



TheWay

A Discipleship Pathway

Abide in Christ

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Note: The final two lessons on, “History & the Gospel,” are extra lessons to be used by those who are interested in exploring the core message of the Christian faith for the first time or are newer to this faith. They can be done as part of Abide or not, at the discretion of each person or group.

Followers of the Way: A Discipleship Pathway

Why “The Way?”

“*You lost your way.*” Have you ever struggled to pinpoint your location, even if helped by GPS? Then you’ve lost your way. Or have you ever reached a place of severe overwhelm, or had this deep sense that ultimate fulfillment is unreachable? Then you’ve lost your way.

Perhaps you can admit, even reluctantly, that what you’re anchored to is not quite as steady as you hope or think. This illusion of stability could be seriously threatened with any series of battering waves or a massive tsunami of a job being threatened, serious illness, or the loss of a loved one. To add further difficulty to your life, there is a very real enemy of humanity who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. Have you experienced his attacks of darkness? You’ll learn more about his nasty work in the future.

Even those who are followers of Jesus can quickly, or over time, begin to wonder – where is the *abundant, overflowing life* that he spoke of? Churches have many disillusioned or disgruntled people, just surviving rather than thriving. Not surprising, many onlookers become skeptical of beginning the journey to follow Jesus. Then there is the call to be fruitful, for Jesus! Can it be said that the pruning is done in your life, that you are bearing the fruit that Jesus created you to bear?

Into this “less than” life you hear an invitation into something different – what the Bible calls the Way. This Way contains adventure and its own blueprints; after all, Jesus wants to build something majestic in your life. Since the Way centers around him, an infinitely loving, incredibly alive person, it offers something that doesn’t have to waste away or grow dull. It is also meant to be a vibrant, corporate experience and oh, how you need community!

The full title of this journey is: **Followers of The Way: A Discipleship Pathway**. Disciples are people who stick to a way of life, particular lens for the world or specific person’s teaching. Do not be intimidated by this, as everyone follows something, intentionally or not. How much better to instead explore and engage with the One who made you and knows how you thrive. Such a pathway is full of purpose and it is for those who are either exploring it for the first time, or brand new followers, or experienced travelers.

Finally, this pathway has been “field tested” by thousands of believers around the world and has been found completely trustworthy. Since it’s the Way of Jesus, who was involved in our creation, it will work everywhere.

“The Way” in the Bible



1. God absolutely loves showing people the way! He is a good father! Again, he wants us to thrive.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

2. Even those sent to oppose Jesus had this to say about him:

*So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." **Luke 20:21 (NIV)***

3. This is what Jesus said about himself. It is an absolute claim and he is the only one worthy to make it:

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." **John 14:6 (NIV)***

4. It is a Way that saves you in a very holistic way (as you will learn!). Emotions, the mind, your body, and your soul will be touched:

*This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." **Acts 16:17 (NIV)***

5. The Way is so life-altering and exhilarating that you're to share it with others:

*He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. **Acts 18:26 (NIV)***

6. Not everyone will love the Way of Jesus. But it is still worth it – like a treasure!:

*But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. **Acts 19:9 (NIV)***

7. The Way can impact every part of your life. This is a beautiful thing:

*For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. **1 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)***

8. The journey you're invited on points you to Jesus, over and over again. It is about him:

*I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. **1 Corinthians 7:35 (NIV)***

Further Encouragement

Are you busy? Do you wonder about the value of specific materials, such as these? Let us encourage you! As was just noted, it's all about Jesus! So indeed, it's not all about materials. However, being mentored through a pathway can lead a person directly to the feet of Jesus, WHERE they find life. That is, the life is not found in the pathway, but in encountering the One of who it was said, **John 1:4 (NIV)** *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.* The pathway simply gets us there again and again, carving out a trail in the midst of the distractions and challenges of life.

This discipleship pathway was developed through prayer, much study of the Bible and experience. It has been forged through much practice and thousands of hours of mentoring and discipleship, of both pastors and non-pastors around the globe.

It's like a blueprint. When you build a house or high-rise building, you need a blueprint to follow. You can't just start anywhere, like with the roof. You start by digging a foundation and then carefully building on that. This discipleship pathway has been designed with an order in mind. The first manual is Abide. The second manual is Grow Character. And there are more after that (i.e. Prayer & Fasting, Lead Well, the Grand Story)!

These first two, Abide and Grow Character, address the most common reasons why followers of the Way struggle. First, they forget that true life is found in being in a regular relationship with Jesus, through abiding in him – not through mere religious activity. Second, they don't understand how vital godly character is, and how they can partner with God to become more mature.

In the Abide lessons, we address things such as hearing God, journaling, quieting yourself before God, repentance, confession, our desperate need for the Bible and so on. These are the means by which you can abide or remain in Christ. In the Grow Character lessons, you'll learn that there are specific steps to take for character growth, and what God's role is in helping you become more like Jesus.

Will this all take time? Of course! However, it will both save time here on earth and increase your rewards for the place you will spend the most time BY FAR – eternity! As you become more fruitful and mature, you'll find it less time-consuming to navigate the challenges of life. Yes, you'll still have trouble! Jesus promised this (see **John 16:33**)! But you'll have less troubles from your own character flaws and have greater access to the wisdom and power of God. Wow! And as you increasingly honor God with your life, you'll be "storing up treasures in heaven" (see **Matthew 6:20**).

Getting Your Heart Ready

History and present experience have taught us that a certain *kind* of heart is ready to grow to become more like Jesus. The right "heart condition" is also prepared to be increasingly fruitful for his kingdom. We encourage you to invite God to get your heart ready for this pathway by praying for these qualities:

- 1) Humility – humility means being teachable. It means asking – "how can I engage with and grow from what I'm reading" – rather than focusing on what you might disagree with or how "advanced" you might be already. Humility isn't critical or quarrelsome.

What happens when you disagree? Hold your opinion loosely and allow the Holy Spirit to give you further discernment. Consider that you may be mistaken – is that possible? And if you're still convinced you're right, ask – is this worth missing out on further growth, through being distracted by and focused on disagreements? Humility also puts others' interests first. We strongly encourage you to work through this with others. A critical or prideful spirit can hinder the growth of others. This is a serious matter.

- 2) Desperation & Hunger - we're told in the Bible, **Romans 12:11 (NIV)** *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* Can we admit that we all could grow in this kind of zeal and service to the Lord. Are you personally hungry for this?
- 3) Perseverance & Discipline – anything that is worthwhile takes perseverance and discipline. Are you prepared to persevere in your walk with Jesus, giving it as much attention as anything else you've had to sacrifice for? Jesus said, **Luke 9:23 (NIV)** ... *whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*
- 4) Faith & Fear of the Lord – do you trust Jesus that he means what he says – that abundant life is found in him alone? Will you trust him and lean not on your own understanding? (see **Proverbs 3:5-6**) Will you trust also in his great love for you, and incredible grace? And will you respect the One who created you and is your Lord, by living the life he made you for? This life goes far beyond your own maturity, and includes the good deeds he created you for, which includes *actively discipling others.*

The apostle Paul provides us with powerful words, through the Holy Spirit. He says, **Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* So again, will we trust his grace and his plan for us, his handiwork? And will we honor him (which is a part of fearing the Lord), by doing the good works that he prepared long ago for us to do?

The Different Sections Explained

As you work through the different days, you'll notice that they're all structured the same way. The first part is always, "Renewing The Mind." You can be encouraged by the promise of Paul in Romans 12:2 that you'll be able to "test and approve what God's will is" when you are "transformed by the renewing of your mind." This section will really help you think well! And we always seek to base it on the Bible.

The second part is called, "For Your Journal." This is broken into three sections. "Reflecting and Reviewing" ensures that we don't simply rush on, but obey the command of Paul to Timothy in, **2 Timothy 2:7 (NIV)** *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all of this.* "Life Application" helps us take seriously the words of James, **James 1:22 (NIV)** **Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** This should be goal, as the Bible highlights that true love for God leads to obeying his commands. Finally, Bible reading helps us keep engaging with the Bible for ourselves, not just verses scattered through a book or lesson. Personal Bible reading and reading/hearing teaching on the Bible are BOTH important! Do not skip the Bible reading!

Abide 1 – Establish Time to Abide in Christ

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

A personal journey as disciples is completely dependent on something the Bible calls, “abiding.” Jesus said, **John 15:5-6 (NIV2011)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers ...*

Friend, Jesus desires that you really thrive! In this, you’re presented with a clear and intriguing choice – to bear much fruit or to be thrown away and wither.

Abiding in Jesus is the best way to get necessary “spiritual nutrients.” Do you want to be healthy inside, at peace and tasting joy? Though bodies will still break down at some point, getting healthy on the inside can also have benefits for one’s physical health.

What is the impact of abiding with Jesus?

Impact of Abiding in Jesus

First: we have a growing, close relationship with Jesus

Did you know that a central theme of the Bible is that God made you to be in a close, lively relationship with Jesus? Listen to this promise! **1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)** *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

Have you ever noticed that followers of Jesus use the word “fellowship?” This means to be in a profound relationship with Jesus. Sadly, many followers limit their fellowship to one another! Why not fellowship with Jesus, who is perfect in love, justice, mercy, etc.? Why not indeed!

God didn’t simply make people, place them in the universe he had just created, and then wind it up to spin on its own. No! That’s something called “deism.” Instead, here’s what happened:

- God was in fellowship with Adam and Eve, the first people (Genesis 3:8)
- Something called, “sin” (e.g. lying, disobedience, greed, sex outside of God’s boundaries) broke that fellowship, separating people from God (Genesis 3:9; Isaiah 59:2). Everyone can feel the impact today! For example, many never feel fully at rest!
- God then lovingly initiated a plan (Jesus!) by which people, including you, could once again come near for fellowship
- First, he drew near, introducing a sacrificial system which gave them limited access to him, as he lived among them from a distance in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:8)
- Second, God promised to draw near through a Son born to a virgin, who would name him Immanuel, meaning “God with us!” (Isaiah 7:14)
- Third, Jesus, the Word, became flesh and lived (tabernacled) among people (John 1:14)
- Fourth, when Jesus left he promised to send another helper to be with us (John 14:16-18)

- Fifth, Jesus promised that he would return to take us to be with him (John 14:1-3). The last book of the Bible, Revelation, gives us a picture of the final goal, **Revelation 21:3 (NIV)** *Now the dwelling of God is with human beings, and he will live with them. They will be his people and he will be with them and be their God.*

This is why God calls you and others into fellowship with him! As Paul said, **1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV)** *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* John said the same, **1 John 1:3 (NIV)** *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.*

Consider this verse: **Ephesians 2:13 (NIV)** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.* You can be near God! You can have fellowship with him! How? Like any relationship (i.e. marriage, parenting) - by means of communicating (prayer and listening prayer), while you're reading your Bibles, and while you go about the activities of your day! This is what you'll learn to do from lesson to lesson, either for the first time, or to deepen what you already have.

Second: we won't wither

The Bible says: **Psalms 19:7 (NIV)** *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.* It has always been God's goal for you to have life and to be revived regularly. Wow! When you're revived, you can endure under the most trying circumstances. On the other hand, if you don't feed on the Word you'll find yourself consumed by overwhelming stresses.

You can be sustained by Jesus' words to you: both his written Word (the Bible) as well as his ongoing words to you, often whispered to your soul. Here is a weighty verse – think about it carefully! **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)** *The Son (Jesus) is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining ALL THINGS by his powerful WORD.* Did you catch it? "All things" include you and I!

We're also told in the book of John by Jesus, **John 15:5-6 (NIV2011)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

Since we're free-willed humans, rather than robots, it's up to us to remain connected, as Jesus claimed above.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 2 ways that you can be impacted from abiding in Jesus?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. God invites you to fellowship with him! Take some time to reflect on this question – is your fellowship with Jesus increasing or decreasing? In your journal write down why or why not.
2. Can you think of a time in your life when you withered under pressure? Write it down.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 1.
2. Normally you will be asked to write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you. This can be difficult to do with Matthew 1! Please also read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in preparation for the Bible reading that you will be doing each day.
3. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 what is the Bible useful for?

