

# NEW WINE

CRSWLK

# **NEW WINE**

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*Thank you to the amazing team that makes this happen for every series and every day of the year!*

# INTRODUCTION

As we begin 2024, we desire that you make these study guides into something you do every day. Spiritual growth and development take discipline and a deep desire to continue to work. These resources, both this guide and the Abide Daily Podcast, are tools that will help you along this journey.

This tool is used to prepare you to hear the sermon and is to be used along with the weekly study guide for small groups to get the complete benefit for you and those you study with. However, if you are doing this alone, then this guide, along with the companion Abide podcast, will grow you toward a deeper understanding of discipleship as you develop both your spiritual awareness and your academic knowledge of the texts we study each week.

The writing/teaching team at Crosswalk works hard to make sure these guides will ask pertinent questions, have relevant illustrations, and will also allow you to reflect on what God is saying to you throughout these series. We are excited about where God is leading us this year, and we can't wait for you to come along for the journey.

—Pastor Tim and the Teaching Team for Crosswalk Church.

# Day 1

## NEW WINE?

### MARK 2:22



“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

Mark 2:22

Our first series of the year will be about New Wine. Perhaps this is not an excellent metaphor for a church in a tradition that has a legacy of health and “tee-totalism,” if that is a phrase. While Adventists have traditionally not partaken of wine, we understand the metaphor used in this text.

While there is discussion of whether Jesus drank wine that had been fermented, this is not the point of this text, nor is it the point of this series. Our “New Wine” series is essential for us in that we need to look at whether or not we are putting old wine into new wineskins, new wine into old wineskins, or new wine into new wineskins. All of these things have different connotations that we will discuss.

As you know, Crosswalk has become a church far exceeding its walls, and the teaching that comes out of Crosswalk also goes beyond the pulpit. We teach other churches and ministers what it is that we do. Often, their first question is about our process, how we do what we do, rather than what we are doing. They love conversations about the Coffee Bar, the Lights, and the Production as if these are the things that set us apart from other churches.

While I understand this impulse, we must see if we are talking wineskins or wine. If we are talking wineskins, then yes, what we do is undoubtedly new, or at least different from most churches in our Adventist world.

However, should we be talking about wineskins or wine? Should we be talking about how we do what we do or the content and purpose of why we do it? Is it enough to work out new processes if we are giving the same old messages and content that has always been given from our churches, pulpits, and flyers?

When we think about new wine, we have to consider the ingredients and see if there is anything new we should discuss and recognize. We have to think about not only process but content. Are we doing something different or doing the same thing differently? We also have to ask what we should be doing and why.

Here are a few questions for today:

1. When you think about Crosswalk and your experience, are you thinking about new wine or wineskins?



2. Do you have things that need a different process or content in your life?

3. How can you contribute to both the new wine and the new wineskins?

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# Day 2

## WINESKINS



Let's talk wineskins for a little. Most of us are not so familiar with wineskins for many reasons. The biggest reason is that the bottle replaced the wineskin in approximately the 1600's. Those bottles looked a great deal different than the glass bottles and the shape we are used to today.

The reason why wineskins were used for so long is pretty robust, but they used sheep or pig bladders to account for some flexibility in the material as they transported wine. For hundreds of years, the process of making wine was kept from the ordinary person, and wine would demand a high price. Therefore, most people didn't get a chance to drink much wine unless it was connected to a religious ceremony.

Regardless, wine is much more portable, and the process of making wine is common knowledge; wine is much cheaper and has become very different in our culture.

When the wine was emptied of the wineskin, it would often become brittle, cracked, and no longer valid for its

intended purpose. Therefore, if you put wine into a wineskin that had been used and then left empty, it would not be pliable and would burst.

This is the point of the message we hear in Mark 2:22. When the previous wineskin has been left empty, the new wine will burst the vessel. When this happens, that precious liquid will be released onto the ground and won't be suitable for anyone any longer.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever felt pretty brittle and cracked, empty from what had filled you before? When we become this way, it is difficult for us to be prepared for something new to come into our understanding. We tend to let the great things we are learning or experiencing out and become useless because we need to prepare. Perhaps this is why we are told that we become “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17-“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”)

This means that when thinking about renewing our religious and spiritual experience, we must be remade and made into new creations and creatures, as Paul tells us. Jesus reminds us that we need to be “born again” (John 3). All of this means that we are made to be renewed to hold that new wine God has to carry.

1. When did you feel brittle and about ready to crack?
2. Do you think you were good to hold anything new?
3. What changed in your life?
4. Do you feel you were “born again” and a “new creation?”

5. If you do or did feel that, what was it like?

[illegible]

# Day 3

## OLD WINE?



So, what is old wine?

In a word, Vinegar. . .

That's not great.

One of my earliest memories of being at my wife's family home was when we had gone on a walk one chilly December morning. We walked a long time, as we often do. We were hungry by the time we returned to the house, but most of all, we were thirsty.

We first went to the refrigerator to grab some ice-cold water. Sara, my wife, reached into the fridge, grabbed a big container of water, tore off the cap, and began to drink giant long draughts of clean and cold water.

Then her eyes got huge, and she threw the container away. I couldn't tell what was happening, as she couldn't seem to speak at all. She was choking, but she also couldn't breathe. I kept asking her questions, but they didn't seem

to help. She was in pain but was unable to communicate what was happening in the moment.

After just a moment, she was able to breathe and speak again. She told me that she had grabbed what she thought was water, but it was vinegar, and she had taken a big swig before she realized.

Twenty-eight years later, we look back and laugh, but at that moment, the vinegar was the last thing she needed, wanted, or would quench her thirst. She was okay, but not until she could rid herself of the foul liquid she had mistaken for life-giving water. The vinegar was toxic, particularly in those kinds of ratios.

And this is true of anything less than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whatever else has inhabited that wineskin has long since become vinegar, and it was thrown out. Therefore, the wineskin has become inflexible, dry, and cracked. We need a new vessel, a new people, and a new creation.

Luckily, as we learned before, Jesus is in the “new creation” business. Something that can take the new wine, grow to the intended size, and be flexible enough to handle even more.

Galatians 6:15 says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

In some ways, we are being told that what made the old wine old is no longer in play, for there is something new

that we need to focus on that is being created and that will take the place of the old.

This is hard for many of us, as we are often so comfortable in our ways we don't want anything to change. However, not only must we change, but we must allow ourselves to be changed by the grace and power of Jesus Christ for us to be those new creations. It does also mean that some things must be left behind. New wine demands new wineskins.

1. When you buy a new phone, do you get rid of your old phone?
2. If not, what do you do with it? Does it stay around in a drawer and clutter things up?
3. What must you let go of to be a new creation in Christ?
4. What should the church look to get rid of to become a new creation?

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# Day 4

## NEW WINE?



So what would new wine be?

I mentioned before that when people want to learn what makes Crosswalk unique, they often go to our process and design. We offer people something completely different from what is usually given in the churches they have attended.

The difference is New Wine.

Let me explain: When I came back into pulpit ministry and led a church, I had to decide my organizing principle. The more I thought and prayed about it, the more I realized that there had been a title that I had been given a long time before that, I had not always lived up to.

I was a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized this was all I had ever wanted to be. I didn't want to try to prop up anything made by man, anything less than the gospel, and anything with another organizing principle at its core. I tried to preach Jesus in and out of season and see the



seasons change because of it. Every week, I wanted to spend time in the word of God, listening to the Spirit of God, and speaking about the will of God to people, all in the context of who Jesus was, is, and is making us to be. I wanted to be a disciple, I wanted to be a follower, and I wanted to lead people to the foot of the cross and the feet of Jesus. I wanted to learn from Jesus, not just about Jesus, and I wanted a group around me that felt the same way.

