

VERTICAL PURSUIT









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THIS RESOURCE.

Vertical Pursuit
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 8

How to Use VP 8

Pride vs Humility 9

CORE 14

The Questions We All Ask 15

Your Center 16

Your Value, Your Worth 22

Your Identity 28

Your Character 35

Your Strongholds 46

Your Heart 52

Your Mind 60

Your Healing 66

THRIVE 74

Garden (Rediscover) 75

Son (Reintroduce) 86

Father (Reintroduce) 91

Holy Spirit (Reintroduce) 100

Hearing (Rekindle) 107

Word (Rekindle) 113

Power/Authority (Reemerge) 118

Seasons (Reassure) 126

Rhythms (Rearrange) 129

Recharge (Release) 136

ADVANCE 142

Your Legacy 143

Your Cause 152

Your Work 157

CONCLUSION 162

QUOTES 166





INTRO TO VERTICAL PURSUIT

Vertical Pursuit (VP) is the merging of two dynamics. Vertical is about extending your reach and creating elevation. The vantage point from a higher elevation gives a thrilling perspective of life that is essential to seeing the bigger picture. Pursuit is about the chase and the tenacity to reach a desired end.

Life is full of terrain through which we must traverse and navigate. God promises, though, to enter into our journey with us and lead us through it. He is not a God who sits in Heaven leaving us to our hopeless wanderings. Rather He is a God that is relentlessly pursuing us with the goal of carrying us to His heights. Vertical Pursuit is about living life in response while relentlessly pursuing God and the life He has for us. Our relentless pursuit is about the desire to remain true to this faith adventure regardless of life's obstacles.

Imagine living a life free from shame, failure, charades or good intentions. Instead we can live a life of grace, power, and purpose that will impact our marriages, churches, families, friendships, jobs, and culture. Vertical Pursuit is about helping others unlock their God given potential and moving from the ordinary to the extraordinary!

VP is about passionately pursuing God, fueling hunger for God and discovering your greatest potential in God; all within the context of relationships. VP is designed as a simple resource to equip and empower a spiritual growth experience: discipleship. Discipleship is a biblical concept which involves relationally mentoring one another. Our desire is that VP will give you the confidence and resources you need to step out in faith and begin your discipling experience.

HOW TO USE VERTICAL PURSUIT

God wants us to live, serve, and process truth in community. We are all at varying stages of maturity and need people around us to help guide us toward Christlikeness. Pursuing God with other people will be invaluable as you seek to understand what the Bible is saying and how God wants that truth to play out in your life.

VP is a discipling experience that can be done through one-on-one or group encounters. Ideally, you will either lead another person through this material or be guided through it by someone further in their spiritual walk. The goal is that once you've walked through the material, you can turn around and guide someone else through it. In fact, you are encouraged to guide others even as you are learning. Don't wait until you have completed it all before teaching others what you learn.

Throughout this process take the time to reflect on the questions, set goals, and journal your thoughts. Vertical Pursuit will help you ask the deeper questions about yourself and how you engage with the people and world around you. Take your time to walk through each section. Pause on each question and don't rush your answers.

We pray that this starts you on a journey to truly understanding what it means to walk and live as God intended.

Pride vs. Humility

One of the first steps we must make on this journey is the process of moving from a life of pride to a life of humility. We are told daily that life is about us, our desires, our wants! We do whatever we can to get more and make sure the world revolves around us. Except it isn't all about us, it's about others; and the way to living a life further away from pride is *emptying ourselves*.

Pride will constantly get in the way of fully seeking Jesus. Pride requires every part of our being to prevent there being any room for God. Pride says we are self sufficient and don't need God. It will always promise to have the answer, but it will never deliver.

Humility is the stepping stone of the christian life; all other character traits build upon it. The further we move away from pride, the closer we move towards Jesus. John 3:30 says, "*He must increase and I must decrease.*" Humility lets us live in the sweet spot of self awareness and grants the ability to consider others higher than ourselves.

Once humility is seen in us, self fades away and the glory of

God truly shines; because every opportunity and circumstance becomes less about us and our accomplishments and more about elevating Jesus. If we run towards humility, we run away from pride. If we run away from humility, we run towards pride.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What does passionately pursuing God look like for you?

Who has God placed in your life that can help you understand yourself better during the VP experience?

Where are you currently on the journey towards humility? In what areas do you need to empty yourself to experience more of God?





VP1 CORE

Core exercises are an important part of a well-rounded fitness program. Aside from occasional sit-ups and pushups, they are often neglected. Core exercises train the muscles in your pelvis, lower back, hips, and abdomen to work in harmony, which leads to better balance and stability, whether on the playing field or in daily activities. In fact, most sports and other physical activities depend on stable core muscles. When we talk about the CORE of who you are we are talking about this main question:

Who are you?

Not just what you do or what you have accomplished, but who you are beneath all the trappings and titles. What do you see when you look at your very Core? Who is that inner person walking around in your body, doing your job and managing your life? How would you describe your *true* self?

CORE is about the very center of who you are. A strong Core develops when the center of our identity rests on God's promises. A strong Core means transformation from the inside out, not the outside in, moving us from aimless wanderers to extraordinary people who have a clear sense of direction.