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day 1 you considered two exciting impacts of abiding in Jesus: 1) a growing, close relationship with him 2) you won't wither. Today, you'll look at three more impacts!

God is so *rich* in blessings. He is good to those who follow his Way! In fact, some of the deepest longings that you've had in your life are "echoes" of your longings for what God offers.

Third: we have victory over temptation to sin

Wouldn't it be great to get victory over the habitual sins that you struggle with, day after day, month after month, and year after year? The Bible vividly describes what happens in your life, **James 1:14-15 (NIV2011)** ... *but each one is tempted when, by his own evil DESIRE, he is dragged away and enticed.* It is your desires that cause you to get dragged away. That is, the devil didn't make you do it! So how do you counter this? Is it even possible?

It's important to understand that the flesh in us desires sinful things. We're told, **2 Peter 2:10 (NIV2011)** *This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.* The flesh and its desires are always tugging and if you give in, sin will reign. HOWEVER, the fact that we have this flesh is no excuse before God because he has given us his Spirit, by whom we can overcome all tugs and temptations.

As Paul said, **Romans 6:14 (NIV)** *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.* You see, under grace, we have been given God's Spirit living right in us, by which we can put to death the misdeeds of the body, influenced by the desires of the flesh. Peter really expanded on this when he said, **2 Peter 1:3 (NIV)** *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

Did you pick up on where the power comes from? From knowing God. Another way of saying this is – we need to abide in Jesus! When you abide in Jesus, his Spirit starts taking control. It may sound mysterious, but this is how it happens. It's one of the ways that God proves his existence. Listen to how Paul describes it: **Galatians 5:16 (NIV2011)** *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.* Wow! You do not have to be angry, impatient, addicted, in slavery to anxiety, greedy, etc.

Therefore, Paul could say, **1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV2011)** ... *but when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* A way out because you abide in the Way! Praise God!

But there's more. Sinning can also give a foothold to demonic influence in our lives. Therefore, Paul could say, **Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)** *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* Perhaps in this case the devil attacks people through their emotions or by increasing the wrongful anger they're already feeling against others. Similarly, Paul mentioned "the breastplate of righteousness" (**Ephesians 6:14**). If we have areas of continuing sin in our lives, then we'll have gaps in our armor where we'll be vulnerable to demonic attack.

Again, the solution to this is to abide in Christ. We cannot defeat the enemy on our own, but with God's help, we can do all things consistent with godly living.

Fourth: we can grow in godly character

You are also invited in the Bible to not only avoid sin, but to become a totally new kind of person! Imagine being everything that God planned for you! In Colossians you can read, **Colossians 3:9-10 (NIV)** *Do not lie to each other, since you have put off your old self with its practice and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* It refers to an "old self," which is full of brokenness/problems. You're likely aware of this major issue inside of you.

But it doesn't stop there! You're called boldly forward to develop a, "new self." You're to be more like Jesus, or as Colossians puts it, in the image of your Creator. What a vision for your life! You're to be like the greatest person who has ever lived!

No one is like Jesus yet; so this applies to everyone. Here is an important question – *will even those who are "experts" as followers of the Way humbly admit this?* As you abide, you too grow in character.

Paul was also able to say this, **1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)** *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* It really helps to have people in your life who can show you what this looks like. This is why isolation from a church family can be so damaging!

Fifth: we become successful in our lives

The book of Proverbs is a part of what people often call the "wisdom literature" of the Bible. And do you ever need wisdom! It helps you be successful and isn't it amazing that God wants you to succeed? Listen to what one of its verses states, **Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)** *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.*

At least ten times in Ecclesiastes, another book of wisdom, the author Solomon introduced his thoughts with, "I saw (observed) such and such, and this is how it works." He made observations about:

- laziness vs. diligence; adultery vs. faithfulness; generosity vs. greed; integrity vs. dishonesty; harsh vs. gentle words; pride vs. humility; good vs. bad leaders; enemies vs. friends, rich vs. poor, present vs. eternity, youthfulness vs. aging, righteousness vs. wickedness, etc. What a list!

King Solomon said that though wisdom beckons people to take heed, it is often rejected, resulting in disaster, **Proverbs 1:26-27 (NIV)** *I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you-- when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.* However, those who welcome wisdom and understanding are saved from the results of reckless behaviour.

Therefore, a person who abides in Jesus and his words will be very wise and successful! Or as Proverbs also notes, **Proverbs 2:11-12 (NIV)** *Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse ...*

We're encouraged to be people desperate for wisdom and INTENTIONAL in gaining it. We're not to drift through life, hoping for good outcomes. Drifting will never lead you there. Never. Drifting ALWAYS takes you in the opposite direction. And you cannot depend solely on one Sunday sermon per week to do all this for you! You must also train yourself to abide. Once again, Solomon has wisdom on this matter, saying, **Proverbs 2:3-4 (NIV)** *If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure ...*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Write down 3 additional ways that a person is impacted by abiding in Jesus?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. When you abide with Christ your character will grow. Write in your journal where you have grown in the past couple years.
2. Record 1 or 2 specific temptations and sins that you struggle with regularly. Write out a prayer, confessing to God your struggle, while also asking him to help you walk with him in victory!
3. Memorize John 15:5-6. Memorizing can really impact your heart! You can do it!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Followers of Jesus & Devotions

There's a word that many followers of Jesus use – *devotions*. Devotions is giving time to Jesus, doing exactly what Days 1 and 2 encouraged – abiding in him. This is an actual relationship! And remember the five impacts of abiding in him. This will benefit you greatly!

How often should you spend time in devotions? Should you be focused during that time? Well, think of a marriage relationship! Should you talk and listen to each other daily? Would focus be important? Of course!

It's no different when you abide in Jesus. If you read the biographies of ordinary people who accomplished the significant things that God had in mind for them, they had this daily practice. Even some of them did so in prison! (often drawing on their memory)

Daily Devotions

Joshua 1:8 (ESV) *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* To “meditate” means to chew on. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the Hebrew word behind it is, “ruminate.” It’s what cows do when they chew their food. They actually swallow it, “bring it back up,” and then chew it some more – multiple times! This may sound gross, but it ensures they get maximum nutrients out of their food.

May you be a spiritual cow! Okay, maybe not the best image – but why not maximize your spiritual nutrients with daily devotions? Joshua said, “day and night.” If you read **Psalm 1:2** it says the same thing.

The Jewish people of the Old Testament were encouraged to engage in this activity as they went about their days, **Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NIV)** *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up ...* Notice that it says, “talk about them” – as it encouraged memorizing, rather than reading. And this talking happened all the time – at home, on a journey, in bed, and in the morning! We also know that Daniel and those like him prayed three times a day (see **Daniel 6:10**).

Do you need daily food for your body? For sure! You need it for you spirit and soul too! While physical fasting comes with benefits for your body, spiritual fasting DOES NOT bring benefits for your soul. You’ll notice (or should I say, those around you will notice!) that if you fast spiritually you will become irritable and cranky. And you’ll feel dull and empty. These are sure signs of fasting from Jesus!

Everyone needs a daily time when they get quiet to hear from Jesus – his words are life for a soul and spirit! They’ll strengthen you for the day much more than any protein drink or energy bar! How long should you spend?

If you’re starting at 15 minutes a day, a snack is better than nothing! But soon it will be time to move it on to 30 minutes, and so on. Some may reject this daily habit as “legalistic” or “too structured.” You will hear the word “legalism” used a lot to make excuses to avoid good things. So, what is the definition of legalism?

Legalism is when you rely on moral commands or wise guidelines to be made right with God, to be saved and go to heaven. The gospel, or good news, clearly teaches that no amount of moral goodness or wise living can save us. Perfection would be required, a perfection that no one but Jesus has. Therefore, daily devotions do not save a person! *Instead*, they help intentionally develop believers into the kind of follower of Jesus that the Bible calls one to become. Encouraging devotions then is wise, as long as we remember that we begin with a foundation of salvation by grace.

Put another way, is it legalism when a doctor says that his patient needs to change their lifestyle; or to take certain medications; or take some tests? Of course not! It’s to help you be as healthy and well as possible. It is the same with daily devotions.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Why do you need devotions every day (time abiding with Jesus)? Is this encouraged in the Bible?
3. Is having a daily devotional time legalistic? Write in your journal why or why not.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you do not already have a plan for daily devotions, please write one out:
 - a. Set a regular time to have your devotions
 - b. Set the amount of time to have your devotions
 - c. Set the location for your devotions
2. You looked at 5 ways that abiding in Christ impacts people. Find someone that you can share this with this week (they are found in Day 1 and 2). Put it in your schedule. It is important that you disciple others as you are being disciplined.
3. Review your memory verse from yesterday – John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:13-18.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Wisdom for Developing Daily Devotions

If you were to create a great and tasty meal, you would need to have good ingredients, effective preparation, the right mindset, and proper kitchen appliances and utensils. Isn't it true that those who rush through meal preparation and creation usually make a mess of it?

Great devotional times are no different. They require preparation, the right mindset, and some useful tools. Yes, it can take time to develop proper habits, but it is worth all of the effort. **2 Peter 1:5 (NIV)** *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to your goodness, knowledge ...* The Bible talks about all kinds of effort! Some have called such habits "doorways to transformation." They are not powerful by themselves, but create room for you to encounter the Powerful one!

What are some requirements for establishing a DAILY devotional life?

- A good Bible for reading and memorization. Find something that is readable for you! The NLT translation is quite simple. The next best option is the NIV. Finally, the ESV is a bit tougher, but still understood by most. You can ask someone who is discipling you for ideas
- A notebook or journal to jot things down. This can be on paper or through using electronic devices (be cautious about using devices that distract you)
- A personal prayer list – this is a record of things that you can pray for. Some will have this prayer list divided into different categories
- A quiet place in your home or elsewhere if needed (i.e. a local prayer room, or church). As family units, be willing to work with each other to create the space and time for devotions
- A specific time during the day

- An expectant spirit. You can even ask – is my heart open to tell Jesus all that is on my heart? Is my heart open to hear what he wants to say? Am I only trying to rush through this?

A Suggested Tool: SMORP

What is SMORP? It is an acronym that can give you guidance on what to do in your daily devotional time. Many have found it helpful, including experienced followers of Jesus such as pastors and seniors! Here's what it stands for:

Scripture – Refers to reading and memorizing **The Bible** (this word literally means “writings.” It is another word for the Bible)

Message – Refers to anything the Lord may be saying to you – the **Message** for the day (you will learn more about hearing God's voice)

Obedience – Refers to **Obeying** what God instructs you to do

Repentance – Refers to any sin that the Spirit prompts you to confess and **Repent** of (to repent means to turn from)

Prayer – Refers to your **Prayers** to God. This should always include praise!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What does SMORP stand for?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. What is the best meal that you have ever made? (or if not a cook – something else you created) Write down the preparation required, the “tools” you needed, and the steps you needed to take.
2. Have you ever prepared to really dig into the Bible? If yes, please explain what you did. If not, write out a prayer asking Jesus to help you on this journey.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 2:19-23.
2. In your journal, practice using SMORP with this passage. Don't rush it! If you can, invite someone (or multiple people) to do this with you – then compare what you received.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Setting Aside Other Times to Abide in Christ

First: establish daily time-outs

A disciple of Jesus is ready at all times to be LOVED by him, ENCOURAGED by him, RECEIVE HIS POWER, and to HEAR HIS VOICE. Again, all exciting relationships are like this! Daily devotions provide an

incredible foundation for each and every day. However, as you seek to abide, it can be essential to stop in the middle of a day, moving into a time of prayer. Jesus will be ready!