Almost ten years later, we are continuing this journey. This new wine that was given has stayed dry. It continues to overflow. We have continued to be those ever-expanding and flexible vessels growing in grace, understanding, and even numbers when it comes to this new wine of Jesus Christ.

I love the text: “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”—Luke 6:38

1. Have you experienced the overflow of God’s love and grace in your life?
2. How can you look around and see what God is doing in your life?
3. What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ? Specifically, what does it mean to you?
4. Do you live any differently with this reality?
5. When do you most hear the voice of God in your life?



## Day 5

# NEW NATURE VS. OLD NATURE?



The Greek words for “new” and “old” don’t merely denote age but “nature” or “essence.” Old wineskins are already stretched, thin, rigid, cracked, and brittle. New wineskins, by nature, are elastic, full of oils, supple, thick, and can be sewn and shaped.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, spill it, and destroy it. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.”—Luke 5:37-38

In some respects, we are talking about our old and new nature. Our old nature was often brittle, breaking, and full of cracks that let all the great stuff out. The truth is that they have been empty for a while.

Some of us have come from living lives that started as full but emptied quickly. We either caught the things we were chasing and found them to be empty, or we never could catch them, and we ended up living lives of quiet desperation, wondering why we couldn’t ever hit our

targets. We run around like a dog chasing a ball our owner never threw.

Others come from places that promised us fulfillment but lacked anything to sustain our flexibility. As the old wine dried up or was used up, we became rigid, brittle, and somewhat unyielding in our resolve to ensure that things stayed the same. We are slowly turning to dust without the old wine even being present.

This is particularly difficult when you realize that the old wine was given to you by your old church. Just because we call them churches doesn't mean that the organizing principle is the new wine. The new wine is Jesus, so if you have come from a place where Jesus is an afterthought, an honorable mention, or something other than the core of who they are, know that the old wine will dry up as it can't be renewed.

I shouldn't have to say this, but I do. When Jesus is lifted, there is a renewal of the spirit and an outpouring of new wine. However, when something else takes priority over the message and the life of Jesus, historically and in the church, those wineskins will dry out eventually.

I pray you have not been to a church like the one mentioned above. I hope that whatever community you are a part of is nothing short of a beacon of light and life for your community in how they speak of Jesus!

However, if your experience was something different, know that now you have come to a place that believes not only in new wineskins but also in new wine, and we believe

1. Have you ever been to a church like the one mentioned above?
2. Did you leave?
3. Did you stay?
4. What can you do to change it?
5. How can Crosswalk help?



## Day 6

# WHY CAN THE NEW NOT INHABIT THE OLD?



Please read Colossians 3 today. I won't do it for you, as it is long. But take some time to read it as it pertains to what we have discussed this week. Well, I will give you just a peek:

Colossians 3:3 : “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

Jesus is a master storyteller. So, it is no surprise that the analogy gives us profound and agitating truths about life. The analogy takes something very practical to reveal the futility of adding our new nature to our old way of life. Jesus is making it clear: The old man cannot hold the new, or the new will be lost. Like the old wineskin, the old man cannot expand or grow to accommodate the new man. Because there is a new nature within us, within our being, we are not, in essence, or nature, the same. We are a new creation. (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-23) Only our new nature can contain the new growth, good fruit, character, healing, and maturity our Father has for us as His sons and daughters. He loves us where we are but wants continually

to take us and make us who we were created to be, always trying to "produce new wine" in our lives.

I'll keep it short so you can go and read the whole of Colossians 3!

A couple of questions for you:

1. Have you ever tried to hold onto your old nature while trying to accept your new heart?
2. How does behavior play into this?
3. How sure can you be that God has given you a new nature?

[illegible]

# Day 7

## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN

If you make New Year's resolutions, share one with the group, along with how the group can encourage you. If you don't make them, share what you're hoping for in 2024.

### HEAD

1. Read Luke 5: 36-39 and Colossians 3:1-17 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
2. If the wine is the content/the message, and the wineskins are the delivery method, what was the "new wine" that Jesus was teaching/living?
3. How did it differ from the ways the Jews had been teaching?



4. What was some of the new wineskins that Jesus' new wine would need to ultimately deliver that message to the world?
5. Colossians 3, and Paul in general, talk a lot about the old life vs the new life, death vs renewal. Why is it so hard to die to the old self? Why do you think we have a tendency to want to hold onto the old self/ways with one hand, and the new self/new ways with the other? Why does this not work?
6. What was the new wine teaching found in Colossians 3:11 and why was it so revolutionary for their time?
7. In verses 10, 12, and 14, Paul uses the metaphor of clothing yourself with the new life, new qualities (after putting to death the old ones, v. 5). How might the analogy of choosing what clothes you put on each day help you connect to "putting on" this new life each day?

## HEART

1. What is the new wine (the message) that you are hearing today in and thru the ministry and community of Crosswalk that may differ from previous teachings as it relates to God, Jesus, salvation, etc...?
2. Have you ever seen, or visited, a community that simply put old wine (old covenant, or old teachings) into new wineskins (methods)? If so, how did those experiences feel? Were they genuine, impactful, exciting, or something else?
3. Why do you think we have to continue to "choose" to "put on the new self" each day, instead of accepting we are

new creations and just continuing to move forward without looking back?

4. Put into your own words how you've grown in your walk with Jesus through the new wine of our Crosswalk community? How might you help someone else experience that newness this week?

## HANDS

Take some time to reflect on your life before the new wine of a new focus on Jesus. What was missing? What was hard? What did you long for that you felt you didn't have? For this week, take some time to reflect back on your old self, and celebrate the new that is Christ in you, the hope of glory. In some prayer time, thank God for His work in your life, and ask Him how you might partner with Him to help others experience the joy you've found in your new life.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*“So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.*

*The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”*

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 NLT

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## Day 8

# WHY DO WE WANT TO PUT THE NEW INTO THE OLD?



It is in our very nature to try and put this new wine into our old wineskins. Why? It is because of our fallen, broken nature that we seek out more without making sacrifices.

My wife and I bought my mother's house a few years ago. The only issue was that my mom decided to move and not take her things. The good news is that we love much of her stuff. The bad news is that we had quite a bit of stuff. Our furniture, our tools, our plates and cutlery, and more somehow had to find a place amongst my mother's stuff.

This was challenging by any means. 4 years later, we are still trying to put our new stuff into her older house.

Things might have been easier had we started with a new and empty canvas. My wife still dreams of moving into a new house with blank walls and no furniture, and we would have the opportunity to build it from scratch. The dream includes an unlimited budget, which would be awesome.

But alas, it is a dream.

But back to the topic at hand. We have this opportunity when it comes to our new nature. We don't have to bring in all the baggage that we have been lugging around for far too long. We can begin with a blank slate, with a new nature, and as new wine. With all of this, you would think we would be clamoring to be those people.

However, we have a tendency to fall back into what is comfortable and what we are used to in order to keep our lives a little more comfortable. Also, we sometimes think that our behavior, which is very difficult to change, is what this whole thing is about.

I have a question: What happens when you receive this new life and your behavior stubbornly does not change as immediately as the new life has begun? Does this mean that you have yet to really have the new life we have been talking about?

When we diminish our new nature to our behavior, we vastly underestimate what Christ has done for us. We have been given a new life, and sometimes it takes a moment for us to realize this. While we may have some of the same behaviors, we are no longer working on behavior change by ourselves; we are invited into a new life and new nature with Jesus Christ, and we need to let Jesus fill our lives with new furniture and paintings—Yes, I know I am taking this metaphor too far.