Discovering our true self can open the door to a life that feels fulfilling and exciting. Our greatest potential becomes unlocked and breakthroughs are on the horizon. Our ability to find meaning and purpose in this hinges on how well we actually know ourselves. VP will help you peel back the layers of who you are in order to:

- **Determine** what is vital to **Your Center** and how to remain strong at your core
- **Deepen** your understanding of **Your Value** and where you get your sense of worth
- **Declare** who you are and embrace God's definition of **Your Identity**
- **Describe** the end game of who you are becoming as it shapes **Your Character**
- **Destroy** the elements that sabotage your soul and find victory over **Your Strongholds**
- **Devote** yourself to aligning and seeking the health of **Your Heart**
- **Develop** a new way of perceiving and overcome the toxic thinking in **Your Mind**
- **Delight** in the fact that at your very core there is a hope for **Your Healing**

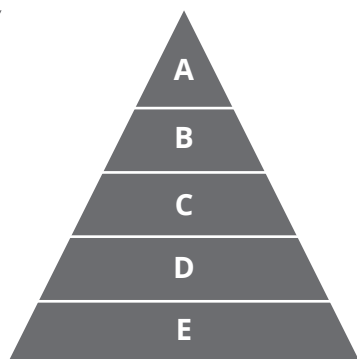
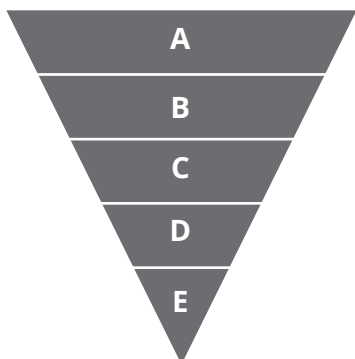
THE QUESTIONS WE ALL ASK

One of the things that separates mankind from the rest of creation is the ability to question. Here are five common questions everyone wrestles with as they attempt to discover themselves:

- The **COMPETENCY** question: What am I good at?
- The **COMMUNITY** question: Where do I belong?
- The **CALLING** question: What is my purpose in life?
- The **CHARACTER** question: Who am I becoming?
- The **CORE** question: Who am I?

While culture often says the most important thing about you is what you do, Jesus teaches that your Core is the most important thing about you. As we begin, let's take a look at the center of your Core.

CULTURE'S PERSPECTIVE



JESUS' PERSPECTIVE

A. Competency: the opportunities and resources God has entrusted to me for His glory.

B. Community: the time, place, and people God asks that I impact for His Kingdom.

C. Calling: the distinct awareness of responsibility to lead others towards Christ.

D. Character: essential qualities that create distinction as I live out my calling, in culture, with my competencies.

E. Core: the foundation of my soul that determines my identity.

YOUR CENTER

Being centered means having a reference point; a place to come back to when life, emotions and stress, push you off balance. Think about those wobbly toys that kids play with;

they knock them down and they bounce right back. They have the kind of balance that we, wobbly humans, often wish we possessed! They have such a strong “center” that they effortlessly go right back to it, no matter how many times they are knocked or which direction you push them. Being “centered” is that kind of dynamic return point. It doesn’t mean we are always there; it means we always know where to go back to.

A core-centered life will be a Christ-centered life, because Jesus himself stands at the very center of our significance. As we consider the desire to be centered, the place to start is with Jesus.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

A Christ-centered life is shaped by two core convictions. The first conviction is that Jesus Christ is alive. As Christians, we do not follow a dead example but a living Lord. God raised Jesus from the dead, and He sits right now at the throne of God. But Jesus does not simply sit around passively. This is the second conviction: Jesus Christ is working right now on our behalf. He promises to live His life through you and me. Motivation by love, Jesus defines our very existence and purpose. Being centered means to be grounded or rooted in His love for us.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth, and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God

Ephesians 3:17-19

“Rooted and grounded” here means “to build under you a deep and stable foundation of knowing and understanding the love of Jesus.” In other words, the knowledge of Jesus’ love for you is the foundational truth upon which all others truths must be built! Christians who live in guilt, fear, and condemnation are not “rooted and grounded” in the love of God. Our heavenly Father sent his Son to die for our sins and

without fully knowing and fully understanding the depth of His love for you, you will not have a stable or permanent foundation. We desire for you to wake up to Jesus' love for you so that your roots can grow down into Jesus' love and keep you strong.

A root is the part of a plant that draws life from the ground. Before faith in Christ, our natural lives were rooted in many things. Some of us were rooted in our own abilities and talents. We were self-made people and we needed constant affirmation. Some people due to traumatic experiences, have their hearts rooted in fear and pain. Every one of us comes to Christ with natural roots and sadly many stay at that level. They ask God to satisfy those shallow-root needs, never putting down deeper ones.

But the Lord has much more for us. He wants us to put our roots down deep into Jesus' love. This is the key to life and healing. For example, some Christians spend years praying to be healed of a fear of failure or rejection. But *"Perfect love casts out fear"* (1 John 4:18). Putting your roots deep into Christ's love cures fears, pain, and trauma. It cures insecurities and the need for affirmation from the world. His love heals us, secures us, changes us. Whatever the roots of your life, put them down deeper into Christ's love.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What would you say your life is most centered around?

How deep do you believe your spiritual roots go? Would you say you have deep or shallow roots in experiencing God's love?

In what areas of your life would you like to see more of Jesus' character worked out in you?



YOUR VALUE, YOUR WORTH

A part of becoming centered is understanding you find your sense of value or worth.

We hear a great deal today about self-worth, self-esteem, self-image, and learning to love yourself. Many psychologists focus on self-worth with the goal of simply helping people feel good about themselves. Understanding identity and self-worth are important aspects of emotional and spiritual stability and are driving forces within all human beings. The Bible is loaded with references and stories about finding our value and worth in God. To narrow down and simplify where our value and worth come from, we can look at two significant dynamics: the Garden and the Cross.

First, we see our sense of value and worth in the garden where God creates Adam and Eve in His image.

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

That we are created in the image of God says something awesome about God in His creative purposes. It also says something wonderful about the uniqueness of humans in God's grand design. As human beings created in God's image (Latin: *Imago Dei*), we each have value, meaning, and purpose in the plan of God. C. S. Lewis stated it well, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal." Clearly, the image of God in humanity condemns any type of bias toward, discrimination against, or exploitation of anyone on the basis of skin color (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), ethnic origin (ethnocentrism), or age (ageism) as sin. James 3:9 highlights the dignity accorded to humanity by pointing out the contradiction of using our mouths to bless God on one hand and on the other to curse people who are made in God's likeness.