It can become almost automatic. You might not even realize that you're doing it – like breathing. Of course, it can take years to develop this “beautiful rhythm.” You're learning to “pray continually,” as it says in **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. But it starts by trying, even this very week. As many have discovered, when you stop to listen, God may not say anything to you immediately. However, you'll experience his presence! And that's just as good!

These can also be times to get your attention off of the things of earth and to intentionally think about Christ or heaven. Sometimes all that is needed is to become still and listen.

Other times these daily time-outs are for thanking Jesus or praising him. Even “baby” followers of Jesus can do this well! You'll be pleasantly surprised how life-giving this all can be.

Second: establish a weekly sabbath

Did you know that God established the Sabbath (Saturday) for the nation of Israel, as a one day per week “holiday?” In Deuteronomy you see, **Deuteronomy 5:12-14 (NIV)** *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work ...* Sabbath keeping was one of the ten commandments and the Bible has much to say about it. Particularly, it had two key parts:

- First, stopping from all labor – even for animals. It was a time of *physical rest*
- Second, it was a time to remember what God had done for them. It was a *spiritual rest*

The spirits of the Israelites and all current followers of the Way require “food” such as joy, peace, hope, and love from their Creator. The Sabbath was to be something that would benefit people; this was a gift to all. Jesus emphasized this: **Mark 2:27 (NIV)** *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

Clearly, the Sabbath was not intended to be some legalistic ritual and hardship, or a commandment that brought death, such as Paul refers to, **Romans 7:10-11 (NIV)** *I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.* This is why after the resurrection of Jesus, followers of the Way began shifting their day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, to match with the day of the week that Jesus rose.

From this, it's important to know that the Sabbath (Saturday) law is not a requirement for believers today. Here's what Paul stated, **Colossians 2:16 (NIV)** *Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.* Of course, this doesn't suddenly mean that God has changed his mind about how human beings function. It is still very wise!

In fact, it can be argued that in an increasingly stressed out world, where cities brag that they never go to sleep, we need this more than ever! Little wonder that many cultures are experiencing such spikes in mental and emotional issues. We're becoming emotionally and mentally weak because we're on a complete spirit-ual fast.

Therefore, may we step aside from our work and feed on the riches that are found in Jesus!

What can you do when you take a Sabbath?

A. Physical rest for a day

- Be careful not to become overly strict about this – there will be times when you face big challenges that require attention. There are seasons in life!
- Remember that recreation implies activity that: i) refreshes your body, ii) restores your mental state, and iii) renews your spiritual liveliness. Whatever drains these three would not be considered re-creational
- You need to be aware that much of today's modern entertainment/leisure does not re-create body, mind, or soul
- Even a simple change in pace or visiting someone or blessing someone can all be regarded as refreshing and good. Jesus demonstrated this by healing the sick and so on, during the Sabbath

B. Spiritual rest

- This is where you connect with Jesus, spending EXTRA time with him
- For couples it can be a great time to listen in prayer together about something and discuss it. If you simply cannot have a Sabbath together, then find another time when you can share what God has been showing each of you
- Can you pray about your job on a Sabbath? It's a personal choice, but the extended times can be very refreshing times. God can use these times to take job-related burdens from one's shoulders
- Caution: it's possible for you to draw boundaries so tightly around your Sabbaths that you ignore the genuine need of those in your circles of influence. Jesus counters this ... **Matthew 12:12 (NIV)** *Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath*

Third: establish an annual spiritual retreat

Life can be so busy even if you take time for daily devotions, daily time outs, and Sabbath. At times you may feel like you can never get ahead on developing your faith fully or on praying into your life and future. Or perhaps you're getting behind!

Why not build in annual retreat times to spend time with Jesus, hear from him, and to get his strategies for your life? Many people will spend incredible numbers of hours planning a vacation to be entertained, but few hours to take care of their soul, plan for building Jesus' kingdom, etc. It doesn't have to be weeks or even a week. How about three days? Or perhaps a couple three-day retreats per year – alone.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 3 other times that you can abide with Jesus – other than daily devotions in the morning? Write down what you can do during these times.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take a look at your normal schedule and routines. Can you see opportunities to take daily time outs? Perhaps schedule one during a workday to try it out.
2. Either alone, or with your spouse if married, reflect on this question in prayer – do you get enough physical rest and spiritual rest? Journal and pray about any adjustments that need to be made.
3. Review John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 3.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. You may be very experienced with prayer or brand new. It can be very powerful to write out a prayer! Write out a prayer to Jesus, expressing your heart to him – any problems, things you're grateful for, dreams, struggles, etc.
2. Try SMORP again using the well-known Psalm 23.

Abide 2 – Does God Speak Today?

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In Abide 1, Day 4, you briefly took a peek at a tool that many have found helpful in their daily devotions - the SMORP acronym. Today you'll focus on the "Message" piece of SMORP: hearing what God may be saying to you.

First, there's a really big word that needs to be introduced: *cessationism*. Don't skip this! May you be a *learner* – loving God with your mind. He is pleased by this! Think about that ... isn't this incredibly motivating, know that you are pleasing God as you discover new things and deepen your understanding on all truths? So read on.

Cessationism is the theory that God spoke only in the Bible and does not talk to his children directly anymore. Some cessationists (a name for people who hold this belief) also deny that there are still miracles today or certain gifts from God. This is a very sad and unfortunate belief. After all, how could anyone have a real relationship with their Father in heaven if they could only interact with him when they're reading their Bible? Would that be a good Father?

Cessationists regularly talk about the sufficiency of Scripture, by which they mean that God doesn't speak to his children additionally. But are they not then claiming to have the ability to always interpret Scripture correctly (infallibly) without the aid of the Spirit? This position has led them to believe that the best interpreters of God's revelation are the ones who have the best interpretive methods, most knowledge in the original biblical languages, and the historical backgrounds of the biblical period – the ones most intelligent and disciplined.

Imagine if a wife wrote her husband a letter and said, "well honey, that's all you will hear from me. When you need to make decisions, the letter won't cover everything. You'll just have to guess. You'll have to completely figure out the meaning of everything on your own. But the letter also tells you that I love you, so yeah, there's that!" That would be ridiculous! Would this be a lively, vibrant relationship?

Praise God that it's not this way at all. He still speaks TODAY. The Way of Jesus is one full of his powerful, yet gentle voice!

We Need to Hear God to Understand the Bible

It is silly that some still argue that God only speaks to people in the Bible, because the Bible itself teaches that God will speak directly to people through his Holy Spirit. As it states in John, **John 14:26 (NIV2011)** *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* You may not grasp this completely, but what an incredible reality that God gives you his Spirit to teach you what you need to know! And this includes helping you understand the Bible!

Many cultures worship intelligence and education. This is why some of the most "intelligent" people deny that God speaks to people today. Here is a profound reality – God hides his truth from those who have no

intent on obeying him in the first place. Listen to what John said, **John 7:17 (NIV)** *If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*

Do you want to know what God is saying? Be ready to obey! Think about this

Jesus, the Son, actually praised the Father for deliberately hiding knowledge from stubborn and prideful people. He said, **Luke 10:21 (NIV)** *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.* It pleases God to do it this way!

You need to become like a little child to hear the voice of God. This does not mean being immature. It means having a soft, trusting heart, ready to obey. Children love to ask questions, but they are also trusting of their parents early on. Will you be like this as well?

Then, consider what Jesus said to the religious scholars of his day, **John 5:39-40 (ESV)** *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* Where is life found? In the Bible? No, in Jesus! They were very smart and knowledgeable – but they were missing the life of Jesus!

Of course, you must avoid some possible misunderstandings. First, very intelligent people, scholars, “experts” – they too can hear God’s voice. Jesus greatly desires to generously favour everyone with the blessing of hearing his voice! However, the guidelines will be the same for them as anyone else – they will need to humble themselves and be ready to submit to Jesus, who is king. All stand equal before him.

Second, in future days you will see that this does not minimize the importance of the Bible in any way. Instead, what’s being established is that of course God speaks today – since one cannot even understand the Bible itself without the Holy Spirit’s help!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Can you fully understand the Bible simply through formal training and personal study? Write down what kind of heart and attitude you need to have instead.
3. What is cessationism? Write out a definition.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you have made the decision to follow Jesus, what happened in you that made you think or feel that you needed to do that? Journal what was going on in your heart and mind. (this was God speaking!)
2. Has there been a time when a Bible verse you read seemed to be directed at a particular situation or circumstance you were going through? Or a verse seemed to pop out at you? (this was God speaking!)

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:1-11.

2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

The Bible Itself Says That God Is Still Speaking

Today you'll dig into a specific passage a bit. Do not be afraid to dig! You can do it. It will bear beautiful fruit in your life. Consider 1 Corinthians, **1 Corinthians 13:8-10 (NIV)** *But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.* When this passage mentions prophecy, tongues and knowledge, it is referring to ways that God speaks to his people (some call them the speaking gifts – say that out loud; it helps with memory).

Cessationists use 1 Corinthians 13 to support their claim that God doesn't speak apart from the Bible anymore. Yet this passage actually says the very opposite! It does say that these speaking gifts will cease. But when? When perfection comes! Cessationists say the "perfection" is Scripture being completed or the coming of Jesus. They also argue that the gifts of the Spirit authenticated the apostles' teaching until the Scriptures were done. Therefore, after that, they weren't needed. But this is a silly argument because Paul then goes on to tell the church – not just apostles – how to use these very gifts. If they were just for the apostles, why would one of the primary apostles give them many instructions on how to use them!

You may not have noticed, but things aren't perfect yet! If you meditate on all of 1 Corinthians and draw on the rest of the New Testament, the idea of perfection is something still to come upon the return of Jesus. Even a couple verses later, Paul said, **1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)** *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.* When will you see God "face to face?" At his second coming! Therefore, these gifts are still here today. God is still speaking.

Paul also says, **1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV)** *Now I know in part; then I shall know fully ...* Do you understand everything fully today just because you have the Bible? No. Do you understand why a dear couple lost a teenage daughter and then six months later a teenage son? No! And you won't until Jesus returns. You only see dimly now!

If speaking gifts like prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge remain until Jesus returns, then obviously they are here for the purpose of God speaking to people! Further, the Bible even describes what such communications are like:

- UNDERSTANDING from God: **Ephesians 1:17 (NIV)** *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation ...*
- MESSAGE from God: **1 Corinthians 14:26 (NIV)** *When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation*
- DIRECTION from God: **Galatians 2:1-2 (NIV)** *Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. ²I went in response to a revelation*

These additional messages from God will NOT compromise or contradict the Bible, for they're a very different type of message! Do not forget this. The Way of Jesus relies a lot on the Bible! The Bible fixes the boundaries of what God will say to his people. This is a great blessing from God! Thankfully, knowledge of the Bible acts as a filter through which the events of your daily life must pass before you can discern if God is truly speaking in these events.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. How does 1 Corinthians 13 support that God is *still* speaking to his children? Journal the answer.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Have you ever heard a sermon that really seemed to be directed right at you? If you have, journal what happened. (This is God speaking!)
2. Have you ever felt a prompting or urgency to do something good, or to not do something bad? (This too may have been God speaking!)
3. Write a prayer out to God, thanking him for speaking to you in the past (even if you haven't heard him – "signals" can be missed) and thanking him in faith for how you will hear him in the future.
4. Memorize Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:12-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Some Really Good News!

Imagine someone doesn't hear God. It happens. Yet this isn't proof that God doesn't speak to people today. This is an objection rooted in lack of experience. It's simply an admission that *they* can't hear God! Have you personally heard the sound of every animal on earth? No. This doesn't mean they don't make sounds!

Does God still speak today? The Bible answers with a resounding "**Yes!**" And here's the good news – God absolutely delights to speak to two kinds of people.

First, he speaks to people who think they're too simple. **John 10:27 (ESV)** *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* Jesus said his sheep would hear his voice; not the highly educated; not geniuses - his SHEEP! Sheep are dumb! So when Jesus said that his sheep would hear his voice, he was setting the bar very low. In places where hearing the voice of God is taught and practiced, adults, children, those who are hurting and broken – they all begin to hear his voice.