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## Day 9

# A NEW HEART IS A NEW WINESKIN.



Ezekiel 36:**26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

A new heart has been promised to us, which is a new wineskin.

My wife and I have had issues with our hearts, but hers was much more pronounced than mine. She had a hole in her heart when she was born, so she had to have heart surgery when she was about four years old. It was pretty traumatic, but it was fixed and hasn't been an issue ever since.

My issue was a lot less severe. It turned out not to be an issue at all. I just had a weird-shaped chest that somehow resonated in a way that made doctors think I had a hole in my heart. So, I guess I didn't have an issue at all.

But our hearts have been beating consistently our whole lives. So has yours. It makes sense that it is stretched, brittle, and sometimes thin. In fact, where has your heart been feeling a bit thin and brittle lately? Could you use a new one?

This new heart holds all of the new wine we receive from Jesus when we meet him and recognize that what he is offering us is much greater than we ever thought. And we need this new heart to be flexible, with the ability to grow to the size it needs to contain all of this new wine Jesus has for us. As new creations, we have to be supple, pliable, and able to grow as God would have us grow. When we recognize this and accept the new wineskin, then we can really grow for and in God.

When was the last time you received a new heart? Is it time for you to ask for one and to receive what has been promised? We can push this too far, but there is something that we need to recognize here.

God wants to renew your heart, spirit, life, and everything you hope for and give you a new reason for living. Your call to follow Christ, to sit at his feet, to live in his overflow has been prepared from the very beginning of time. He had you in his thoughts when the world was created and he never stopped loving you and never will stop thinking and working toward the best for you. Whether you feel like this is true or not, you can be safe in the arms that Jesus wants to wrap around you.

1. Where do you feel stretched or thin like you are trying to put new wine into old wineskins?





## Day 10

# WHAT TO DO WITH AN OLD WINESKIN?



“And He was also telling them a parable: “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good enough.’” Luke 5:36-39 (NASB) is also found in Mark 2:21-22 & Matthew 9:16-18

We have been looking at this for a while now, but we should take the whole text and pull some interesting thoughts out. I have been reading and meditating on this text all week, and the first question that came to my mind is, “What do we do with the old wineskin?”

Most of us would throw it away. Jesus is saying much more than throwing away the old. I looked up more about wineskin and learned that wineskin is usually made of

goatskin with the insides lined with pitch to waterproof it. If wineskins are made of leather, then logically, they should not be thrown away as leather products usually last for a long time. It does not make sense to keep making new wineskins for the new wine. Old wineskins cannot hold new wines because they become brittle and lose elasticity. As new wine ferments, gases are created, expanding the wineskin. Being less elastic, the old wineskin will eventually burst because of the pressure inside, and the new wine will be wasted.

Interestingly, “fresh” describes the wineskin used to contain new wine, not “new.” A fresh wineskin can be a new wineskin but can also refer to an old one reconditioned. A reconditioned wineskin is as supple as new and can hold new wine. An old wineskin must be cleaned and soaked in oil to recondition it. The wineskin is soaked until it is rejuvenated to its supple and soft state to be ready for the new wine. So old wineskins are not thrown away or only used to hold old wine. It can be made fresh again to hold new wine!

1. What would it look like to be rejuvenated in Christ?
2. What would the oil be in this situation?
3. Have you tried to put old wine into new wineskins?

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# Day 11

## OLD WINESKIN IS OFTEN TRADITION.



Moving from the personal to the community, often when we speak of old wineskins, we are talking about the traditions of the church that are no longer relevant nor effective as we spread the gospel. The way that the wine was brought to us previously might not be the way future generations and different worldviews engage most effectively in the gospel. Without being willing to change how we bring the gospel to people, we might as well be leaking the wine from the old, cracked wineskins.

Of course, not all tradition is bad or ineffective. Some traditions have been with Christianity since the first century. Communion, baptism, prayer, and the disciplines have always been part of the grand Christian tradition that transcends all traditions and opinions. However, other things seem to have become traditions for churches that are not in scripture and can be looked at in a new light.

How do we look at our churches and see what is opinion, what is a sacrament, and what is ripe for change? Is there a methodology that would make sense, something that we could even take a look at in our personal lives?

Let's start with Philippians 4:8: "And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."

These are the principles that we begin with. Start here—worship, study, thoughtfulness, and prayer. Also, service to others and ways to increase compassion, mercy, justice, hope, and equity in the world will do us well. It will also give us a purpose that is laser-focused on the ministry and life of Christ.

Once we have fully established the direction of our thoughts and purpose, we can begin to think about the methodology that we will use. Methodology will change over the years and if we can keep the overarching principles in place as we put them into practice, we will stay true to the target that we have been trying to hit all along.

Even in our personal lives, these rules apply. We don't simply do the same things over and over hoping for a particular outcome. Rather, we take these principles and find ways that effectively apply them into our lives.

1. What are the things that you are interested in focusing on?
2. What in your life is honorable, and right, and pure and lovely?
3. How can you put them into practice today, in a way that is relevant to your situation?

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# Day 12

## EXPANDING THE NEW WINESKIN.



We need new wineskins because something happens with new wine. Gasses formed within the wineskin as the wine's flavor, color, balance, and boutique grew. Because the new wineskin could expand and hold both the wine and the gasses.

If the new wine is the grace and power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, then we should expect that the new wine will continue to grow, change, and expand. How do we create lives and churches to accommodate the kingdom's growth through the Holy Spirit's work?

It begins with your commitment to the kingdom's growth through your life, your willingness to serve, and your desire to lovewell. Without you, none of this works. We need to work together as a community, but that comes from your commitment to expand your life to the growing demands of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 9 gives us a look into the cost of discipleship. We begin in Luke 9:57. As they were walking along, a voice comes to Jesus and we are told that the voice made a



declaration; “I will follow you wherever you go. . .” (Luke 9:57)

The answer Jesus gives this voice is difficult: “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.” (58)

Was Jesus trying to dissuade this person from following him? Was he trying to scare the person off? Or was Jesus just trying to give a reality check to the person who was trying to commit their lives to Jesus? Why would Jesus say this?

Jesus liked to deal in realities, not in dreams. He wanted the person to know that following him was not a simple thing nor a task to be taken lightly. Rather, it is a commitment to a life that doesn’t look like other’s lives, that is sometimes very nerve-wracking, and always forward-moving. It is a call to keep progressing the kingdom of God and expanding its influence in the world, and that means that when you take it on you will probably not stop moving.

We don’t know if this dissuaded the person, but we do know that the interactions did not end there. Jesus doubles down on how hard it is to become a disciple in the next two interactions we will discuss tomorrow.

1. Have you felt the call to be a disciple of Jesus?
2. How does one become a disciple?
3. What does it mean to follow Jesus and learn from him?

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# Day 13

## BECOMING DISCIPLES



**Luke 9:59** He said to another person, “Come, follow me.”

The man agreed, but he said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.”

**60** But Jesus told him, “Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God.”

**61** Another said, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family.”

**62** But Jesus told him, “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

These two interactions are indicative of what it takes to follow Jesus.

Growing up, in my father’s study there was a framed picture of a farmer, and around his farmer’s hat there were the words from verse 62: “Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

I only understood what it meant once I was much older. The way that I began to understand it came from a very strange place, so please forgive me as I digress.

I was watching Napoleon Dynamite, a film from 2004. If you have seen this movie, it may be a strange illustration of this point about discipleship. But bear with me! I watched the movie and I couldn't get over the character of Uncle Rico, a man who was caught in the past of what he had done as a high school quarterback. He relived those moments again and again in the film, and for some reason, it finally clicked what this text meant.

