's presence in and with you, what could your next step be?*

Forgiven, Filled and Following

We know from reading Jesus' words in the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that he expected those who *accepted his invitation to obey His commands*. However, right before Jesus offered His invitation, He had a profound baptism experience. In this moment we see clearly that the life He is calling us to is *far richer than simply improved behaviour*.

At his baptism God the Father spoke from Heaven in an audible voice and said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Along with that voice it's recorded that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove from Heaven and landed on Jesus. God's Holy Spirit then began to lead and empower Jesus in an entirely new way!

In this dawn of Jesus' public life we see three defining characteristics that continued right up until his sacrificial death on the cross: He had an intimate relationship with God the Father, He was empowered by God's Holy Spirit and He lived with a sense of passion and purpose.

This is the life that Jesus is inviting us into. Firstly, this life includes an intimate, loving relationship with God the father. A life where we are secure that we are dearly loved sons and daughters of God - we have a new identity marked by forgiveness and love rather than guilt and rejection.

Secondly, it's a life empowered by God's Holy Spirit. His Spirit is given not just to comfort and guide us, but to provide us with supernatural power to see God work miraculously in and through us. Jesus has no other plan for us than we experience the power and presence of God in our life just like Him!

Thirdly, just like Jesus we are called to live with clarity and purpose in this life. Fuelled by the love and power God gives us we are to follow Jesus into a life of sacrificial love for those around us.

As you continue to respond to Jesus' invitation to *follow* him, keep in mind that each one of his powerful challenges to our behaviour is actually a challenge to something deeper. His challenge is to live in a vibrant, intimate relationship with God the Father, to be fully empowered and led by God's Holy Spirit and to live with the same sense of calling and destiny that He did.

The question for you is, "Am I willing to go deeper?"

If so, then come, *follow Jesus* into life as it was designed to be.

Contact

To discuss Jesus, starting a church, or anything else that this resource has brought up for you, please contact me!

Dan Harding
dan@openroad.church
+61 402 301 568