It all starts with the willingness to be like children and a desire to be dependent on God. Again, he is a good father!

Second, God speaks to people who think they're too bad. In **John 4**, Jesus talked to a woman who had five previous husbands and was living with another! Jesus was accused of speaking with gluttons, drunkards, and sinners! No matter how simple you may think you are (it may be to your advantage!), or how bad you've been, Jesus longs to speak to you. In fact, he is already speaking to you. He loves you that much.

Maybe you simply have not recognized his voice yet – that's what happened to Samuel. He had just laid down for the night, **1 Samuel 3:3-5 (NIV)** *Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down. So, he went and lay down."*

After the third time Eli figured that it was God calling out to the boy, **1 Samuel 3:8-10 (NIV)** *Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

What a powerful story and lesson! You too can hear God like this, learning to discern as you grow and mature. Seeking his voice, but being patient as you (and others) learn.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What kind of people does God delight to speak to?
3. Can you learn more about hearing God's voice? What is the biblical example that was used in this lesson, where one of God's servants had to learn to recognize God's voice?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt inadequate, dumb, or hopeless about pulling something off? This can be in the past or present (about anything, not just spiritual matters). Write this down.
2. Ask God to speak to you about HIS perspective on this time in your life. Record what you receive (if you're still learning to hear God, don't stress if you seem to get nothing). Don't overanalyze what you get. Just write it down.
3. Text or call someone that you know who follows God. Ask them to share with you a time in their life where they heard God.
4. Review Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 4:18-25.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Story Time!

Throughout the Abide lessons, you will consider some inspirational stories. Stories can motivate, teach, and bless! Of course, it's even better to walk through these lessons with someone, sharing what Jesus is doing. New examples of the abundant, overflowing life that Jesus brings you is like tasting the freshest bread or fruit day after day!

The New Testament is full of cases in which the early church ordered their lives by what they heard God say to them apart from the Bible. For example, do you ever need direction on what God wants you to do with your life? **Acts 13:2 (NIV)** *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* You see that they were directed *specifically* by God. This happened a lot! And it happens today as well, if you'll listen.

Then, there are many illustrations outside of the Bible of people who received God's specific direction. For example, A.W. Tozer said, "the voice of God is a Friendly Voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it." Here are some other names of those who heard God (don't worry if you don't recognize them!):

Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Mueller, Andrew Murray, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, A.W. Tozer, James Dobson, Elizabeth Elliott, Dallas Willard, Jack Deere, Richard Foster, Francis Schaeffer, John Ortberg, Francis Chan, Rick Warren, etc.

Many others from history expected God to lead them through his voice. Consider the titles of some of the old songs of faith: "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us," "All the Way, My Savior Leads Me," "Lead on, Oh King Eternal," "Where He Leads Me," "Holy Spirit, Faithful Guide," "Jesus Savior Pilot Me," "Guide Me, O Great Jehovah," etc.!

This is not a new idea at all! In fact, the idea that God stopped speaking is a very recent invention. To believe that God speaks is to be in the "camp of historical Christianity." Put another way, you're normal if you seek his voice.

Here is a very personal story from Pastors Ray and Fran Duerksen, founders of Church Renewal – the ministry that has produced these Abide lessons. Please take the time to read this longer story.

George Mueller & Driving School

"I had been taught that God doesn't speak to people like he did in the Bible. Then one night I was reading the autobiography of George Mueller. The people of England didn't believe in God, so he prayed that God would show him how he could demonstrate God to the people – God gave him the idea of an orphanage. He would start and run the orphanage entirely by faith, asking no one for anything.

During his lifetime he did just that, caring for over 10,000 orphans, and never asking for money! He had secured a location to start, but the night before the first children arrived, he realized that he had none of the usual household items and food. He was distraught and had no modern means of communication to call for help. As he prayerfully read the Bible, God spoke to him: **Psalm 81:10** *Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* The next day carriages arrived with everything Mueller had asked God for the night before.

I saw something for the first time! If God spoke to Mueller in the 19th century, then God was still speaking today! I wept and wept in my bed as the Spirit revealed these things to me - I didn't realize it then, but he was already speaking to me - he had used an autobiography to do it! The next morning, I excitedly told Fran: God still speaks! I then determined to see if he would speak to me about a huge need in our lives right then! You see, in 1982 interest rates had skyrocketed and many industries were closing their doors. McGee Industries, where I worked while going to school, had also laid everyone off. I had spent \$1000 to get my driver instructor's license to get a job, but then the job evaporated. Someone I knew owned 2 driving schools in Kitchener and offered to sell one of them for \$5000. Only problem - I didn't have one nickel, never mind \$5000! On June 29, 1982 I got up very early, and sat down with a little green notebook and Bible.

I wondered how I would know if God had spoken or not. What would this look like? Then I wrote the following words: 'Lord, I have never done something like this before – if you really speak and guide people you have to make it plain.' With that, I began to read in John, where I had left off in my previous devotions. When I came to John 16:13 and 25 it said (forgive the older language), '... whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will **shew you things to come ... but I shall shew you plainly of the Father**.' I don't know how to explain it, but when I read that, the words came right off the page and buried themselves right in my heart!

My heart was racing and again I wept! I couldn't believe it! The very words I had just prayed, I then read in the Bible, and when I did, something incredibly powerful happened inside of me - I KNEW God had just spoken to me! And I couldn't get over it! It was worth more than silver or gold! I could talk with the God of heaven. WOW!

But I wasn't done - I still didn't know how I would buy this business with no money. So I continued my Old Testament reading in Psalm 37. When I reached the 21st verse my heart was again stirred. It read... Psalm 37:21 (KJV) 'The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.' It happened again when I read a few verses later ... Psalm 37:26 (KJV) 'He [the righteous] is ever merciful, and lendeth.' Both times the Spirit spoke a word into my heart - but it was confusing: giveth or lendeth?

We made a trip to Steinbach about a week later for a family wedding. On Saturday morning at 8 am, Fran's dad came down the stairs, dressed in his wedding attire. I was sitting on a couch, already dressed for the wedding, reading the Bible. He asked if he could interrupt. Then he told me that God had woken him in the middle of the night and prompted him to phone someone about the money we needed to buy the business.

The woman said, 'Go to the credit union and I'll co-sign a loan for Ray and Fran.' So Dad and I went to the bank and secured the loan to buy the business. After the wedding we flew back to Kitchener and bought the business. The statement came every month and we paid it. But on the fourth month, the statement came, and the balance said, '\$0!' We knew that was impossible. Fran called the credit union to straighten everything out. But they informed her twice that it had truly been paid off, though Fran insisted we hadn't.

As we thought about it, we thought about this woman - had she paid it off? She hadn't told us. Finally, I got up the nerve to write her a letter and ask. The following week we received a letter back telling us that she had, but not to tell anyone. As we stood in the living room, suddenly the two phrases exploded inside me: 'the righteous lendeth; the righteous giveth!' WOW!!! With such precise accuracy, the Lord had done exactly what he had spoken to me about!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. If you have a specific story of how God has spoken to you, write it out in full. When done, pray about 3 people that you can send it to – those who are following Jesus or not (be wise about your choices). Being a disciple includes sharing your story with others!
2. Review verses Romans 12:2 and John 15:5-6.

Bible Reading

1. Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 5:1-12. Practice using SMORP with this passage in your journal (see Abide 1: Day 4 for reminder of what SMORP is). Don't rush it! Significant conversations should never be rushed.

Day 5

For this day, you can go straight to the Life Application section. It's time to practice! The Way of Jesus is one of obedience.

Life Application (James 1:22)

At times the words, "listening prayer" will be used. It's another way to speak about hearing God. Some well-meaning people object – "the Bible does not use the words 'listening prayer.'" They are correct! But it does speak about listening to God and prayer. 'Listening prayer' is just a term that captures a practice many have ignored.

1. **A "Simple Question" (Listening Prayer)**
 - a. Are you excited for Jesus to speak to you? If this feels uncomfortable or odd, do not give up. You will learn. If this is something you are experienced with, why not seek his voice more?
 - b. **First: thanksgiving & praise**
 - A great way to enter God's presence is through praise. **Psalm 100:4 (ESV)** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you something he wants you to be grateful for and why
 - Then begin to praise and thank him from a heart of deep gratefulness
 - Write it out (journal it)
 - c. **Second: ask a question**
 - "What do you like about me? Why?" Or ...
 - "What do you see when you look at me?"
 - d. **Third: write down an IMPRESSION, thought, 'word' or picture that comes to you**
 - Write "G:" (for God)
 - Then put your pen on the paper and write the 1st thing that comes to your mind
 - Do not wrestle with the impressions or thoughts – just write them down
 - Do NOT reject positive things he may want to say to you. Accept them by FAITH!

- Keep writing as long as you get thoughts - don't stop!
- e. **Fourth: respond** (journal it)
- Next, print your first initial on the next line and write out your response to God
 - It could be a question you have or you may simply wish to make a comment. There is no right or wrong thing here
 - It's just part of normal conversation, only this time the conversation is with God!
 - Why write these impressions, 'words,' thoughts or pictures down? In order to focus one's thoughts, so that minds don't wander
 - Next, listen attentively, for another response from God – and write it down again
 - It will likely be a logical and rational response, one that makes sense for the context of your question or comment. Again, place a "G" before it
 - Then respond again and keep the conversation going!
 - The conversation will look something like this:
 G: Begin by writing down an impression, thought, 'word' or picture you get
 R: Begin with a question
 G: Be quiet (listen) and write down the thoughts
 R: Respond to the thoughts you receive, addressing them to the Lord
 G: Be quiet (listen) and write down further thoughts that come to you

2. Begin a Devotional Journal. Each day:

- a. Write down the date.
- b. Next, begin your time by thanking God for something, such as what he did for you the day before.
- c. Then follow your praise portion with a prayer conversation.
- d. Of course, you may also wish to note other things in your journal as well, such as what he taught you, or what he did for you or any other thing that may be noteworthy to you.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:13-16.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6 and Romans 12:2
2. Try using SMORP again using only 1 verse. You can choose your own verse – i.e. from a sermon you heard this week. Or you can use **Philippians 4:13**. God bless you as you continue to abide in Jesus!

Abide 3 – Quiet Ourselves to Hear God’s Voice

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

If The Weeds Are Gone, The Harvest Increases

Perhaps you have noticed a resurgence in the past decade, among all ages, of exploring the joy (and difficulty) of planting one’s own gardens. Fresh, vibrant vegetables have become greatly valued, as has the process of “rediscovering the land.” Of course, lessons are swiftly learned regarding what does and does not lead to a significant and tasty harvest. What is one such lesson? Get rid of the weeds!

Weeds choke out the development and steady growth of plants. Gardeners acquire this knowledge early on, likely paired with frustration. However, if you want a good harvest ... start pulling!

This also relates to hearing God’s voice. There are “weeds” to intentionally remove from your life so that you can hear what God is saying. This shouldn’t surprise you, as *any* engaging conversation requires that you get rid of distractions, deal with unforgiveness, learn to listen, etc.

So, what are the weeds that you need to pull out?

Eight Weeds

1. Unwillingness to Hear God

Did you know that Jesus told stories called “parables,” so that those who did not want to hear truth could avoid it? **Matthew 13:12-13 (NIV)** *Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”* God does not force his way into the lives of anyone who is stubborn or wants to go their “own way.” He is *that* committed to maintaining your free will, so that genuine love is possible (you cannot have genuine love if it is forced, can you?)

2. Unwillingness To Surrender Until We Know the “Cost”

Some do not believe that Jesus has their best interests in mind – that he wants good things for them. Therefore, they desire to know what he wants and what it may cost them - before they seek his voice. But Paul declares, **Romans 8:28 (NIV)** *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* You can trust this truth!

Related, some will fear what God might ask of them. But perfect love casts out fear. You can come into his presence and say “Here I am, Lord.” Let him initiate with love and still your fears.