Jesus was not saying to not care about your family. Rather, he was saying that the work of the kingdom of God is ever-expanding and always progressing. It means that we look forward, and we are not to spend out time looking back over what has been accomplished.

You may have done some amazing things in your life, I am sure you have. You should recognize those things, and then move forward in the way that God is calling you to move.

One more anecdote. There was an old dental professor that used to live on the street south of us when we lived in Loma Linda. He was a great man, and we would talk when we were all out on our walks. It turned out that I worked with his daughter for a few years.

It turned out that we were at an event with this daughter and her husband a little while later, and she began to tell me about her dad and his incredible accomplishments over his life. Dental schools in third-world countries, mission dental clinics, and more awards than you can imagine. Then, her husband relayed how when he first went over to

take the daughter out on a first date, he was met by her father, this dentist, who was trying to warm the house up, as the electricity had shut off for some reason. He was stoking a fire in the fireplace.

He asked the young man to hand him one of the plaques on the wall. The young man did, and as he handed him the plaque, which was about to go into the fire for kindling, he realized it was a pretty significant award from a large dental society in South America in recognition of the work that this dentist had done. The young man asked the professor if he really wanted to burn such a great honor. The professor answered: “that was yesterday, I am more interested in what we are going to do tomorrow!”

This is what it means to live and work as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. What is God calling you to do for the growth of the kingdom of God?
2. How has he gifted you?
3. Are you willing to go?

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# Day 14

## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN

One can study for decades how to properly grow and care for a vineyard to produce not only the best fruit, but a great wine. Have you ever planted a garden, or grown something from seed to plant or fruit? Share about your first-time; what you grew and how it felt knowing you helped make that happen.

### HEAD

1. Read Ezekiel 36: 26-27, and Luke 9: 23-25 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
2. After reading Ezekiel 36: 26-27, go back and read Ezekiel 18: 30-32. In Ezekiel 18, who was responsible for getting a new heart? In Ezekiel 36, who actually provides a new heart? So God tells us we need a new heart, then God

provides us one. What do you learn about God and His grace by comparing these two passages?

3. Why do you think the cost of following Jesus is so high (*deny yourself, take up your cross/instrument of death, etc...*)?
4. Jesus was honest with people when it came to what it was like to follow Him. He didn't sugarcoat or beat around the bush. And it wasn't all negative and sacrificial. Jesus said to gain your life you have to lose it. So how did Jesus' honesty help people choose whether to follow Him or not? And how does giving something up (*i.e. losing your life*), help you gain a new life?
5. Hearing Jesus talk about all that you have to give up to follow Him, why do you think the disciples stayed with Him? Why not leave and take an easier path?

## HEART

1. Can you think of something or someone that used to frustrate, maybe even anger you, that God softened or changed your heart towards?
2. Can you think of something you have given up because of your new life in Christ? Was giving it up easy to do? Hard? How did your life change when you let the former thing go?
3. If the gospel is ever-expanding and ever-growing, how have you seen yourself change to be more Christ-like in your journey with Him? What areas would you like His grace and love to continue to work on in you for newness and growth?



## HANDS

As part of your journey to live into the new heart Christ gives, commit this week to memorizing the Living Words listed below, maybe even including them in part of your prayer time before getting out of bed each morning. Seek His renewal, His transformation, and the heart He wants to give you each and every day. Then, see what changes take place within you for the cause of Christ.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*

*Psalm 51:10-12 ESV*

[illegible]

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# Day 15

## THE VINEYARD



John 15:1 “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

Have you ever hung out in a vineyard? Weirdly, I have. I spent one year in the Napa Valley attending Pacific Union College. It was a great year. I had a great time, and I was able to hang out with some amazing people. I also had the opportunity to learn a bit about the grape industry that is so prevalent up there. From the crush in the fall to planting in the spring, it was interesting to see how well the vineyards were cared for and the incredible harvest available at the end of all that work.

John 15 begins by reminding us where our sustenance comes from. The source of everything that we need comes from Jesus. We are well-tended by the Gardner, who is God himself. In the process of tending to the grapevine, there is a discernment of what needs to stay and what needs to go due to the efficacy of their fruits. This is not to give us a

picture of a God who is interested in cutting off branches, rather, it is a picture of God who tends to his vineyard with love and with care.

I don't know a great deal about plant husbandry, but I do know that pruning a tree is not simply cutting off certain branches that are not bearing fruit, it is also redirecting the connection of the vine to the branch so that it might bear fruit in the future. It is making sure there is a Vital Connection that creates fruit.

It is possible to be connected to the vine yet not to grow fruit. We see this every day with those who come to church, and who do some great things but can't seem to grow spiritually. Those who find themselves stuck in a loop of sin management that they cannot seem to get out of. Their fruit does not grow because that connection to the vine is not vital, and so it does not create the kind of results they are hoping for.

Therefore, we have to be mindful of the way that we are attached to the vine, making sure that is vital. The good news is that when it is not vital, we can get involved in practices that help us to revitalize the connection we have with God. These are often called the Spiritual Disciplines.

1. Do you feel like your connection with God is vital? That is bringing good fruit?
2. Have you ever engaged in any spiritual disciplines?
3. What can you do to get to know more about these disciplines? (Good news, we will keep talking about them)



# Day 16

## THE VINEYARD



John 15:3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

So the pruning did not take the branch away, rather, it purified it and made it able to produce good fruit. If you are like me, for many years I found this text problematic due to the idea that the Gardener would throw away a branch that wasn't producing fruit. I have done this many times with the fruit trees that I have in our backyard. We trim that which does not bear fruit, and then we throw away the other branches.

However, there are five rules to pruning that might be helpful to us both for our trees and our hearts.

1. **Know when to prune.** There are certain times that you should prune. Prune too early, and you will lose fruit you might have had. Prune too late, and you will also lose fruit on certain branches. The good news is that we

are not the one's doing the pruning, rather, our Good Father is the one who will be doing the pruning.

**2. Know where to cut.** It seems easy to see where a branch is connected and just cut there. But if you do that, there is no chance of reclaiming the branch with new growth. You should always cut just below where the branch is dying, has died, or is diseased. Instead of simply assuming this branch is lost, see if something is worth saving.

In our lives, oftentimes, we feel like we are dying or diseased. However, the Good Gardener knows exactly where to cut so that your branch can produce good fruit again.

**3. Remove problematic branches first.** Some branches are just waiting for a new environment to be able to thrive. By removing the problematic branches first, the Gardener creates a better environment for other branches to thrive.

There are times when certain people leave our faith communities. While we are never happy about that, there are times when they should leave to be able to grow in another vineyard. Usually, as they leave, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we also see some of the branches they were close to in our community begin to grow in a different way than they had grown before. This means that the previous branches were part of creating an environment where not everyone could grow. We don't like having people move on from our communities, but we do love them finding a place they can thrive spiritually.

**4. Thin out dense growth.** Shrubs or trees maintain their health when they see the sun. When the outer part of the tree becomes too dense, the inner parts cannot see the sun and essentially die inside. This same thing can be said of the church and our personal spiritual lives. When we create a density in the outermost parts of our lives then we often die a bit inside. We need to thin out dense growth that crowds out the sun and its nutrients.

**5. Prune regularly.** If we constantly allow God to prune us in the ways that we need to be maintained, we then see the possibility of what it means to live in the vineyard with God and to be deeply and vitally connected to the source of all life, that branch where we find our sustenance, Jesus Christ.