Secondly, we see our sense of value and worth in the cross.

The message of the cross is not one about our worth, but about Jesus' worth. In fact, that's the whole point. As Romans 3:12 says, we were "worthless" in our sin. We needed Jesus

who is “worthy” to come and take our place. He is the only one worthy. This was God’s plan before the foundation of the world. Jesus wasn’t obligated to die for us because we were deserving of it—that would be too “me” centered. I think the greatest encouragement is that God loves us even though we are NOT worth it. Do you see the shift in focus? I’m not “someone worth dying for” because I deserve it. I am “someone worth dying for” because He valued me enough to give His life as payment for. A true grasp of grace requires realizing that Jesus loves me no matter what I do, no matter what I’ve done, no matter if I fail, no matter if I stumble because of how much HE is worth. The pressure is off to perform, to earn it. We rest in His worth. The moment Jesus died on our behalf was the moment He transferred His worth onto us.

Having a right concept of ourselves is biblical, but only if we keep the right focus and purpose. For instance, in Romans 12:3 we are told to think realistically about who we really are. A biblical self concept has two important sides or contrasts, it contains both strength and humility.

There is nothing wrong with doing things well for God’s glory, for the blessing of others or for our own enjoyment. However, when doing our best becomes the focus, we can become slaves to perfectionism (or to defeatism). Those who are under pressure to meet self-imposed standards usually base their self-worth on how well they do things and on the response of others to how well they have performed. They tend to be vulnerable to mood swings depending on their success. They are often critical and look down on those who don’t do so well, and yet when criticized they are devastated and become defensive because their value is determined by their performance. In their pursuit of a perfect standard, they become controlling as they fight to have things perfect so they will feel okay.

Their self-imposed standards usually result in a rule-dominated life. They set rules and schedules for nearly every area of life and focus their attention on their ability to meet these requirements. In contrast to this, the Christian’s focus needs to be on Christ and his or her new life in Him, not on self-imposed regulations or achievements, nor on popularity, status, wealth, or appearance, etc., regardless

of whether these activities are “religious” or “secular”. Christ must become the center, the focus, motive, and source of what we do and how we do it rather than a neurotic drive to achieve.

Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

Colossians 2:6-12

Being centered is the way in which a person is spiritually and positionally united and identified with Christ (in His person and work—past, present and future). Over a hundred times, phrases like “in Christ,” “in the beloved,” “in Him,” and “with Christ” appear in the Bible, putting the focus on this secure position and the many blessings believers receive through their union with Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When do you feel most valued?

When do you feel least valued?

In what areas of your life do you need to be more centered around Jesus?





YOUR IDENTITY

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

i·den·ti·ty: The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

Often times when asking Who am I?, we tend to explain ourselves or find our identity in five ways:

- What I do
- What I have accomplished
- What I have experienced
- What I possess
- Who I know

The problem with each of these factors is that they are based upon variable conditions or circumstances. Like a buoy in the ocean, having your identity based on conditions or circumstances will cause you to experience the up and downs of insecurity or self-worth.

When you focus on your identity in Christ your faith will grow strong and steady (Galatians 2).

This means identifying and abandoning any image of yourself that is not from God. You stop accepting what others have said about you, how others have labeled you, and how others have defined you (or what you've told yourself!); and you start believing what God says about you, that He is pleased with how He created you, and that He defines you.

Here is another way of looking at it:

- *What He Does Rather Than What I Do*
- *What He Accomplished Rather Than What I Have Accomplished*
- *What He Has Experienced Rather Than What I Have Experienced*

- *What He Possesses Rather Than What I Possess*
- *Who He Knows Rather Than Who I Know*

It may be hard to believe but you're not defined by your feelings. You're not defined by the opinions of others or by your circumstances. You're not defined by your successes or failures. You're not defined by the car you drive, the money you make, or the house you say you own when the bank really does.

You are defined by God and God alone. He identifies you as his own.

2 Corinthians 1:22

We are constantly in danger of letting the world define us instead of God. It is only natural to shape our self-image by the attitudes and opinions of our parents, our peer groups, and our society. It is only when we define ourselves by the truths of God's Word, rather than the thinking and experiences of the world, that we can discover our deepest identity.

The thing is, if you don't know who you are then you're vulnerable to other people telling you who you are. But the concrete, solid, gospel truth is that you are who God says you are and no one else has a vote in the matter. You are now identified with Christ and have the power of the Holy Spirit within you. You are God's precious child and He created you in a way that pleases Him.

MY IDENTITY IN JESUS CHRIST

BELOVED

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

Jeremiah 31:3

A CHILD OF GOD

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1

DELIGHTED IN

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.

CHRIST MUST BECOME
THE CENTER, FOCUS,
MOTIVE, AND SOURCE
OF WHAT WE DO
AND HOW WE DO IT



He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

FORGIVEN

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2:24

WASHED CLEAN

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Isaiah 1:18

FREE

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

1 Corinthians 6:19

ADOPTED IN TO GOD'S FAMILY

The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'

Romans 8:15

CO-HEIR WITH CHRIST

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:17

RIGHTEOUS

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

NEW

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 5:17

A SAINT

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:11

SET APART

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

1 Peter 2:9

AN AMBASSADOR OF CHRIST

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5:20

A CO-LABORER

For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

1 Corinthians 3:9

A SWEET AROMA

For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 2:15

NEVER ALONE

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:8

A MASTERPIECE

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10

WONDERFULLY MADE

I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:14

BOLD

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

2 Corinthians 3:12

HAVING GUARANTEED VICTORY

You have given me your shield of victory. Your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.

Psalm 18:35

HOLDING A SECOND FUTURE

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

WHOLE IN CHRIST

In Christ you have been brought to fullness.

Colossians 2:10

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In what area of your life do you feel most insecure?

What influences or experiences in your life have shaped your self-image the most?