3. Unconfessed Sin

When a husband and wife have something between them, a tension and isolation can result in their relationship. Those are not fun times! God made us to want to get beyond this! The same is true in a relationship with God. The psalmist described it well, **Psalms 66:18 (NIV)** *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

4. Lack of Knowledge on How to Hear God's Voice

Sometimes people simply haven't been taught how to hear God. Ignorance is not bliss! As it says in the Old Testament, **Job 33:14 (NIV)** *For God does speak--now one way, now another-- though no one perceives it.* We also see in the life of Samuel that he needed Eli's help to learn to recognize God's voice (see **1 Samuel 3**).

5. Unbelief

It says that Jesus couldn't do miracles in Nazareth because of unbelief (Matthew 13:58). If you do not believe that Jesus speaks or that you personally can hear him, the "harvest of hearing God's voice" will be limited.

6. Fear of Chaos in the Church

Some churches discourage people from hearing God's voice, worried about potential chaos or people claiming to have heard bizarre things from God. Sadly, people do misuse God's voice! Yet some also mishandle the Bible – and you don't stop using that, do you?

Instead, you need to use the gifts that God has given you, BUT with love, wisdom, boundaries, etc. Or as Paul said when he faced some chaos in the Corinthian church, **1 Corinthians 14:40 (NKJV)** *Let all things be done decently and in order.* Put another way, Paul's response to the misuse of God's gifts wasn't, "well then, just put them away and quit using them!" Instead, he provided wise instruction.

Many areas of life would be chaotic if careful rules weren't laid down: flight, health care, financial institutions, driving, etc. We don't get rid of airplanes, doctors, money, and vehicles, do we? No, we regulate them. Why would we have a different standard for hearing God's voice and the use of gifts?

7. Not Desiring a Friendship with God

Some people only want to relate to God when they need him to get them out of trouble. This would be disrespectful to anyone and it is to God. You should not expect to hear God regularly and clearly if that is your attitude. May we meditate on this wonderful truth, **Psalms 25:14 (NIV)** *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.*

8. Too Busy to Spend Time Listening to God

Some peoples' lives are filled with a lot of things that do not matter for eternity. To hear God's voice, you need to create space to listen to him. If you look in **Luke 10:38-42**, you see that Martha is an example of someone who was too busy (even with good things!) to listen to Jesus, while Mary was ready to hear. It's even possible to be too busy with one's own plans for how to serve God.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 8 weeds that can hinder you from hearing God's voice?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Do any of the first 8 weeds mentioned apply to you? If so, journal which one(s).
2. Review your verses from Abide 1 and Abide 2 – John 15:5-6 and Romans 12:2.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:17-20.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On the previous day, we looked at eight weeds that can make it hard for us to hear God's voice. Today six more will be noted!

Does it seem counterproductive to work from the "negative?" As long as you remember that the ultimate goal is to draw closer to a God who really loves you, this can be very useful. Keep at it and you'll see so much fruit in your life.

Six More Weeds

9. Talking Instead of Listening

Does God want to hear what's going on in your heart? The intense emotions, questions, pain, and dreams? Of course! However, when you go to prayer, you can't just pour out all your complaints and concerns to him in a steady stream, without stopping to listen to what he has to say. The Spirit of God challenges us, **Psalm 46:10 (NIV)** *Be still and know that I am God.*

10. Impatience and Rushing Ahead

How long are you willing to wait to hear from your good Father and King of all that exists? A minute? Five minutes? Would you ever wait in silence for 15 minutes or even more? Moses waited 6 days before God spoke! **Exodus 24:15-16 (NIV)** *When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.*

11. Fear of People, Rather Than Fear of God

If you're afraid of or controlled by what other people (even other followers of the Way) think about you, you introduce another weed into the midst of your desire to hear God's voice. Read what a simple verse highlights, **Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)** *Fear of man will prove to be a snare.* You're trapped and in chains when you are a people-pleaser!

This is in contrast to what you're told in another passage, **Proverbs 14:26-27 (NIV)** *Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress and for their children it will be a refuge. For the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.*

12. Satan Tries to Keep Us from Hearing

It's fascinating that people are very good at listening to the devil's voice, when he says things such as: "You're not beautiful;" "You're not smart;" "Nobody likes you." Or when he sows seeds of doubt in one's mind: "Yeah, but . . ." "What if?" "That wouldn't be possible." We don't want to be people who, when God says something positive to us, we believe the opposite!

In one parable Jesus explains that Satan will attempt to snatch the seed (God's Word) out of hearts as quickly as it is sown (Mark 4:14-15). Have you experienced this? The devil is a liar and the source of many lies. Why would one choose to listen to him rather than to God?

13. Asking The Wrong Questions

Sometimes you may frantically ask God a question, and hear no response. If you quiet yourself however, he might show you that you're asking the wrong question! E.g. you might ask – how can my business prosper? Maybe you should instead be asking – “should I be in business at all?”

What you want to be listening for is the, “God-agenda” which is not just a good agenda, but the BEST!

14. Fear of Confusing Our Thoughts with God's Thoughts

God promised that you'll be able to know and recognize his voice. **John 10:4-5 (NIV)** *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.*

The Bible also promises that if you're seeking the Lord, you WILL find him. It says in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 4:29 (NIV)** *But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.* And in the New Testament, **James 1:5 (NIV)** *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

Humans learn from experience alone how to distinguish colors; musicians learn by experience to distinguish a minor from a major key simply by listening. In the same way, you learn to hear God's voice in your spirit through the experience of intentionally listening.

Will you make mistakes? Of course! If you can mistake a friend's voice, you should expect to slip up on hearing God's voice from time to time. Learning to follow God can be messy (because people are messy!), and you'll make blunders along the way! No person on earth will be 100% accurate – not until heaven! This is why the most necessary characteristic you need for learning to hear God's voice is humility! It will allow you to laugh at yourself when you make a mistake and admit it to others. The other necessary characteristic you'll need is to keep choosing faith over unbelief.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 6 weeds were shared today, things that can hinder you from hearing God's voice? Write them down.
3. Will you make mistakes in hearing God's voice? What characteristic do you need to help you handle your mistakes?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Do any of the 6 weeds mentioned today apply to you? Journal which one(s).
2. Look at your answer from Life Application question 1 from both Day 1 and Day 2. In your journal spend some time walking through a. to c. below. Do not rush – this is how you experience the

growth you've always been looking for! You want to pull out some weeds! Being a disciple in the Way can feel like you're spinning tires in one spot UNLESS you develop these beautiful habits of abiding.

- a. Thanksgiving: for revealing to you the incredible gift of hearing God's voice; for being able to have true fellowship with him through conversation; for being able to receive real instruction, direction, comfort, and encouragement from him through hearing him.
- b. Confession: for whatever weeds apply to you. Ask God for his response. Record what you sense him saying to you.
- c. Surrender: commit to do whatever you hear.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:21-37.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Can you believe it? You've already examined 14 possible weeds that get in the way of the, "harvest of hearing God's voice!" Today you'll finish up with two more. It is amazing to learn together, whether brand-new to this or an experienced follower of the Way.

15. Listening for a Loud Voice, Rather Than a Quiet Voice

While all the weeds discussed in the previous days will not apply to every person listening for God's voice, this one does! Many are mistaken – they think that God is GOD, so he must be loud all the time.

Consider the amazing experience of the prophet, Elijah. He was hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb when God told him to stand on the mountain because he was about to pass by. Wow! Now carefully read what happens!

1 Kings 19:11-13 (NIV) ... then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

God seldom raises his voice! Though the world makes a lot of noise, God does not generally make himself heard by speaking over the chaos. Rather, he often speaks in a whisper and only those who are willing to become still can start to hear him clearly. This can be hard for us to accept especially when storms are crashing around us. But again, we're called to be still, **Psalm 37:7 (NIV)** *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*

You can also reflect on these two verses from the Psalms, **Psalm 131:2 (NIV)** *But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.* **Psalm 62:1 (ESV)** *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*

16. The Weeds of Fear and Anxiety

A big challenge you will face in life is FEAR! You can also add anxiety to a list of hinderances. Is it natural to feel fear and normal to feel anxious? Yes, at times. However, they become a huge problem when they begin to direct and steer a life.

It's important that you live your life by FAITH as followers of the Way and not FEAR of what can happen. Faith isn't the complete absence of fear. Instead, it is the resolve and choice to follow the leading of Jesus in your life despite any fear and lack of understanding.

The key to doing this is learning to stay connected to God's peace. There truly is a peace that passes understanding. What exciting news! Many followers of the Way have discovered this reality. As it says in Philippians, **Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)** *So do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Here you see Paul encouraging the believers (including you) to not be anxious about anything (afraid, fearful) but instead to turn to thanksgiving and prayer. Then you can let your requests be made known to God and his peace will guard your heart and mind. This is brilliant!

Too many times people go into a prayer time overwhelmed or anxious and then feel like their devotions are very dry. They then leave with the same feeling they had before. This is NOT the way your walk with Jesus was supposed to be! Paul is giving very practical advice. He is saying "change your focus" and you'll have an easier time experiencing, yes *experiencing*, the peace of God.

Remember that this peace doesn't come through the absence of conflict or the presence of great circumstances. That's the world's peace – dependent on circumstances. Why aim for something so temporary and that can be easily threatened? For Day 4 and 5, you'll look at a tool that will help you quiet yourself and re-focus when confronted with fear and anxiety.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. Read the Bible verses noted in this day. Try reading them very slowly, 2 times each.
3. What emotions often overwhelm, hindering one's ability to hear God's voice? Write this down.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Reflect on your life a bit – are you able to be quiet before God? Write down why or why not.
2. In your journal write a list of fears and anxieties that you have. Let them surface. God can handle them! You will use this list on future days.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 5:38-48.

2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today a tool will be introduced that helps address the weeds of fear and anxiety. The tool is called, S.T.A.R. Tools such as these do not bring a person the abundant life found as followers of the Way. However, they do provide ideas on how to *create space and connection* – so that you can abide in Jesus.

The “S” in S.T.A.R. STOP - Don’t Fix the Problem, Person, or Situation

This suggested step isn’t a surprise when we examine our lives and see that poor choices, sin, emotional outbursts, and isolation are often preceded by tiredness or overwhelm. Science shows that when a person is tired or overwhelmed, their ability to use their *cingulate* and *prefrontal cortex* is greatly diminished. These may be big words, but what does this look like practically? Among other things - your ability to make good choices, think creatively, connect relationally with others (God included), empathize, and make wise choices – are all severely limited. Have you ever experienced a time like this?

Of course, when you’re utterly exhausted, you may simply need to sleep! But for the rest of the time you have great instruction in the Bible regarding practices that help one overcome weaknesses and stay abiding (there is that wonderful word again!) in the peace of God.

The first step is to STOP. Many need to learn that not everything has to be fixed right now nor can they usually fix it. When people insist on fixing problems or people, they almost certainly end up trying to control the person/situation. The same is true if they run from the problems and people that are causing the stress. There is a different option than, “fight or flight.”

You don’t want to miss out on whatever God is trying to do in the situation. Remember, he has an abundant life planned for followers of the Way. **Psalm 37:7 (ESV)** *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

Can you commit to pausing in your life? Can you commit to releasing control? The second step will help you even further.

The “T” in S.T.A.R. TAKE – A Breather & Calm Down

If you were to go to the gym and lift 15lb weights, they wouldn’t feel heavy. It would likely feel like you could lift them forever. But what would happen if you strapped them to your hands? Eventually those 15lb weights would feel like 30lbs, 50lbs or more. Your arms would get so tired from being under constant strain that not only would you not be getting stronger, but you would lose the strength you previously had.

Too many followers of the Way do just this. They keep themselves so busy that they miss out on times of quiet and stillness before the Lord. They wonder why they feel so burnt out!

In Western culture, being still and quiet is not something practiced regularly. In fact, many people feel shame when they aren't busy ALL the time. You may think that being constantly busy is a sign of your value. Sadly, this causes many people to burn out, even leaders who are supposed to model the power of being quiet and hearing God's voice.