1. When was the last time you felt you were being pruned positively by God? (I know that sounds weird; go with it!)
2. How can you allow God to do the work on your heart so you will maintain the ability to see the sun and grow from its nutrients?
3. Are you clear that you are not the one who does the pruning; rather, it is God who does that work in us?

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# Day 17

## THE VINEYARD



John 15:4. . . Remain in me. . .

We should talk just about this text today. It is just a little part of a much greater whole, but it makes sense to linger here.

While working on my doctoral thesis, I spent much time thinking, studying, and exegeting the idea of the Trinity as a model for community. This one phrase stuck in my mind above all the other phrases: “Mutual Abiding.”

The more I studied it, the clearer it became the Trinity works and makes sense because of the time and effort each member of the Godhead had put into simply abiding with one another. They were so close to being one, and they did not function as anything other than a community, a unit, a cohesive whole. As I read, it had massive impacts on particular parts of scripture.

John 14, John 15, and John 21 were some of the texts that were most profoundly impacted by this idea. So When Jesus says “. . . remain in me. . .” he means something very

specific. He is talking about the time, energy, and priority he has put into abiding with one another. In the vineyard, the grapes grow to ripeness because they remain. When picked too early, they are not yet ripe and are bitter; too late and sour. However, when they remain until the right point, they are some of the sweetest things in God's creation.

When Jesus asks us to remain in him, it means that we are to remain close to the vine that gives us sustenance so that we might grow closer to the source of life, which is Christ. We grow toward Christ, are sustained by Christ, and learn from Christ. This makes us strong, grows our roots deep, and helps us bear fruit.

So, how will you remain in Christ? How will you create an environment that constantly brings you back to Jesus? There are times in our lives when rather than creating good habits, we need to create the right environments so our habits can thrive. Are you a morning person, how can the mornings help your spiritual walk? How can your evenings point you toward Christ? Does your job help or hinder your walk with Christ? How can you remain in him more profoundly today?

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# Day 18

## THE VINEYARD



John 15:5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

This remaining will produce much fruit in you. The next statement is important; “apart from me you can do nothing.”

What does this mean? Is it true that we can do nothing of significance without Christ? That may be a strong statement, too strong. But it does mean that when we speak of spiritual things, our efficacy is greatly grown by our vital connection to the vine. We will fall short and wear out without the vine, and our fruit will be less viable.

So we stick close to the vine. This is called an unbound set. A good example of this is the illustration of fences when it comes to how cattle are kept together in Australia. You have heard this illustration before, so I won't linger. However, since the “stations” (read: cattle ranches) in Australia are made up of millions on hectares, fences are not an efficient way to keep cattle together. So rather than fences, they drop wells. The cattle know they need to stay

close to the wells in order to survive. This manages where they go better than fences ever could.

When we realize that we can stay close to our sustenance, which is the vine, we want to remain, to abide, more each day. We want to stay close as we know we can grow toward Christ, rather than away from Christ. This is important for our spiritual growth as well as for our sustainability and our ability to continue in the way that Christ has for us.

I was thinking about this illustration and I thought I would use it here. I have 2 dogs at home. Vespa, who tries to get away any time she can. She is a sight hound, and she loves to run, to find new people, and to try and get as far away from the house as possible. Bo, our other dog, has no interest in leaving. We got Bo as a rescue from the streets in Korea, and she knows what it is like to live on her own, to forage for food, and to be hungry. Vespa came home with us when she was 10 weeks old and has never known hunger or any hardship. Bo is a good example of someone with experience staying close to the source of life, for her. Vespa represents our usual wayward behavior that doesn't want to remain, but wants to forge her own way. They are both sweet and loving Dogs, but one you have to keep your eye on a little bit more, for her own good.

1. Will you remain today?
2. Are you more like Bo or like Vespa?
3. How can you make sure you set up an environment that helps you remain without making hard decisions every day!

[illegible]

# Day 19

## THE VINEYARD



John 15:7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

How do you bring glory to the Father? How does the work you do in the vineyard, the things you do that bear fruit, show the world who God is? What does the fruit you bear look like, can you pinpoint it, and does it align with the Missio Dei or the mission of God?

When we work for compassion, healing, justice, mercy, and equity and to let people know that God is for them and not against them, we are bearing good fruit into the world and showing the world the character of God through our actions. As we do these things, an imbued blessing resides in these actions and, therefore, our hearts. We are bearing good fruit, and God is blessing that fruit.

This is not a formula. Those don't exist in our spiritual lives and theology. But there is a bit of cause and effect. It is like when you think about giving to God. God does not have to bless what we give to Him. However, our hearts are put



to rest when we give with a glad heart. This creates a peace in us that transcends what we think we know. We are given this peace as we put our money in the places that God is asking us to put it. The peace that results is not the result of a formula, i.e., I give so I have to be blessed. . . Rather, it is a peace that comes from following Christ, even when it is inconvenient for us, even when it makes us decide on things that might not seem like they are in our best interests.

1. Why would you need to do things that honor and bring glory to God?
2. What would those things look like in your particular context?

[illegible]

# Day 20

## THE VINEYARD



**John 15:9** “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. **10** When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. **11** I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! **12** This is my commandment: Love each other like I have loved you.

It is fair to say that the greatest harvest that comes from the vineyard is a harvest of love in the world. There is an example of love and a command to love all encapsulated in this particular text. Jesus shows us how he has loved us in the same manner that the Father has loved him. Then, we are asked to obey his commands, specifically to love one another so our joy will overflow.

How do you love the people around you? Does giving love give you joy? It usually does. There is a reciprocity to love that is made clear repeatedly in scripture, and here is perhaps the greatest example of it. We are to love people the way that Jesus has loved us, which is based on God the Father has loved him. It’s pretty good company you keep when you decided to love in the way that Jesus has.

And what I find most comforting is that when we are given a commandment, it is to love! I am constantly amazed when someone is confused by this. Jesus makes it explicit. But there are some that don't believe that this commandment is enough. They constantly want to point us back to the Ten Commandments rather than understanding that by loving as Christ loved us, we can't help but keep all of the commandments in our hearts. There is a confusion that keeps sinking in.

I think the confusion stems from the reality that it is hard to accept that love is enough. When we have not yet experienced the love that comes from Jesus, then it feels like love is just another emotion. However, when we have experienced the love that comes from the sustainer of all life, when we feel the belonging and acceptance that comes from Jesus, we stop thinking we need more rules, and realize that the freedom that comes from Christ is the freedom to love without boundaries, as we are loved without boundaries.

We can then realize that the vine has been taken care of by the good gardener, and we are living off the overflow of that love and care!

1. What does love really look like to you?
2. Why do you think people want more rules, rather than more love?
3. What is the greatest love you have ever experienced?

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# Day 21

## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN

Share with the group what your favorite fruit is and how you like it prepared?

### HEAD

1. Read John 15:1-17 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
2. Do you think the process of pruning is cruel or kind? Explain.
3. Is it possible that the process of pruning hurts? If so, how might it hurt and if it hurts, why would God hurt us?
4. Jesus says repeatedly to remain or abide in Him. How does one remain/abide in the course of a day?
5. Read Matthew 7:15-20. What fruit is produced when you are connected to Jesus? What fruit comes when you are disconnected from Jesus? Can you be a Christian and

produce bad fruit? How? What are you connected to if not Jesus?

6. In John 15:13, Jesus says that there is no greater love than to lay one's life down for one's friends. Jesus went farther; He laid His life down for those who hated Him too. How does one produce that kind of fruit, that kind of ability, in your life?
7. What does love and commandments/rules have to do with each other? Which comes first?