Of the "Identity in Christ" list which ones resonate most with you? Which do you have the hardest time believing?

YOUR CHARACTER

After you establish who you are based on our identity in Christ and what He has done for us, the next question is:

Who am I becoming?

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29

God's desire is to see our lives shaped and chiseled to become more like Jesus. Becoming more like Jesus is not about managing our sin or putting on an act; it's a life long process of trusting Him to salvage those areas of our lives that miss the mark and to empower us to think, feel, do, and dream like Jesus. It's about experiencing and expressing His character.

One of the gifts of Scripture is being able to see the failures of others and glean lessons for ourselves. Below are some principles we see about the lack of character and it's consequences.

Character is weakened when...

- I surrender **FUTURE BLESSING** for **TODAY'S APPETITE** (Esau sells his birthright: Genesis 25:29-34)
- I let **CIRCUMSTANCES** dictate my commitment to **OBEYING** God (Saul's unlawful sacrifice: 1 Samuel 13:8-13)
- I pursue the **PLEASURES** of life over the **PLEASING** of my God (Samson & Delilah: Judges 16)
- I choose the comfort of **PAST** victories over **TODAY'S** personal responsibilities (David & Bathsheba: 2 Samuel 11)
- I choose my **IDEALS** over God's **MANDATES** (Jonah flees the Lord: Jonah 1-4)





- I **DENY** Jesus because I don't want His **CROSS** (Peter denies the Lord: Luke 22:54-62)

Have you ever wondered why you are not as good a Christian as you know you ought to be? Have you ever been deeply disappointed with something you have done since you have been saved? "I can't believe I said or did that." Others have faced the same dilemma. When D.L. Moody was asked what his greatest problem was, he replied, "The man I see in the mirror each morning."

One way we can try to make sense of this is to understand the tension between "Flesh" and "Spirit."

When you were saved, your old sinful nature did not disappear. It is still there. The Bible calls it the "flesh", "old man", and the "carnal (worldly) mind". When you were saved, the Spirit made you alive and functional. An unsaved person walks after the flesh—his spirit is dead (Ephesians 2:1). A Christian has both the flesh and Spirit. That is where your battle comes in. Notice some scriptures that mention these two natures inside of you:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26:41

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:8

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God.

Romans 8:5-7

The Message paraphrases this passage (Romans 8:5-7), "Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them

find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life."

<p>FLESH (Old Man, Natural Man) Does works of the FLESH Does what comes natural</p> <p><i>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.</i> Galatians 5:19-21</p>	<p>SPIRIT (New Man) Has fruit of the SPIRIT Does what Jesus says</p> <p><i>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.</i> Galatians 5:22-23</p>
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If becoming like Christ looks too hard, you must remember that we are not called to transform ourselves in our own will power. We must live by the Spirit of God. People who try to cultivate the character of Jesus without relying on God's Spirit wind up trying to fill their emptiness rather than living from their fullness. Most of the time "flesh" does not simply refer to the physical part of you. The "flesh" includes the ego which feels an emptiness and uses the resources in its own power to try to fill it. Flesh is the "I" who tries to satisfy me with anything but God's grace. The flesh attempts to use the legalistic or religious resources in its own power to achieve character transformation. As Romans 8:7 says, "*The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law.*" The basic mark of the flesh is that it is unsubmissive. It does not want to submit to the Spirit's leading or rely on God's absolute grace. Flesh says, "I'd rather do it myself."

"Flesh" focuses on becoming like Jesus through external behaviors, perfecting character or getting all of our issues figured out. Once you meet this criteria you're in the "I'm

good” box. This approach to Jesus puts the emphasis of our transformation on our shoulders. Unfortunately this often leads to a life of good intentions and pretense, striving to do what’s right.

“Spirit” is about relational proximity and receptive partnership. The closer I follow the Spirit on my journey, and the more I submit my strengths and weaknesses to His empowerment, the more the Holy Spirit does His transforming work in me. When my eyes are fixed on Jesus and I am trusting the Holy Spirit, I will experience His power for change.

As God makes you more into the likeness of Christ, He weaves His character into the fiber of your soul. It is His character that creates a distinction in how we live our lives.

If you said to yourself when reading about “the flesh,” “Well, I have a lot of that still left in me,” it does not necessarily mean you aren’t a Christian. A Christian is not a person who experiences no bad desires. A Christian is a person who is at war with those desires by the power of the Spirit. Consider this insightful quote from John Piper:

Conflict in your soul is not all bad. Even though we long for the day when our flesh will be utterly defunct and only pure and loving desires will fill our hearts, yet there is something worse than the war within between flesh and Spirit; namely, no war within because the flesh controls the citadel and all the outposts. Praise God for the war within! Serenity in sin is death. The Spirit has landed to do battle with the flesh. So take heart if your soul feels like a battlefield at times. The sign of whether you are indwelt by the Spirit is not that you have no bad desires, but that you are at war with them!

“Spirit” over “Flesh” implies that the Spirit’s work is emphasized, not ours. He bears the fruit. Consider Jesus’ words.

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

PEOPLE WHO TRY
TO CULTIVATE THE
CHARACTER OF JESUS
WITHOUT RELYING
ON GOD'S SPIRIT
WIND UP TRYING
TO FILL THEIR
EMPTINESS RATHER
THAN LIVING FROM
THEIR FULLNESS.

abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

John 15:4-5

Transformation by the Spirit comes as we “abide in the Vine,” so keep yourself securely united to the living Christ. Don’t cut yourself off from the flow of the Spirit through pride, pretense, religious duty or will power. The Spirit is like a locomotive on a train that pulls the cars along as long as they remain attached. We do not follow in our strength. We are led by His power. So “walk by the Spirit” means staying hooked up to the divine source of power in order to reach the destination of who He is making you to become. We must want the Spirit’s empowerment. We must want to abide in the vine!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What area of your character would you describe as the weakest?

If you could grow in any area of character what would it be?