You were NOT made to go without a continuous power source! You are like rechargeable batteries and need to rest. God rested on the seventh day and commanded his people to rest. Our bodies are made to thrive if we operate this way! For example, quieting allows our cortisol levels to subside, serotonin to increase (you'll feel more peaceful and content) and minds to slow down. You may not be interested in science, but can you humble yourself before God's masterful design?

But aren't followers of the Way intended to work hard in building his kingdom? Yes! Isn't this urgent? Yes! Yet you still need to rest. You just need to pick the right kind of rest. This is something we can all grow in, likely! Listen to what Isaiah said, **Isaiah 30:15 (ESV)** *For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." But you were unwilling ...* It says that in rest, quietness, and trust you will find your strength! Do you believe this? Do your choices reflect this reality? Or are you unwilling?

In moments of anxiety, whether in a stressful situation, dealing with a conflict or feeling overwhelmed, you can practice stillness by exercising self-control over your body and breathing. Simply taking a few minutes to be still, relaxing your body, and breathing deeply is often enough to calm your nervous system. This isn't weird at all, *it's how God made you!*

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is the name given to the tool that can be used to help quiet yourself?
3. What are the first 2 steps of the quieting tool? Explain them simply if you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down 2 or 3 examples of when you've tried to take control of a situation or "run away." Try to pick examples that are most recent, if you can.
2. Spend some time in confession. Confess to your good Father that you sometimes, in pride or fear (or both), try to control your life or others.
3. Take one of the examples that you wrote down and make it your goal to share it with someone at work today or a family member or someone from your church. This sharing can start you on the road of discipling someone else in the Way (something all believers are called to do).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 6:1-18.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today you will look at the final two steps of S.T.A.R. The first two were: STOP – don't fix the problem, person, or situation; and TAKE – a breather and calm down. It is amazing what happens in a life when people give time to such exercises. It may not seem natural at first, but like physical exercise, you learn as you go along.

The "A" in S.T.A.R. APPRECIATE and Connect to Jesus

The Bible says, **James 1:17 (ESV)** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* We can stay overwhelmed and say we are thankful for a few things and feel just as dry as we did when we started. But, when we STOP, calm down and begin focusing on Jesus and what he done for us and provided for us, we will notice a shift. Especially as you focus on why the things you are thankful for are meaningful to you.

You'll find that your overwhelm begins to go away, your heart begins to warm up, thoughts are clearer and from these places, prayer and hearing God seem to flow much easier. That is, once we have entered God's presence through praise, we are better able to hear from him and receive direction for our current situations. Or as God's Word declares, **Psalm 100:4 (ESV)** *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!*

How do you enter his gates? This is another way of saying, "how do you experience him?"

When you focus on Jesus and the things that he has done for you, you find that your heart begins to transform. Or as one child put it, "my heart is feeling bigger!" Of course, it's important to recognize that *quickly* saying you are thankful for a couple of things is VERY different than actually *feeling* appreciation.

You need to take time to appreciate. And remember, science has shown that being tired and overwhelmed can cause the cortex levels of your brain to diminish in their capacity to function. Interestingly enough, science has also found that focusing on what you are thankful for causes these same areas of the brain to begin functioning again! Basically, you will function better in ALL areas of life.

The "R" In S.T.A.R. Respond – In Faith & Love, In Obedience

Once you've reconnected to the God of peace, you can receive his heart and direction for the situation(s) you're facing. If you are to live as a follower of the Way and not be controlled by your fears, it also means you must be living the life of the obedient servant. You expand in faith, in love, and in obedience!

In some situations, this may mean forgiving and letting go; in other circumstances you may have to confront; in your prayer times, you may have to choose to trust in the Lord, etc.

Whatever direction you receive from Jesus, you now have peace and respond in faith by obeying and responding with a loving heart. This ensures that you represent Jesus in all your actions and deeds. This is actually a life full of adventure and goes far beyond a religion! This is the Way and it is a great journey.

In responding, you show that you're looking for Jesus to not only be Saviour, but also Lord. He becomes your leader, something everyone needs. This is so important and it is an expected response because of ALL that he has done for you – which you'll look at in the next two lessons.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 4 steps of the quietness tool, S.T.A.R.? Explain them simply if you can.
3. On the internet, go to biblegateway.com. Do a search by typing this in – thank*. How many times is this word or a variation of it used in the Bible? Read some of the verses out loud.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Is there something that is making you very busy/stressed out? Where can you make a change?
2. If you live with your family, perhaps have a family discussion and ask a similar question – is there something in your lives making you all very busy or stressed out, that you can change?

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 6:19-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Go back to Day 3, Life Application (James 1:22), Question 2. You wrote down a list of fears and anxieties. Pick one of these.
2. Using this fear or anxiety go through the following exercise:

Stop – Do not fix the problem, person, or situation

- Write down the fear or anxiety that you are currently facing

Take – A breather & calm down

- Take a few moments to be still, relax your shoulders, neck, hands, face, etc. Take some deep breaths and focus your heart and mind on Jesus
- Any anxious or distracted thoughts you have, or tasks that need to get done... prayerfully surrender them to Jesus

Appreciate & Connect to Jesus

- **James 1:17 (NIV)** *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*
- Think of something you are thankful for: _____
- Briefly write down a time where you experienced what you were thankful for
- Connect to Jesus. Ask Jesus to show you where he was in the memory and what he wants you to know. Write down any thoughts that come to mind

Respond – In faith & love & in obedience

- Ask Jesus how he sees the fear or anxiety you are facing. Write it down
- Ask Jesus how he wants you to respond in the situation. Write it down

Abide 4 – The Importance of Journaling

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Introduction

In Abide 3, you saw that there are 16 weeds which hinder one's ability to hear God's voice. You were also introduced to a very useful tool called S.T.A.R., which helps people quiet themselves to hear God. In Abide 4, the practice of journaling will be addressed. Even if this seems like something that would be hard for you, are you willing to consider the benefits? Many people have learned to journal, and have fallen in love with it!

Where does the idea of journaling, as followers of the Way, come from? What is it good for? How do you do it?

The idea of journaling really comes from the Bible. God didn't just write out or dictate to someone one big Bible. Instead, one way that the stories, commands and prophecies were shared from one generation to another was orally – they had to carefully memorize them and pass them along.

Eventually these stories, commands, and prophecies, etc. were gathered and committed to writing, like the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) and the Gospels (first four books of the New Testament). In other cases, prophets wrote down prophecies that they received over the years, and then they were collected into a book, often named after the prophet who received and 'journalled' them. You can even see that prayer conversations were also written down (journalled)!

Now, this is not to suggest that your journaling has the same level of authority as the Bible – of course not! The point is simply to say that journaling is not a new thing – it has been practiced for thousands of years!

Different Kinds of Journaling

1. Devotional Journal

What is a devotional journal and how can you use it?

- First, this can be your daily journal, to record things the Lord is primarily saying to you through his Word and through listening to him in prayer
- Second, you can use it to record what was received in prayer as you prayed with a spouse, or with others in the body of Christ
- Third, you can use it to record prophetic words sent to you from family, prayer partners, friends, or others in the church. Or if you sense that the Lord has given you a dream, you can record the dream in your journal
- Fourth, you can also track answers to prayer in this journal. This can be a real faith builder and motivation to pray!

Of course, you do not have to record everything that you ever receive in prayer, or from others. You must be selective. Otherwise, you'll just write for the rest of your life! God is THAT generous in leading his people!

2. Life Journal

This is where you record significant events in your life, marriage, family, career, and ministry. This is a selective, but very significant journal, recounting stories of what God has done, including dates, names, and places.

3. Topical Journal

You may want to have a journal that has different categories where you can specifically track God's wisdom in a specific area of your life. Of course, this can be done in your devotional journal, but some people like having something separate for this activity. Possible topics include: finances, character growth, ministry inside/outside the church, evangelism, marriage and family, other relationships, etc.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the 3 kinds of journals described in this lesson?
3. What are 4 ways that you can use a devotional journal?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Text or call 3 friends who are followers of the Way. Ask them if they journal and what kinds of journals they use. Also ask them to share what they have found useful about journaling.
2. Prepare to start journaling. This can be on paper or electronically. If you have no journals, start with a devotional journal. Get it ready this week! (put it in your schedule)
3. If you already have a devotional journal, you could start a Life Journal this week (again, put it in your schedule if this is a step you'll take).

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:1-12.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Reasons for Journaling

First: so we remember what God has done for us, our family, and our church

People are prone to quickly forget what God has done for them. As a result, they may end up being ungrateful. When a person journals, it's a way of treasuring what God has graciously done for them. People treasure many other things in this life, even have a special place for them. In the same way, why wouldn't you treasure what your Saviour has done for you, putting it in a special place – your journal?

Of course, this will also generate thanksgiving, praise, and worship in your life!

Second: when we review what God has done – family (and those you disciple) will be less inclined to turn away from him

Just before Moses died, he repeatedly warned the people not to forget what the Lord had done, as forgetfulness would result in turning from God. Almost the entire book of Deuteronomy records his encouragement and warnings.

For this very reason as well, the psalmist commits to reviewing what the Lord has done with the succeeding generations. **Psalm 78:4-11 (NIV)** ... *we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done ... Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands ... The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.*

There are many extra benefits to this – e.g. Pastor Ray Duerksen, founder of Church Renewal, which generates these lessons – shares family and faith stories on many Sunday afternoons with his children and grandchildren and calls it, “Papa’s Story Time.” These stories come right from his journal. Such “remembering and declaring” is biblical. But you can’t do this without journals, as you’ll forget many things yourself.

Third: we remember approx. 70% more if we write it down

Fourth: so we don’t forget the guidance or promises he has already given us, while we are waiting on him to move

The Lord may be guiding you through a situation that will take weeks, months, or even years to navigate. Much happens in your life when you are waiting, and the promises or guidance may fade from your memory. You may be tempted to lose hope, or you may forget what he already instructed you to do. BUT if you have it journaled, you can quickly recover and review what he has already shown you.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. Which 4 reasons were shared today regarding why you should journal?
3. How can previous journal entries help you stay filled with hope?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done for you personally. Ask God to help you with remembering (he loves to do this).
2. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done for your family (if not married, you can include parents, even if this includes good things that happened historically).
3. Memorize Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:13-23.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.

3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Yesterday, four reasons for journaling were highlighted. Today, you'll be exposed to four more reasons. Please remember that some people take a lot of time to learn how to journal, but when it becomes a habit – wow, their faith is greatly increased! That's where you'll start today ...

Fifth: when we continually rehearse what God has done for us, it will build faith, and the faith of others - to do what he wants us to do next

As you rehearse what God has done, your own faith for next steps begins to grow. What a gift this is for a follower of the Way! And as you share your stories with others, you will begin to notice that they too want to live by faith. It can also help you cast the vision that God has given you in any area that you have influence (i.e. family, small group, work). The devotional and life journals that you develop and use will help you greatly in this regard.

Sixth: time has a way of revising history. When we record it, we will remember what God actually did

This is important in a church where a pastor has obeyed the Lord and done the difficult things God asked them to do. Some, who may have been around at that time, may wish for the history to be forgotten, or the story modified to suit their own thoughts or to receive credit. Then people forget what God actually accomplished! This reason for journaling can also be very important for families and for your own individual journeys.

Seventh: when we rehearse what God has done for us, to our family and anything we lead it will grow great trust in our discipleship and witness, which will help us in the present

Put simply, you will need God stories to effectively disciple others! Yesterday you were encouraged to memorize Matthew 28:18-20 and its command to make disciples. From the moment you become a follower of the Way, you should begin to pray about making disciples – it's to be *normal* activity for such followers. Having a record of what God has done will greatly increase your ability to be obedient to Jesus in carrying out this great and wonderful responsibility.