## HEART

1. Why do you think that for too many professed Christians, love is not enough? The series guide claims that it involves not having truly met, trusted, or accepted the Jesus of Scriptures or His gospel. Thoughts?
2. What kinds of practices help you stay focused on Jesus? Which of those comes easier for you? Which ones are harder?
3. How can you and I help each other REMAIN/ABIDE in Jesus?

## HANDS

Make room in your life this week, if you haven't already, to lean in to one of your favorite practices that helps you stay connected with Jesus, but also, one practice that is a little harder for you. At the end of the week, reflect on your journey and if there is something about the more challenging practice that helped you grow or that you might keep as a part of your journey going forward.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

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# Day 22

## COME TO ME...



**Matthew 11:28-30** “Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.””

I have a question for you. Are you ready for it? Ok, here it is . . . would you like to get really close to Jesus? I mean really close to Jesus. I'm guessing you're saying yes! Well, the good news is that we can! In fact, Jesus wants us to live this life incredibly close with Him!

The passage we are going to spend time in today has Jesus talking about something called a yoke. A yoke was something that was used in the agricultural environment . . . in the fields with animals. It was something that went on the necks of creatures like oxen or horses.



Many yokes were made for a single animal to work or plow the field. But, the animal didn't naturally or instinctively know how to function in a yoke. It had to be taught.

Therefore, there were also yokes that fit two animals so an experienced and stronger animal could show a younger and weaker animal how to plow the field.

Jesus, being the wise and practical Teacher He was, used this example from the everyday lives of those He lived with and taught. This was a very common site for the people of His day. They could understand very quickly what Jesus was getting at when He talked about a yoke in Matthew 11.

However, a yoke was also a term used for the teaching of a Rabbi. If you were a disciple . . . an apprentice of a Rabbi, you were choosing to live your life under their teaching, under their yoke. The yoke, or teaching, of the religious leaders and Rabbis of Jesus' day was a heavy yoke. It was not full of the love and grace of God. It was a heavy burden to the people.

This is why Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." We are so blessed to live in the yoke of Jesus!

1. Do you sense you are enjoying life in the easy yoke with Jesus? If so, reflect on the moments you especially notice it.

2. Do you sense you are a living under a heavy yoke of your own or someone/something else's? If so, what leads you to this realization?

3. Take a couple of minutes to be still and think about what you sense Jesus would like for you to receive from Him today.

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## Day 23

# THE SHEPHERD



"The Lord is my Shepherd..." This phrase, this statement, is one of the most well known to humanity. For sure, it is probably the most familiar among Christians and Jews. It seems to appear in just about every printed funeral program when a loved one passes away. This statement, from Psalm 23, has probably brought some of the most profound comfort to people when going through seasons of grief or suffering. There is a reason for this.

This psalm, more so than any other psalm, helps us more clearly understand and experience God as the One who can ultimately take care of us. It is often during times of grief and suffering when we realize more than ever, we really don't have much control over anything or anyone except ourself. Although, even on a good day we don't do very well in controlling ourselves either! It is during these times we can experience how good it is to let go and trust God with every aspect of our lives. Psalm 23 teaches us, reminds us, and invites us to let God be our Shepherd. One of the

greatest gifts God has given us, is the opportunity to surrender ourselves to His shepherding of our lives.

Most of us probably already have an idea of what a shepherd is as someone who tends to the care and safety of sheep. But, the title shepherd also had another meaning in the Old Testament. It was a title used for kings taking care of and ruling/governing over their people. The prophet Isaiah refers to God/Jesus/The Messiah as The Shepherd King. So, the ultimate invitation to us from our Shepherd King is . . . will we allow Him to/give Him permission to, rule over our lives? Will we not only call him Friend, Savior, and Redeemer, but Lord as well?

The abundant life Jesus talks about in the Gospels is finding and experiencing life under the reign of God (in the vineyard of God) . . . under the reign of Jesus.

Take some time now to read Psalm 23 in your favorite translation.

1. Can you think of anyone else you would want to govern your life than Jesus?
2. Is there anyone or anything else you are allowing to reign over you?
3. If you would like to, in this very moment, enjoy surrendering to the loving reign of Jesus as your Shepherd.

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# Day 24

## AT HIS FEET



**Luke 10:38-42** “38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” 41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things,

42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.””

"At His Feet." This has been my desire for decades. It is how I sign all of my emails. This is, by His grace, the posture I have chosen for the direction of my heart, mind, and will. For sure, I have not done it perfectly but it is the intent of my life.

Many years ago, when I was a youth pastor, God brought a team of spiritual leaders into my life who turned out to be critical in my discipleship to Jesus. They really helped me major in the major things and to not focus on the minor things. I discovered I was trying to do a lot of things for Jesus but not many things with Jesus. Did you catch that? I was doing many things "for" Jesus, but not many things "with" Jesus. I wasn't paying attention to what Jesus and I were doing together in my personal life or professional life.

Sure I was trying to live for Him, honor Him, and obey Him, but I was missing out on His transforming presence in my life and enjoying His company in all He was inviting me to be and do with Him.

The wonderful thing about living at the feet of Jesus is it is an internal posture of the heart, mind, and will which greatly impacts my posture in my outer life which everyone else around me sees. And, no one . . . absolutely no one has enough power to ever remove me from the feet of Jesus!

When followers of Jesus are martyred and imprisoned, their life testifies to the internal posture they have chosen for their life. No matter the torture they may face, they show they have chosen to live their life at His feet no matter what.

1. Would you like to take this moment to let Jesus know you would like to receive His invitation to spend the rest of your life at His feet? If so, tell Him now.

2. What do you think about the fact that nothing can separate you from living the rest of your life at Jesus' feet?

3. What feelings are surfacing for you in this moment?

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# Day 25

## MARINATING



**Matthew 6:9-13** “9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

"Lord, teach us to pray." This is what Jesus' disciples asked Him when they wanted to learn how to pray like Him. They knew He knew how to pray like no one they ever knew before. Who else better to teach them how to pray. As disciples of Jesus in this current day, post-modern area, we too want to learn from Jesus how to pray.

Today we will be 'marinating' ourselves in what is known<sup>25</sup> NW2 as The Lord's Prayer. Some of us may be very familiar with this prayer and might even have it memorized. It is a prayer I enjoy praying and contemplating several times a week. I like to, slowly, pray and contemplate the phrases in this prayer before I get out of bed in the morning. This discipline, if you will, invites me to make God, His Kingdom, grace, and new mercies my first thought and

desire during my first waking moments of each day. When praying this prayer slowly and allowing one's self to pause after each phrase, it also gives opportunity to listen to what God says back or through His Word/Prayer.

I've written previously about God's Kingdom now and to come, and in this prayer Jesus teaches us to pray, we see His desire for His Kingdom to come now and not only when He returns in person. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." It is within us because it is in our heart, mind, and will that we allow God to reign or not. God's desire, as seen in the life and teachings of Jesus, is for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. This is God's desire and will for us, "on earth as in Heaven." And the way this happens is through a relationship with Jesus as His beloved sons, daughters, and apprentices . . . disciples.

1. In this very moment, enjoy praying the prayer Jesus teaches us to pray. Pray it slowly and in an unhurried manner.
2. What are you noticing as you pray this prayer slowly and unhurried?
3. If you have not memorized this prayer, consider memorizing it beginning today and take time to pause every morning at some point to linger in this amazing prayer Jesus teaches us to pray.

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# Day 26

## PACE



**Mark 6:30-32** The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told Him all they had done and taught. 31 Then Jesus said, “Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.” He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and His apostles didn’t even have time to eat. 32 So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone.