When we talk about “Flesh” vs “Spirit” what area of your character would you like to see the Holy Spirit develop in you?





YOUR STRONGHOLDS

We can all relate to Paul's struggle when he confesses that he knows the good he desires to do but he keeps on doing the very things he hates. We can all get stuck in this rut that we just can't seem to get out of. Listen to how Paul describes this tension:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Romans 7:15-20

If faith in Jesus sets us free from sin and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live free from its tendencies, then why do we still struggle with things like pride, depression, fear, anger, envy, and a list of other sins? Another aspect of the "Flesh" that holds us back and starves our core of spiritual oxygen, the Bible calls a "stronghold". Paul explains to the Corinthians how "strongholds" can keep us in bondage to certain sinful patterns and thinking.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish STRONGHOLDS. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

WHAT IS A STRONGHOLD?

A stronghold is a structure that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack from enemy forces. An army invading enemy territory needs to take down the strongholds in order to hold the land. If strongholds remain, they pose a continual threat to citizens in the land.

A spiritual stronghold is an incorrect pattern of thought that has embedded itself into our way of thinking. These strongholds have the capability to affect our feelings, how we respond to various situations in life, and are significant obstacles to our spiritual freedom. Strongholds are built upon deception and error. These errors and deceptions can come from a wide variety of sources, including our environment, those around us, our parents, or even evil spirits.

One of the most common and devastating strongholds to have is an incorrect image of who God is (and how He sees us). For example, people who see God as a taskmaster, live their lives with an unhealthy fear of God. They see God as cruel, cold, distant, uncaring, and ready to snap the whip at us the moment we step out of line. While there is a good kind of fear of God, which is more like a holy respect for Him, there's another kind of fear that is very unhealthy that the enemy wants us to have. People who are afraid they've committed the unpardonable sin are almost guaranteed to have this stronghold. People who find it hard to feel God's love and presence may have this stronghold too.

If you feel God is distant and cold, or question if God loves you, then you need to tear this stronghold down!

Another common stronghold is SHAME. Far too many believers feel dirty, worthless, and ashamed of themselves. As a result, they feel unworthy to approach God or to have the intimate relationship that He wants to have with them. Shame prevents us from intimacy with God because it makes us feel unworthy and distant from Him.

Guilt and shame are not the same! While guilt is seeing *what you've done*, shame is seeing *yourself as a failure because of what you've done*. Guilt looks at the sin, shame looks at yourself. If you allow yourself to meditate unhealthily upon guilt, it can turn into shame. Guilt, if not properly dealt with, will turn into a stronghold called shame.

Shame can affect our daily thoughts. Here is how it affects us:

Actions: We avoid situations which might have the

chance to bring potential shame or embarrassment on us.

Emotions: You can be in a great mood but then think of things that you have done that you are ashamed of and immediately your mood will change.

Relationships: Shame has power to prevent us from being vulnerable with each other. This is deadly because at our core we have a need to be loved and accepted by others.

It can also affect our relationship with God. Shame keeps us away from Him. Shame convinces us that we are unworthy of God's love or blessings.

While it is beneficial to look back in order to learn from past mistakes, obsessing about our past failures wears us down spiritually, giving us a distorted self-image. The enemy wants us to look at our past failures so much that we begin to see ourselves as dirty sinners and failures!

This is the complete opposite of what we really are in Christ!

No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.

Philippians 3:13

He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

Psalms 103:12

Though the enemy would love us to feel shame about our past, none of us are unlovable, beyond repair, or worthless. We are loved and cherished by a redeeming, healing, saving God.

Strongholds are birthed and dwell and thrive in hiding, so naturally the cure is to bring the truth of God's Word on the scene and expose the lie to someone you trust! You debunk the lies of the enemy with the truth, which is in the Word of God! The Bible says that our weapons are mighty for the tearing down of strongholds (2 Cor 10:4). But what is our

primary offensive weapon? The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). Truth dispels deception and lies, and therefore the more truth you bring into a situation, the more the darkness must flee. This is part of why it's important to grow in God's Word.

In John 8:31-36, Jesus tells us that we can be held in bondage due to strongholds in our lives. His solution was to, *"hold to my teaching... Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (v. 31,32)

Strongholds are torn down as we meditate on God's Word, and allow the Spirit to minister these truths to our hearts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What lies do you entertain the most?

Where do you feel most shame in your life?

What truths do you need to embrace and replace the lies with?

W E A R E

L O V E D

A N D

C H E R I S H E D

B Y A

R E D E E M I N G

H E A L I N G

S A V I N G

G O D

YOUR HEART

“Heart” occurs over one thousand times in the Bible, making it the most common anthropological term in Scripture. It refers to a person’s center for physical, emotional, and spiritual awareness—the center of our core, if you will. Head and heart work together in our pursuit of God, but somewhere along the line we have minimized the role of the heart.

Our hearts are designed to love Him wholly and absolutely, and yet our hearts desire many things besides God. We find it difficult to pray with the psalmist, *“Whom do I have in heaven but You? And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth”* (Psa. 73:25). Until our desires are transformed, we cannot be transformed. Until our desires are purified and intensified and inflamed for God, we won’t experience the wholeness for which we were created.

Diagnosing the Heart

Types of Broken Hearts

- Broken by neglect
- Broken by betrayal
- Broken by abandonment
- Broken by lies
- Broken by abuse
- Broken by under appreciation
- Broken by rejection
- Broken by shame
- Broken by sin

Results of a Healthy Heart

- It repents
- It comes into the light
- It releases control
- It trusts
- It stops seeking payback
- It experiences reconciliation
- It forgives
- It expects the right things
- It accepts who you are
- It destroys idols
- It rests
- It is honest

The heart is vital to having a healthy core. The condition of your heart determines the health of your relationships with God and with others.