Eighth: to leave behind a recorded legacy for the next generations

There is no greater inheritance that parents can leave their children than a godly example! As it says in the Psalms, **Psalms 145:4 (NIV)** *One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.* If you have children, is this something that you are doing? Further, you never know who else might be inspired by your example! God works in ways beyond what we could ever imagine!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What 4 reasons for journaling were shared today?
3. How can journaling help you in discipling or influencing others?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Take your Devotional or your Life Journal. Spend some time recording a list of things that God has done in the church you currently attend or in some of the people in the church. Ask God to help you with remembering (He loves to do this).
2. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2 and Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 7:24-29.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Did you know that if you were to read the biographies of hundreds of ordinary followers of the Way, who did extraordinary things for God, that you would discover that almost 100% of them journaled? Can you humble yourself before their example?

Today, you'll be introduced to some good reasons for "prayer conversations with God." And you'll be encouraged to record some of these! Now, it may seem hard or even awkward at first, but there are four good reasons to journal your prayer conversations. And this is a shorter lesson, because you have a longer Life Application today!

Reasons for Journaling Prayer Conversations with God

First: we see A LOT of conversational prayer in the Bible

Second: when writing out the conversation with God, it moves us from being tentative about what God is saying and moves us over to faith in what he is saying

When people are learning to intentionally listen to God, they sometimes wrestle with thoughts such as: "is this God speaking, or is this my thought, or is it the devil speaking?" So instead of moving forward in a conversation with God, they get stuck with these questions running around in their heads, preventing a conversation with Jesus. When you begin writing, it keeps you from dismissing what you are receiving. Every stroke of the pen or the keyboard is an act of faith. Very soon the person becomes comfortable with conversing with God.

Third: it will keep our mind focused, rather than thinking about what's on our to-do list for the day; or other random things that distract

Fourth: research shows that we remember more of what we wrote

When we hear that research supports something, consistent with how God made us, are we teachable and humble to respond? Are there perhaps exceptions to this research? Yes. But have we really tried for a period of time (i.e. six weeks)? Is our relationship with God important enough that we'll make adjustments to our regular habits?

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are 4 good reasons for recording your prayer conversations with God?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Write down 3-5 questions that you have for God. You will be using this list during Day 5.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 8:1-17.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

How to Journal Prayer Conversations with God

Thankfully, it's not at all complicated for you to journal your prayer conversations with God! After all, Jesus said that everyone would hear his voice; not just some 'elites.' If you think about how a human conversation might go, you begin to realize that it's quite simple and logical for anyone.

When you wish to begin a conversation with someone, you either state something or ask something. Then you wait and listen for the response. Conversing with God is the same. So, when you journal, you might want to do something like this . . .

- Begin by writing down your own first initial with a colon – i.e. R:
- Then write out your prayer to God – it may begin with a sentence or sentences of thanksgiving and praise for what he has done for you that day or week. Again, praise is one of the key ways that you can come into the Father's presence
- Or you might wish to write out a sentence or sentences, confessing some sin you committed that day or the day before. This is another way to enter his presence

So, it might look something like this ...

R: Lord, I just want to praise and thank you for the huge answer to prayer today! I can't tell you how grateful I feel inside. Only you could have done that. What a gift from you. I really love you! You are such a wonderful Father.

At this point you can write the letter "G:" (for God) and then listen with your pen pressed on the paper, or fingers hovering over the keyboard, for the first thought. As soon as you begin to have a thought or a picture, you just begin writing – not debating in your mind where it came from. It could look something like this ...

G: You have no idea what joy it gave me to answer this prayer for you.. I have wanted to reveal myself to you as one who delights to answer your prayers. I am so pleased that you were one of those who came back to say thank you – not everyone does.

It could be that much; it could be less, and it could be more. Who cares? It's a conversation! There's no rules for a conversation! You're just enjoying a conversation together.

Now you might ask, "What would I do next?" What do you FEEL like doing next?! There's no right or wrong here. Perhaps you have a question for the Lord – remember, you're having a conversation. Take the lead, the Lord delights in spending time with you! He is NOT too busy for you – ever!

Let's try a question ...

R: Lord, I have this big decision to make (marriage, family, work, ministry). I just don't know if it's best to do this or that?

G: Why don't you?

R: Lord, I never even thought about that! Thank you for that incredible insight.

R: And how do you think I should go about doing that? How do I convince so and so that this is what we need to do?

G: Why don't you ask so and so to listen in prayer with you? I will speak to both of you at the same time.

R: Oh Lord, you are truly amazing.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What are the important aspects of a conversation between people? This answer can help you understand how to have a great conversation with God!

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Go back to Day 4, Life Application Question 2. You wrote down a list of questions that you have for God. Pick 1 of them and in your journal record a conversation with God about that question.
2. Pick a second question to ask God and go through the same process. If this feels very new for you, don't give up! You'll be developing brand new habits that will eventually be automatic.
3. Review Matthew 28:18-20.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 8:18-34.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2 and Matthew 28:18-20.

2. You are now done Abide 1-4. It is a good time to do a heart check – are you approaching this with a soft heart, taking steps forward and encountering Jesus? Or are other things getting in the way, such as stubbornness or an independent spirit, or things that matter less than being close to Jesus?

Abide 5 – Why We Need To Hear God’s Voice

Day 1

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

In Abide 5, you’ll look at three powerful reasons that highlight why you need to hear God’s voice. Remember that this is an exciting part of your spiritual inheritance! Some people have experienced the blessing of growing up in a family full of joy, peace, and encouragement. However, when you become a child of God, the potential to receive these same things and much more is now possible!

So, why do you need to hear God’s voice?

So That Christ Can Function as Our Lord & King

God is fully establishing his kingdom on earth – a kingdom that has its own ways, plans, enemy, and weapons. This is not an exaggeration at all! Yes, you are child of God, but also a soldier (see **2 Timothy 2:4**). If you have grown up in a society that believes only in what it sees, this can be hard to grasp. But even if you think about what the world is like, what is “seen” gives you hints about what is happening in the “unseen.” There is a battle going on, including for lives!

Jesus said, **Matthew 11:12 (NIV)** *From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.* And Peter counsels, **1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)** *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

The enemy, the devil, is looking for people to devour! And what does fighting against his attacks require? What does being an effective soldier in the kingdom involve? Much communication! (just like in any war). You will need strategies and plans – which comes from hearing God’s voice.

Consider the example of Paul and his companions. We’re told, **Acts 16:6-10 (ESV)** *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Was there anything intrinsically wrong with ministering in Asia and Bithynia? Of course not! However, the Holy Spirit had another plan which included another continent – Europe!

God has much wisdom and can see things that you can’t. Are you humble enough to admit this? Here is how the prophet Isaiah described it, **Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV)** *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Example: David & the Philistines

David knew these things about God, which is why he went to listen for the Lord’s strategies to fight his enemies. For example, **2 Samuel 5:19 (ESV)** *And David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go up against the*

Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?” And the LORD said to David, “Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.”

Eventually, the Philistines returned and David inquired again. This time the Lord gave David a different strategy, **2 Samuel 5:23 (ESV)** *And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, “You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees.”* The need for direction from God was just as strong for the people of God in the New Testament, as it is for followers of the Way today. What purpose has God given you? To expand his kingdom! May you keep growing in this, as you serve the King!

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. What is a battle you’re facing right now? Write down a brief description of it.
2. Use conversational prayer (see Abide 4) to seek God’s strategy for you in the middle of this battle. Some questions you could ask:
 - “Father, do I have anything that I need to confess about this situation?”
 - “God, what is your perspective about this situation? How do you want to be King and Lord?”
 - “Are there any steps that I need to take?”
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20.
4. Memorize 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:1-8.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 2

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

A follower of the Way needs to hear God to be able to understand the Bible. They also listen to him so that he can be their Lord and King. A second reason is so that God can be their Father in a very real way. Are you ready to think about this incredible gift?

So That God Can Be Our Father in a Very Real Way

God called these people his friends: Abraham (**Isaiah 41:8**); Moses (**Exodus 33:11**); his disciples (**John 15:14-15**). Yet Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer that the relationship goes even deeper - God is also called your Father!! As a believer, you are clearly God’s child (**Romans 8:15**). In this light, we are wise to meditate on statements that Jesus made, such as, **Matthew 5:45 (NIV)** ... *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*

Of course, this is not meant to be something that is, “in title only.” God wants to have a relationship with you as a Father. Or as John describes it, **John 17:3 (NIV)** *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Of course, without communication you cannot have a healthy, growing relationship; e.g. you cannot have a good marriage. What is the single greatest problem that many fathers have? They’re distant and they don’t communicate with the kids. They don’t talk!

But this is the whole point – your Father who is everywhere around you, isn’t distant at all! Neither is he silent! When you talk to him, he happily responds! And he also takes the initiative to speak if you’ll take the time to stop and listen.

What will your Father do for you as you speak to him?

First: the good Father assures his children

This is how Paul describes it, **Romans 8:16 (NIV)** *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.* Some followers of the Way can struggle with doubts such as, “do I really belong to God?” Or, “do my struggles disqualify me from being his child?”

In such situations, a person needs what is called, “assurance of salvation.” They need to understand DEEP within that they are accepted by God. This kind of assurance is life-changing! And it is possible.

And how do you (or anyone) receive this assurance? It happens through hearing God’s voice! Of course, God may use a Bible verse or verses to confirm that you are his child, but even here, it is still his voice speaking.

Second: the heavenly Father warns his children of danger

In a dream God warned Joseph of danger to his family, and so they fled to Egypt (**Matthew 2:13-14**). Such gracious direction from God to his kids still happens today! God does not change. Here’s a story from one follower of the Way:

“We always pray for safety when we travel. One winter day, when our family was returning from a road trip after Christmas, it was snowing quite hard. On-coming traffic kicked up a lot of snow and visibility was close to zero. The family was sleeping as we had left quite early. A semi approached from the front kicking up a lot of snow. No problem. As the snow cleared another semi was following also kicking up snow. Then I saw a 3rd semi coming and a voice clearly spoke to me: ‘Pull on to the shoulder.’ I didn’t know God would speak to me so directly, but it saved us from certain injury or death.”

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today’s reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?
3. What does God as Father do for you – the 2 things shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God assured you that you belonged to him? If yes, write down how this happened. If not, spend some time praying about this!
2. Can you think of a time when God warned you about something? If yes, write it down.
3. Spend some time in prayer, asking God – “is there anything that you want to warn me about now?” If a great fear rises up, bring this to him in conversational prayer.
4. Review 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:9-26.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 3

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

On Day Two, you learned (or were reminded) that hearing God’s voice allows for God to be your Father in a very real way. You also saw that as a Father, he can assure you and provide you with warnings. Today, two more things that God graciously does for you as your Father will be highlighted. He is so good!

Third: the heavenly Father comforts his children

There are many verses in the Bible that richly describe God’s incredible comfort. For example, in one of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, he says, **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NLT)** *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles ...* What a promise! Of course, as followers of the Way, you’ll need this kind of comfort to help you persevere! Here’s another story from someone who is on a journey with Jesus:

“My brother died in a house fire on New Years Eve, 1978, at age 18. Before the funeral my mom was sitting in a corner of the living room grieving and disheartened about the loss of her son. Suddenly she heard a clear voice to her left: “Your son is OK. He’s with me.” She turned to her left to see who had spoken, but no one was sitting there. She looked to see if anyone else had noticed the voice, but no one had. But she was so comforted that she got up and began to serve coffee and food to others. Some wondered at the change in her countenance. Later, she called a prayer partner who had sent news of the tragedy down the prayer chain. Mom told her what she had experienced, and the woman replied: “We were praying that God would reveal to you if your son was with him. This is the answer to our prayer for you!”