**Luke 5:15-16** Yet the news about Him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

How's your pace? How is your pace of life? While this is a very simple question, it can prove to be a very difficult, possibly painful, and revealing question. So . . . how is your pace of life? Who or what is determining and/or driving your pace of life? Here is the 'big' question . . . are you, someone/something else, or Jesus determining and leading your pace of life?

I think if we are honest, we are finding this line of questioning a bit painful. I know for me and many of those I

speak with and counsel, it can be a painful realization that most of the time it seems our pace of life is more led by ourselves rather than Jesus. Even, as intentional disciples of Jesus! Because our pace in life is directly related to and greatly impacts our spiritual life, it is essential we carve out some intentional time to think about it.

Today we are going to reflect on Jesus's pace of life and the pace of life He invites us to with Him. As disciples and apprentices of Jesus, we are desiring to learn from Him, as our Master and Teacher, how to live the 'Thy Kingdom Come' life in our lives. So, what sort of pace does The Kingdom of God . . . The Reign of God, take up and create in the life of a Kingdom resident . . . as a disciple of The King? When we take time to notice the pace of life Jesus lived and led, we will notice He was never in a hurry. He was arguably the busiest person Who ever walked the face of this earth, so it seems He would have the greatest reason to be the most hurried. But, He wasn't. As one of my friends says, busyness is a matter of the calendar, but hurriedness is a matter of the heart. And, it is the heart Jesus asks to reign in/over. Jesus lived at the pace of grace.

Jesus lived always trusting The Father to guide and provide, and because of His trust in His Father He could rest in knowing His Father was always working so He didn't have to.

1. How might Jesus be asking you to learn from Him about the pace of your life?

3. How do you sense Jesus is asking you to let Him lead you today according to His pace as His beloved disciple?

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# Day 27

## TRUTH



**John 8:31-32** To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Today, we are going to take a good hard look and listen to some incredibly clear and serious words of our Master Teacher/Rabbi Jesus. These words are probably some of the most well known of His sayings. Especially, by people who don't know He was the One Who said them! In fact, some of the words we are going to look at are etched into stone, concrete, and walls at universities and the halls of academia.

Maybe you have heard them, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Am I right? Have you heard these words before? Are you aware of them being spoken and/or written outside of the context of the Bible, or not in connection with Jesus as the source? Maybe you have heard of The University of

Southern California (USC)? It is a very prestigious university and well known in America and abroad. This statement, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," is engraved on the main exterior wall of the building on campus where the department of philosophy resides.

The challenge, or unfortunate mistake, is that millions of people don't know this is a statement made by Jesus! And, it is probably the most incomplete and misquoted quote in the history of civilization! (In my opinion). But, Jesus says, if we hold to His teachings, then we are really His disciples, and we will know the truth, AND the truth will set us free! The truth is directly connected to knowing and following Jesus, by taking everything He said and did seriously and banking every bit of our life (past, present, and future) on it ... and Him. According to Jesus we won't know the truth He is speaking of, unless we are His disciples and hold to/abide in Him and His Word.

1. What do you think about the 'complete' version of this quote and what Jesus is really saying?

2. Is there any area of your life where you think you might be looking for truth outside of Jesus?

3. If you believe Jesus is completely capable and competent to lead you in every area of your life, tell Him. Now, enjoy the peace of God that comes in resting in His reign.

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# Day 28

## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN

Share about one of your favorite school teachers growing up. What did they teach? Why were they one of your favorites?

### HEAD

1. Read Mark 3: 13-15 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
2. There were three things that Jesus appointed the disciples to do, what were they?
3. How do you and I, today, “be with” Jesus when we can’t see Him or reach out and touch Him?
4. Read Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
5. According to this passage, what are the things that bring us life? What brings death? Which one does God want us to choose?

6. What are we called to do that leads toward obedience?  
Why is loving first so hard, or simply not enough, for so many people?
7. Read Matthew 11:28-30 from the NLT, then The Message paraphrase and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts from the reading.
8. The posture of a disciple involves that of listening before doing (see Mary's posture in Luke 10:38-42). What are some of the ways we can listen to Him today, or sit at His feet especially in a world that is often hustling to do and accomplish more?
9. What do you think are the "unforced rhythms of grace"?

## HEART

1. With so many options and distractions, how can you and I help each other live with Jesus as our Shepherd, our guide?
2. When was the last time you stole away from the hustle of life to spend quality time at the feet of Jesus?

## HANDS

This may be a tough ask for some of you, but the challenge for this week is to schedule an hour with Jesus this week. Set aside your phone and any other distractions, and set the room (maybe light a candle, or turn on some ambient music, or curl up with a favorite blanket). Then just spend time with Jesus in a way that connects with your heart - prayer, worship, reading Scripture, being silent, etc.... When done, maybe schedule another time to do this again.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*Psalm 27:4, 8, NLT*

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# Day 29

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



With new wine and new wineskins, we need to be able to handle it all a little differently. You may have been a Christian for the majority of your life. Yet, you have never really had the opportunity to delve into the spiritual disciplines in a way that has become truly meaningful for you. This week, we will delve into 5 disciplines that might be helpful for you to dive into intentionally.

### #1 Meditate on God's word

God's word is the foundation of our lives. In the Scriptures, God reveals himself and his will for us. If we want to know and enjoy God, the place to begin is God's word. The truth is that apart from the Bible, we CAN'T know what God is like.

We can see some aspects of God in nature and the creation, but we would never look at an oak tree or a butterfly and know that God is holy, sovereign, or loving. We could never know what Jesus did to redeem us by hiking through the Grand Canyon or looking at a beautiful sunset. We need God's word, the only source of absolute, unchanging spiritual truth.

Here's what Scripture says about itself:

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts." - Jeremiah 15:16

To "eat" God's words means we take them in; we hear God's words or read them. And when we do this consistently and meditate on them, God's words become a joy and delight in our hearts.

In Psalm 1, there are two forces that will shape our thinking: either the world or God's word:

In Psalm 1:1-2 it is said:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

We can either follow the counsel of the world or the Word. Psalm 1 tells us that we should make God's word our delight and meditate consistently - day and night on it.

One last note. This is more than reading the word of God. It is ingesting the word of God. Some days you may read chapters, while other days you may read a sentence, or a phrase, or a word. We take it, we "eat" it, and we sit with it as we contemplate what those words mean. We take the time to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts

1. I am sure you have studied your bible, but have you meditated on it?

2. Can you take 30 minutes a day to do this? 20? 10? Start with whatever you can handle.

3. Are you hearing what God is saying between the words? What is it?

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# Day 30

## GIVING THANKS



Spiritual Practice #2, Giving Thanks.

"...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

We can thank God in all circumstances because he is sovereign over all things; he is infinitely wise and infinitely loving. He is in control of all things; nothing can happen unless he allows it, and in his infinite love and wisdom, he causes all things to work together for our good, as it says in Romans:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

We don't have to thank God for pain or tragedy or sadness, but we can thank him that even amid horrible things, he loves us and will somehow work all things for our good.

But even when God blesses us, or life is going fine, we can so easily forget to thank God for our blessings. So, one of the spiritual disciplines for the Christian life is to thank God daily. It is a practice that humbles us, and brings us to the mercy seat of God.



I try to spend some time giving thanks before I start asking God for things. It's not legalistic; I can pray first if I want to, but I think of Psalm 100:4: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!"

One way I try to "enter his gates with thanksgiving" is after meditating on God's word, I usually write 1 page of things I'm thankful for in a journal, I use my phone notes most of the time, but I know some people use the companion journal here at Crosswalk.