Bad Heart = Bad Motives

Healthy Heart = Healthy Motives

Broken Heart = Broken Relationships
 Healthy Heart = Healthy Relationships

Wounded Heart = Builds Walls
 Healthy Heart = Scales Walls

Unhealthy Heart = Unhealthy Core
 Healthy Heart = Healthy Core

When the Titanic hit the iceberg, it was what was below the surface that sunk the ship. What was visible above the water was deceiving and gave a false sense of navigation. So many of us are blindsided in the same way—by focusing on what is above rather than what is below.

For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.

Mark 7:21-23

This verse is sobering! Jesus hits them all. He hits behavior, He hits attitude, He hits hidden secrets. So much of our lives are focused on what's above the surface—behavior and attitude. But Jesus is after what lies beneath the surface: the heart.

Obtaining a Healthy Heart

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

Some of us need a heart transplant
 Some of us need resuscitation

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 11:18,19

Guard Your Heart

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows





from it.

Proverbs 4:23

Guarding your heart means to be careful about what you welcome into your life. It means being wise and filtering what we look at, listen to, and allow to influence us. It calls for humility, confession and repentance, being honest with God about the things that tempt you. The longer you linger in these areas the more your heart will be poisoned by them.

Align Your Heart

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5

Aligning your heart means to set your affections on God and desire Him more than anything. It means to live in response to what He desires for you, admitting and confessing idols like greed, comfort, entitlement, and selfishness. When your heart is aligned with His it values what He values.

Heal Your Heart

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 147:3

Healing your heart starts with honesty before God. You bring to Him all of your hurts, regrets, disappointments and fears, acknowledging that He is your only hope for transformation. Healing your heart is a process of daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit to restore what was broken, while taking steps to cooperate with Him in His healing work (granting forgiveness, seeking restoration, praying for our enemies, etc). He alone has the power to take your brokenness and bring beauty.

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be

How would you describe the condition of your heart?

In what ways has your heart been broken?

What steps can you take to experience healing in your heart?

[illegible]

H E A L I N G

Y O U R H E A R T

I S A P R O C E S S O F

D A I L Y D E P E N D E N C E

U P O N T H E H O L Y

S P I R I T T O R E S T O R E

W H A T W A S B R O K E N

YOUR MIND

What you put in your mind affects how you think. Remember watching those scary movies as a kid, then had nightmares? It didn't take long to realize that the way to avoid the nightmares was to stop watching that kind of movie. Similarly God has provided a way to overcome unhealthy thoughts and behaviors, and gain the self-control you seek. It's a matter of taking charge of your life—His way.

2 Corinthians 10:4–5 says, *“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh. That is, they are not merely human. But the weapons of our warfare have divine power to destroy strongholds.”* Then Paul defines this powerful stronghold-destroying activity in two steps. “[First,] *we destroy arguments and every lofty or proud opinion raised against the knowledge of God and [second,] we take every thought captive.*” It's just like in a battle: You destroy the fortress and then you take captives. We demolish the stronghold by identifying the lie and replacing it with the truth and then we take every recurrence of that lie captive to obey Christ.

Satan is known as the father of lies and the great deceiver. Lies have a way of sabotaging our identity and convincing us that we are not who God says we are. Negative thinking and false identities usually stem from the lies we believe about ourselves. These lies play through our minds like a recording and derail us from the true identity we have in Christ. Lies make themselves at home in the basement of our souls and in the dark they grow and manifest in destructive thinking.

Taking your thoughts captive can look like this:

Accept responsibility for your thoughts.

You have been given the ability to exercise control over your thoughts. God warned Cain to focus his mind on the right things, but Cain chose to think about the wrong things—anger and jealousy—which led to his murderous actions. Are you willing to admit that you can, with God's help, regain control of your thoughts and think *enabling* thoughts instead of *disabling* ones?

Change your mind (not just your behavior).

God calls us to change sinful behavior that does not honor

and please Him. Instead of focusing on your outward behavior, work on disciplining your mind—from which the behaviors stem. Allow God to transform you by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2).

Think through your problems rather than just react to them.

When you experience difficult challenges, you can react to them and think yourself into despair, or you can look forward to the next opportunity and ask yourself what you learned from this failure. Is your first thought “I’ll never do anything right?” You don’t have to get trapped by disabling thoughts like that. Empowered by the Spirit you are capable of getting out of your shame, despair, hopelessness, and anger by taking control of your thoughts.

Take your disabling thoughts captive through confession.

Paul urges us to *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (Rom. 12:21). Confront your disabling thoughts. Turn them over to God and meditate on who He sees you can be. It will take work to take your thoughts captive each time they pop into your mind, but it is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Choose to focus your thoughts on the right things.

We are to think about things that are “true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable” (Phil. 4:8). When we think on those things, God promises to give us His peace. What a contrast that is to the practices of millions of people today. Don’t look to a movie, TV show, or a “how to formula” to ease your mind—this is a false sense of peace. True peace, which comes from a transformed mind, takes discipline and commitment.

It is possible.

It is not easy to retrain your thoughts or to respond in new Christ-like ways. Take heart: as God empowers you to focus your mind on the right things, it will become easier. You can develop a new frame of reference based on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does it mean to take every thought captive?

What negative thoughts seem to plague you the most?

What changes will you make in order to begin thinking differently?





YOUR HEALING

God wants to take your wounds, pain, hurts, and sorrow!

Sin vandalizes our souls enslaving us to an existence of regret, addiction, and pain. It clothes us with shame which whispers and hisses that no matter what you do, you will always be defined by what you did or what was done to you.

It mocks you.