Fourth: the heavenly Father gives wisdom to his children

This is also a truth that the Bible declares over and over again – God will lovingly lead his children with wisdom and counsel! **Psalms 16:7 (ESV)** *I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.* Again, a story can help one understand the importance of this – this time a story from Pastor Ray Duerksen – who founded Church Renewal, the ministry that has made these lessons:

“My wife, Fran, and I differed on how to handle one of our kids, as a teenager. It was the first time that our marriage had been under such pressure. Fran’s idea was to loosen the grip and back off. I, on

the other hand, felt we needed to enforce the parameters even more to get compliance. And so, we were at odds with each other over this. One day I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, 'You and Fran are actually on the same page. You both want what's best for your teen. You just disagree on how to get there.' I told Fran what I had heard, and it had a big impact on our relationship. Soon after, I was driving with a young man (who was married) from Toronto to Montreal. He had gone through a very rebellious and difficult teen time. The Spirit suddenly spoke to me, 'Ask him what would have helped him during that time: if his father relaxed the pressure or increased the pressure at that time.' His response was mature. He said, 'I was the problem. However, I think that it would have worked better if my father had backed off a bit right then.' Something happened in my spirit and I knew the Lord had just spoken to me through this young man to give me the answer that would resolve the disagreement between Fran and I. As soon as I got to the hotel in Montreal, I called her and told her I knew what God wanted us to do - to back off. And that's exactly what we did from that point on!"

Because God is so good to his children, as a Father, he also: provides, disciplines, teaches, motivates, protects, encourages, forgives, etc. This intimate Father-child relationship isn't abstract or an unattainable dream! It is offered to you with open, waiting arms. He really wants to relate as a Father to you. But for this fellowship, you need to hear his voice.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What does God as Father do for you – the 2 things shared today?

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God comforted you? If yes, write down how this happened.
2. Can you think of a time when God gave you counsel? If yes, write it down.
3. Spend some time in prayer, asking God – "is there anything that you want to comfort me with right now?" If something arises, bring this to him in conversational prayer. May God bring you great comfort today!

Bible Reading

1. Please read Matthew 9:27-38.
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

Day 4

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today and tomorrow, you'll look at another powerful reason for hearing God's voice – so that he can be your life. One of the greatest cries of current times is, "I want to feel alive!" Much effort is made at significant cost to try to achieve this "dream." It's a universal desire, found in all cultures and in all places. Well, praise God, this is possible when a person abides in Jesus, which is closely connected to hearing his incredible voice.

So That He Can Be Our Life – Part 1

Jesus taught that to be truly alive, you need to be sustained by him. He said, **John 15:5 (ESV)** *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* As a human, you have the capacity to draw on God. You were created for this! This is like a branch that draws on the vine, in order to flourish. There are words like this - flourish, taste, be fruitful, be renewed – that are found in the Bible. These words attempt to capture your heart.

In Matthew, Jesus declared, **Matthew 4:4 (NIV)** *"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" What did Jesus mean by this? Jesus was teaching that the material side (body) feeds on "bread." (or tacos, or salad, or pizza!) But people also have an important immaterial part: the soul/spirit. This part is made up of the mind, emotions, and will. Put another way, we'll need another kind of food as well!*

When you are absolutely filled with joy, hope, love, and peace, you can tackle almost any challenge! Is this not true? But when it's lacking, you become paralyzed; everyone has experienced this as well! Of course, trying to feed your soul/spirit with food meant for the body doesn't work. Many people who eat three good meals every day (or overeat) are still discouraged or in despair.

Jesus then tells his listeners what the soul/spirit is to feed on: "on every word that comes from the mouth of God!" This isn't just God's words, as written down, but every continuing word of God! Here it is helpful to understand that there are at least two ways that, "word," is used in the Bible.

First, there is the "logos" – the Greek term (the New Testament was written in Greek originally) that is often talking about the words that you read in the Bible. It's the "written down for all time" kind of word. Jesus is also called the Word – or logos – in John 1. As one who is eternal, Jesus in a very real sense is always communicating.

And as Jesus keeps communicating, he communicates SPECIFIC things. This points us to a second Greek word, or second way he would speak – "rhemas." These are often specific words that God speaks to your soul/spirit in a moment. Consider, **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)** *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* In this verse, the word "word" in Greek is "rhema." It's saying that Jesus sustains the world with his ONGOING words and activity – his "rhemas."

As humans, we use words to express thoughts, ideas, and wishes. But Jesus' words carry out his thoughts and wishes because they're living and powerful. He pointed to the power of his ongoing words when he said, **John 6:63 (NIV)** *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

In the same way, when his words (his rhemas) penetrate into your soul, they will bring not only life, but abundant life! That is, they are creative and re-create according to his will and for his glory, not for our often narrow desires. Do you need some re-creating, some transformation? Well, Jesus still speaks! This makes all the difference in the world!

Consider what else it says about God's powerful words, **Isaiah 55:11 (NIV2011)** *... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the*

purpose for which I sent it. In some mysterious way Jesus abides in the very words that proceed from him so that they accomplish and achieve what is spoken! Wow!

Special Note: we want to acknowledge that biblical scholars are divided on how to interpret and translate specific Greek terms. This is true also of the distinction we're making regarding "rhema" and "logos." Discussions on this can be full of bias, confusion, etc. It often depends on what scholar you talk to. We'll continue to use the distinction of "logos" as the Bible's "all time" Word to us – including Jesus - and "rhema" as specific words which will not contradict the Bible. We also acknowledge that God will frequently use the Bible to speak a "rhema" word to us.

For those who prefer to ignore the distinction we use or disagree with it, that's totally fine! The important thing is that we acknowledge that a RELATIONSHIP with Jesus requires two-way communication, some of which is through the Bible, but at other times through other means (which will be discussed in future lessons). May disagreements on interpretation not be used as smokescreens to keep us from developing a vital relationship with Jesus! If you choose to ignore the term "rhema," we only encourage you to preserve the value of SPECIFIC words directly from the Spirit, that may or may not come from the Bible itself. Further, that Jesus himself lived by two different words – the written word and the spoken word.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the spoken word is audible. That would be very rare! Neither will we hear these specific words perfectly, as only Jesus could. That's why the Bible itself encourages us to test things! (see **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**, **1 Corinthians 14:29-30**) Testing assumes both that there are things that need to be tested – specific words – and that the hearing will be imperfect! We need to be very humble about this, not denying God's willingness to speak to his children outside of the Bible, but also recognizing the great need for testing.

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

1. In your own journal, write down something that stood out to you from today's reading.
2. What is a reason for hearing God, the reason shared today?
3. Explain what the difference is between the logos and a rhema as best you can.

Life Application (James 1:22)

1. Can you think of a time when God gave you a sense of abundant life through something he said to you? If yes, write down how this happened.
2. Ask God to show you someone who is really struggling in their faith right now. Ask God to give you something to share with them – a word, picture, thought or verse. In faith, pass this "word" on to them, trusting that God will use it to bring them life eventually. (sometimes the seeds take awhile to bear fruit!) Caution: do not share a correction or give them direction on what to do.
3. Review John 15:5-6, Romans 12:2, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

Bible Reading

1. Practice using SMORP with Psalm 19:7-11. What does this passage say that God's Word does for someone – i.e. his laws, statutes, precepts? His "rhema" words (words spoken to you) do the same.

Day 5

Renew the Mind (Romans 12:2)

Today, you'll have the opportunity to think a bit more about how hearing God's voice can bring you life.

So That He Can Be Our Life – Part 2

Remember, God's words can be like food to you! They're packed with himself, to give life to troubled or weary souls, whether circumstances change or not. The powerful word of God spoken to you can put *courage* into your life even if circumstances continue to rage out of control around you. This is a significant benefit of hearing God's voice. Wow!

In the New Testament we're told to deny ourselves and take up a cross. This includes difficult circumstances. And yet we're also encouraged by Jesus himself, **Matthew 11:30 (NIV)** *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Is this a contradiction? A cross, yet a light burden? Well, with God's help and life flowing in and through you, it's not!

For example, the apostle Paul had just been arrested in Jerusalem, and in the process had almost been torn into pieces by a violent mob. Wouldn't that put fear into you? See what Jesus does for him, **Acts 23:11 (NIV)** *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

Paul couldn't turn his fears into courage. However, when Jesus stood near him in prison, and spoke a word of courage into his heart, his fears subsided! God never intended for you to work up encouragement or to find it in something else. Jesus, who speaks, wants to BE your courage, your joy, your hope, your love, your peace – by speaking his living WORD into you! It's one of the reasons that Jesus is called, the Word, in the Bible (see **John 1:1**).

Now this is LIFE! It's exactly what Jesus meant when he said, **John 10:10 (NIV)** *I came that they may have life and have it to the full.* The Old Testament affirmed the same thing, **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)** *... the joy of the LORD is your strength.* When the soul/spirit (inner person) is fed, it becomes strong!

Unfortunately, many through neglect fail to hear God's voice and the result is this, **John 15:6 (NIV)** *If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers ...* May you not allow your inner life to wither. This isn't God's desire for you at all!

Here's one more story that illustrates the blessing of hearing God's voice, from Pastor Ray Duerksen:

"The day before Fran had one of her brain surgeries, we were both feeling some pressure, knowing that humanly speaking this was the end of the road. We also felt particularly alone...not the loneliness of human touch, but the simple need to be assured of God's love. At supper time we quietly walked to a food court building on the great Penn State campus and chose, as we so often do, pizza. In the center was a juke box (look it up! It was like a public version of Spotify, years ago) which would automatically select and play a tune every 15 minutes in order to entice paying customers to select tunes also. As we waited in line to receive our pizza the music box came to life and in that large secular setting played 'Jesus Loves Me.' And as it did, the Holy Spirit sent us what I can only describe as 'waves of liquid love.' It continued for approximately 15-20 minutes until I whispered, 'Please hold back, I can't take any more in public,' because I was so moved to quiet sobs. After I gained my

composure, I finished my pizza. Then Fran and I went over to the juke box to find that song. And guess what? Though we both checked it, neither of us could find the song listed! That's because God will find ways to bring life to his kids!"

For Your Journal

Reflecting and Reviewing (2 Timothy 2:7)

You can skip ahead to the Life Application section for today.

Life Application (James 1:22)

Step 1: Carefully and prayerfully read (reflect or meditate) Psalm 121 – take your time.

Step 2: Select a word, phrase or verse that seemed to 'draw you' to it.

- a. Other ways of saying this includes:
 - It seemed to stick out to you
 - It caught your attention
- b. You may have had an impression in the very first verse or two; perhaps in the middle or the end.
- c. Whatever the impression was, write that word, phrase or verse down in your journal.
- d. Or perhaps a thought came to you *because* of the word, phrase or verse you read.
 - A specific 'word' of encouragement for something in your life
 - A piece of wisdom you need for something in your life
 - A promise for you at this time
 - A rebuke for something
 - A warning
 - A blessing
- e. Then write this down!
- f. Why do you write these impressions, 'words,' thoughts or pictures down? In order to focus your thoughts, so that your mind doesn't wander. Once you have written down the word, phrase or verse that stood out to you, **WRITE the letter "G:" in front of it.** Remember: "G" stands for God.
- g. That impression or thought that stood out to you as you read was the whisper of God's voice! You heard it! If you had a 'word' or picture in your mind, that too was his voice. On the next line, write down the initial of your first name (E.g. J for John or R for Rachel).
- h. Next to your initial, write out a question you have about the word, phrase or verse you wrote down. You could also write a comment. You're speaking back to God about what you heard. A question or comment is part of normal conversation. There is no right or wrong in this, so ask away! Or tell God something about this!
- i. Next, wait for a response from the Lord. It will make sense for the context of your question or comment. Again, place a "G" before it. And then, placing your initial on the page, continue with another question or comment.
- j. Keep the conversation going.

Bible Reading

1. Today's Bible reading has been moved to Day 6. Enjoy! It is a powerful passage!

Day 6

Final Steps

1. Please read Matthew 10 (it's a longer section today, but it is best done in one sitting).
2. Write down 1 or 2 verses from the passage that stuck out to you.
3. Take time to quiet yourself before Jesus and meditate on the verses. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.