I start with something like, "God, thank you for..." and begin writing. It's not usually anything deep. It might be as simple as "Thank you for the sunshine," or "Thank you that I got to spend some time with my family," or "Thank you for another day of life."

Or I might thank the Lord for spiritual blessings, like, "Thank you for saving me," or "Thank you for paying for all my sins on the cross," or "Thank you for giving me eternal life." I don't write for anyone else to read or worry about being profound; I want to say thanks for everything.

The point is always, that I get down to the idea that I am grateful for the little things, the big things, and everyone in between. That I give thanks as a discipline every day.

1. What are you thankful for today? Did you write it down?
2. How can you create a spirit of thankfulness in your life?

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# Day 31

## THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER



Spiritual Discipline #3, Prayer.

“...pray without ceasing” -1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and constantly pray...” -Romans 12:12

“...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...” -Philippians 4:6

It's hard to overstate the importance of this spiritual discipline for the Christian life. Prayer is simply asking God for help, strength, or provision. It is the supplication of our lives before God in an intentional conversation focused on God.

We should not worry or “be anxious about anything” but bring all our needs and concerns to our gracious Father because he loves us.

“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you .” -1 Peter 5.6-7

It is humbling to ask our Father for everything. Prayer says, “Father, I need your help. I need your grace. Please provide for me. To give me wisdom and strength. To lead and guide me with my children.”

Rather than try to solve our problems or relieve our anxiety, we should cast them on our Father. Why? Because he cares for us - He genuinely, truly cares for us. It has been stated in scripture time and time again, but yet we seem to think that those promises are for someone else.

Remember, a “discipline” is something we do regularly. So don’t wait until you’re in trouble to pray. Do it every day. Try and find the same time to do it so it becomes part of your daily practice. You can do it while you brush your teeth, while you shower, while you drive to work, while you work out, you can really do it everywhere!

1. Where is the best place you have to pray?
2. When is the best time for you to pray?
3. Do you keep those lines of communication open more often than not?
4. What can you do to focus your prayer time today?

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## Day 32

# THE DISCIPLINE OF GIVING



"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come" - 1 Corinthians 16:2

The point is this: "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God can make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." -2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give regularly and joyfully. Not under any legalistic pressure but freely and cheerfully. The "discipline" involved was to set apart and give weekly (for them) or regularly.

It also takes a measure of godly "discipline" to do this cheerfully. But as with all God's commands, when we obey them, he blesses us. He doesn't promise to give us Cadillacs, but "to make all grace abound" to us and meet our needs, that we "may abound in every good work."

And when Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give in the passages above, it was not for the church's support, but for the poor saints in Jerusalem who were going through a famine. We should give to our church, but we certainly need not restrict giving to the church.

Proverbs 19:17 says:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.”

And Jesus said:

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” -Luke 6:38

So Jesus commands us to give. It is, in a sense, a “spiritual discipline.” But it brings great rewards, as Jesus said. However, we need not linger on the rewards, but rather we should linger on the ask. God asks that we support those in the work and those in need. If God has blessed us in any way, we should, with a grateful heart, give back to God what he has allowed us to steward.

1. When was the last time you thought about giving as a discipline?
  2. What can you do in order to make giving a little less painful, but more intentional?
  3. What can you give to today that will honor God?
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# Day 33

## THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVING



“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” -John 13:14-15

“...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” -Mark 10:43-44

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” -1 Peter 4:10

Serving may not technically be a “spiritual discipline,” but I’m including it because we are to practice it regularly, and in a sense, it often requires discipline. Sometimes we won’t feel like serving others, and we will need to cry to the Lord for grace, then “discipline” ourselves to serve even when we don’t feel like it. Even using our gifts can require discipline.

The more we obey Jesus’ commands to serve others, the more joy it will bring into our lives. Sometimes, we can “schedule” our serving; at other times, it is more spontaneous. But I believe Jesus calls all of us to imitate him and serve others, whether we feel like it or not, in the

same way, God calls us to regularly meditate on his word and pray, though we will often not feel like it.

Service can happen at the church, at home, in our communities, or even at random places and spaces. Not all service helps those we serve, so we do need to be thoughtful about the kind of service we are giving to those in need. Well-meaning Christians have often allowed their helping to hurt, so it is always good to partner with organizations that are already establishing systems of advocacy and help so that we do the best possible things for our neighbors that might need help.

1. When was the last time you served beyond your regular life?
2. How can you get in touch with organizations that are doing great work already?
3. What do you think you can do in order to make sure you and your family are serving those who need the help?

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# Day 34

## THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING



“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” -Matthew 6:16-18

In the New Testament, God does not command us to fast, though it seems that Jesus assumed we would - “And WHEN you fast...” (Matthew 6:17)

It certainly takes discipline to fast. The NT doesn't give clear directions on how to fast or how long to fast. Because we are not commanded to fast, no one should feel like they HAVE to. But it seems to be a powerful way to pray. When facing a significant need or problem, or a family member or friend is suffering, we may want to fast.

It may be as simple as skipping a meal or 2 for a day or several days. Or fasting one day a week till supper time. I know many people who take a day for fasting once a week and have done it for decades. It is a practice that helps to focus us and remind us of our need for God.

In fact, starting small may be the best way to start. The lie of the enemy is “God isn’t going to do anything for you skipping breakfast.” We have no idea how powerful fasting is, or what happens in the spiritual realm when we skip breakfast to pray for someone.

Remember, God gives us these “spiritual disciplines” for our joy and gladness in him. Start small. Build habits. Grow to understand the place they take in your spiritual life and learn more and more about them. There are some great books that will help with that on our discipleship page on the [crosswalkvillage.com](http://crosswalkvillage.com) website.

Take some time today to think about how you would like to engage in the spiritual disciplines and how they can be an amazing expression and practice for our spiritual growth and maturity.

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# Day 35

## SMALL GROUP STUDY



### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN

When you think of following Jesus, truly following (living, breathing, studying His every move), is there someone in your life that has significantly influenced you in the Way? Maybe a book, an exercise, or an experience that has been meaningful to you in your life as a disciple?

### QUOTE

”There are no experts in the company of Jesus.”

- Eugene Peterson

We are all disciples, we are all learning what it means to follow Jesus. No matter how long we’ve been at it, we are still just learning.

### HEAD

1. When you think of discipline, what thoughts or images come to mind?

2. How would you define a disciple of Jesus? And in light of that, how would you define what it means to be disciplined in the Way of Jesus?
3. In the Greek, a disciple is a learner. We talked this week about several methods of learning more about God and His ways; meditating on God's word, prayer, giving, serving, and fasting. Are there any others you can think of? Is there one for you that is a favorite? Why? One for you that is hard? If you're willing to share, what makes it hard for you?

## HEART

1. Let's try a meditative practice in the Word. Read the following passage through a total of five times, stopping after each time to reflect on any aspect of the verse that speaks to you and why. Pray before you begin, asking God to speak to you through the reading of His Word. For today's passage, read Colossians 1: 15-20.
2. What did you think of this experience? Was it helpful? Difficult? Frustrating? Transformative? Explain.
3. Do you think you could spend the rest of this week just reading through this passage and continue to learn, to grow, to be impacted, by it? Why or why not?
4. Share with the group one spiritual practice that you do that you find particularly meaningful. What do you do as part of this practice? Has it always been meaningful for you or did it take time to practice?

## HANDS



Try a discipline this week that you have never tried before or that you struggle with; confession, fasting, thanksgiving, prayer, serving, solitude, rest, study, giving, worship.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*“Jesus told him ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.’”*

*John 14: 6 NLT*

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