Healing isn't just the absence of pain, it's the presence of wholeness. At the root of all pain there is a form of loss. Loss of health, loss of innocence, loss of trust, loss of relationship, loss of hope, and the list keeps going. Wholeness is experienced when we invite Jesus into our places of loss, meet Him in the midst of pain, and allow Him to fill those empty spaces.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:4,5

He carried our sorrows in His work on the cross. The New Testament Greek tells us that the word sorrows here literally refers to anguish, affliction, grief, pain, and sorrow. Jesus took these things upon Himself when He suffered in our place. You need to know that God desires to heal your broken heart and bind up your wounds. This is what the Bible tells us:

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 147:3

Do you want to receive healing from emotional wounds, pain, sorrows, grief, and anguish? It is vital that we take advantage of what Christ has done for us and learn to cast our cares upon the Lord. Not some of them but ALL of them; knowing that He cares for you and wants to take those things from you.

Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

Release those hurt, painful, and fearful emotions into the hands of Jesus.

Hanging onto fear, hurt, and pain can actually block the healing power of the Holy Spirit in your soul. It is vital to open up and allow the Lord to heal your wounds.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

Luke 4:18

Jesus paid the price for the healing of our souls and set us free from the bondage that comes from the bruises we receive. It is important to God that we receive this inner healing... His Son paid a costly price for it!

Allow painful emotions to be released as you give them to the Lord. It's okay to cry, sob, scream in order to let the damaged emotions come out. Holding on to the pain and hurt will only prevent you from experiencing healing.

Tremendous healing can take place as you share your pain with a fellow brother or sister in Christ! Find a person to confide in, it is important to share your burden with them and receive prayer for healing.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

Unforgiveness will hinder the healing power of the Holy Spirit. It is vital to release the negative feelings that you have against others so that the Holy Spirit's healing and forgiving power can restore your soul.

This is because unforgiveness is a deadly poison that separates us from God's forgiveness in our own lives and

gives us over to tormenting spirits. It is hard to receive healing when one is in such a position.

Forgive yourself—see yourself as God sees you

Forgiving yourself is a crucial step we must take when seeking inner healing. We need to learn to love and appreciate the person God created us to be, seeing ourselves for who we really are in Christ. If you continue to beat yourself up for your past failures after the Blood of Christ has washed them away, then you are, in reality, denying the very work of the cross! Here are a few (of many) good verses to mediate on:

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalms 103:12

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Isaiah 43:25

He has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed by God to proclaim it.

Colossians 1:22-23 (NLT)

Acknowledge the pain and release it into Jesus' hands.

Go to the pain, the emotional wound that is hidden within you, and confront it with the healing love of Christ. Knowing that Jesus has paid for your emotional wounds, hurts, pains, and sorrows, tell the inner hurt, painful memories, and emotional affliction to leave in the name of Jesus. Then call upon Jesus to remove those things from you. You might pray something like this, *"Lord Jesus, I love you, thank you for*

bearing my burden on the cross. I ask that you take these inner hurts, painful memories, and emotional wounds from me right now. I submit them to you, and accept your peace in place of those things which I am giving up.” You may need to revisit this process several times as you partner with the Spirit to apply His healing power to the deepest places in your soul.

We have reached the end of CORE. If you have taken time to reflect on the material and answered the questions you should have begun to peel back some of your layers. Hopefully you have felt empowered to be honest in order to purge things that have undermined and damaged your Core. Eliminating the negative is only part of the process; filling up those spaces is equally important. Replacing what was harmful and negative with what is healthy and true requires intentionality in order to stay centered and thriving. The next section, THRIVE, will help you explore the practices and perspectives which will place you in the right posture to receive all that God wants for you so it can overflow into the world around you!

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

What area of healing are you seeking?

Are there areas of unforgiveness that you need to address?

What have you learned from your struggles and how does that contribute to your maturity?





VP2 THRIVE

There is a fundamental difference between thriving and surviving. Surviving is “to continue to live or exist,” while thrive means “to grow or develop well, to prosper or to flourish.” How come, when so many of us claim to have a goal of thriving, the majority of us are still just surviving?

Life is meant to be more than just living in survival mode; it was intended to be lived in THRIVE mode. This is fundamental to living a life of meaning and purpose, which invariably creates joy, inner peace, contentment, and fulfillment. It is about feeling alive and waking up with energy to seize the day.

Thriving is about: Values. Motives. Recharging. Relationships.

Values are beliefs or convictions that govern our purpose and vision. They provide guidance, direction, meaning, and purpose in life. Our values shape our influence, our behavior, and our choices. Get them right and you’ll be swift and focused in your decision-making. Thriving is also about discovering rhythms of rest and recharging in order to sustain a healthy lifestyle. Most importantly thriving is about relationships both being tethered to God and experiencing deep fellowship with others. In this section we will:

- **Rediscover** God's original intent was for us to flourish as we live with Him in the **garden**
- **Reintroduce** ourselves to a life-giving relationship with the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**
- **Rekindle** our hearts as we learn to **hear from God** personally and through **His Word**
- **Reemerge** in victory as we realize the **power and authority** we have been granted
- **Reassure** that whatever **season of life** we are in, whether good or bad, God is near us and sustains us
- **Rearrange** and prioritize our **rhythms** so they lead to intentional thriving
- **Release** ourselves to retreat and practice the art of **recharging**

GARDEN (Rediscover)

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:8,9

Eden was a place for thriving! The word Eden in Hebrew means “delight” or “enjoyment”—it was a garden of delight. In the Old Testament, Eden is often a symbol of great fertility, a place where things would grow. The environment was not only beautiful but also useful for producing things. God had in mind not merely an environment where vegetation would flourish, but where relationships would flourish through intimacy with God and each other. Spiritually, Eden symbolizes a rich and fertile place of unbroken relationship.

God created us to live with Him in a relationship that is intimate and personal. Just as Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in deep friendship, we were created to be complete, at peace, fulfilled, and full of joy as we dwell with God. Adam and Eve ended up hiding in this garden out of shame. The garden was not intended to be a hiding place but a place of refuge and renewal. Take a look at the following verse and note God's delight over us.

The Lord your God is with you the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

If we are honest, most of us would say that our lives don't reflect a peaceful, garden-like setting, but more of a hectic, painful, daily grind. What went wrong in the garden of Eden still seeks to sabotage our thriving potential. The two culprits that seek to kill and destroy our garden refuge are Sin and Satan. Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God causing them to forfeit their right to live in the garden. As a result of their choices our world inherited the dramatic and toxic effects of sin.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.

Romans 5:12

When we look at Romans 5:12, we see that each one of us has inherited a sin nature and is plagued with tendencies toward sin. Parents quickly realize that no one needs to teach their toddler to bite, disobey or throw temper tantrums—that's their sin DNA in full action! Sin will always disrupt our thriving experience. Beyond its effect on humans, sin also disrupted the created world as well.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Romans 8:20,21

Satan was an angel created by God who turned against

God's authority (Isaiah 14:13) and became the head of a kingdom of evil spirits called demons—his “angels” (Matthew 25:41). His power is great, both in the heavenly realm and on earth, and should not be underestimated (nor should it be overestimated!). Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 2:11 not to be caught off guard *“in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”* Satan wants to sabotage our thriving.

Consider some of the ways that Satan does this:

- He may slander God in order to cast doubt on God's goodness and shipwreck your faith (Gen 3:4-5).
- He may tempt you to deceive others in order to create or maintain the impression of being more spiritual (Acts 5:3; Jn 8:44).
- He may corrupt your mind and steer you away from the simplicity of Christ and His gospel (2 Cor 11:3).
- He may hinder [cut in on, as in a race] your gospel witness and steal it from unsuspecting hearts (1 Thess 2:18; Matt 13:19).
- He may wrestle against you, fighting against your progress in Christ (Eph 6:12).
- He may tempt you to commit sexual immorality against your spouse as a result of neglecting the intimacy of the marriage bed (1 Cor 7:5).
- He may harass you with some form of fleshly affliction (2 Cor 12:7).
- He may blind the spiritual eyes of your unsaved family, friends, and neighbors so that they may not see the glory of Jesus in the gospel (2 Cor 4:4).
- He may keep your unsaved acquaintances in bondage to sins that hinder them from coming to God (Gal 4:8).
- He may smite you with physical disease (Luke 13:16; Job 2:7).
- He may murder you (Ps 106:37; Jn 8:44).
- He may send counterfeit Christians into your church gatherings in order to deceive and create disunity (Mt 13:38-39; 2 Cor 11:13-15).
- He may lead you toward theological compromise by causing you to be friendly to false doctrine and its





teachers (1 Tim 4:1-3).

- He may persecute you for your godliness (Rev 2:10).
- He may tempt you to do evil (Matt 4:1; 1 Thess 3:5).
- He is—at this moment—prowling around seeking to capture and destroy you, chiefly through pride (1 Pet 5:6-8).
- He will slander you before God in heaven (Rev 12:10).
- He may ask God for permission to single you out for concentrated attack and temptation (Luke 22:31).
- He may use the power of suggestion to move you away from the will of God (Matt 16:21-23).
- He may try to cripple your effectiveness through confusion, discouragement, and despair (2 Cor 4:8-9).

However, while Satan and his forces are formidable enemies, Jesus Christ crushed Satan's power, fulfilling the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. The cross of Christ won the victory (John 12:31). *"The prince of this world now stands condemned"* (John 16:11), and soon Jesus will completely destroy Satan's power and purify creation (2 Peter 3:10).

God's good creation is a beautiful mingling of two worlds, the physical and the spiritual. However, in western civilization we tend to focus on the physical world and neglect the relationship between the spiritual world and our physical lives. The physical world, which we know through our five senses is complemented by an invisible spiritual realm. This is a separate realm of existence, which interfaces with the physical world. Did you realize that physical actions have spiritual implications? Conversely, spiritual actions have physical implications. It makes no difference whether something is in the spiritual realm or in the physical realm. It doesn't matter whether you can see it or not. (You don't see a magnetic field but because of its effects we know it exists. You don't have to see electricity for it to exist. The same is true in the spirit, so why should we think it strange?) The spiritual realm is of huge importance to Christian living, so much so that the Bible says to, *"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things"* (Col 3:2).

In the same way as they were in the garden, God, sin, and

GOD CREATED
US TO LIVE
WITH HIM IN A
RELATIONSHIP
THAT IS
INTIMATE
AND PERSONAL.

Satan are still at work in our lives today. Therefore we cannot afford to be ignorant or unaware of how the spiritual world effects our daily living and our desire to thrive in relationship with God. To complicate matters, this fallen world now experiences a conflict between two kingdoms—the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of the Son (light).

Consider Jesus' life. This cosmic battle of two kingdoms faced Jesus every day. Jesus established God's kingdom while being faced with the temptations and struggles of the kingdom of darkness. Hebrews 4:15 states, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."* Part of thriving is living in a new awareness of this struggle and what it means to be sensitive and discerning to what is really behind the scenes. Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

But it is not merely a negative reality. The more we grow in awareness and understanding, the more we can lean into the beauty of the spiritual world, not just the dangers of it. Within this spiritual realm we are gifted everything we need to thrive in this world as Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3, *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence."* As we continue to explore what it means to THRIVE, we will discover and unpack some of the spiritual provisions we access through our relationship with our Heavenly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

From the list, how is Satan currently working to rob your life?

In what area of your life would you like to become more aware of spiritual realm?

How can you set your mind on things above and not just earthly things?

SON (Reintroduce)

Because man has sinned, he needs a Redeemer. In fact, because man has sinned, all of creation needs a redeemer. God has provided a Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. The God of creation is also the God of redemption.

"In Him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Ephesians 1:7

What is the meaning of redemption? In the Bible the word redemption has a two-fold meaning: (1) the paying of a price, and (2) to loose, or set free. Related to the Christian concept of redemption is the word ransom. Jesus paid the price for our release from sin and its consequences (Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6). His death was in exchange for our life. In fact, Scripture is quite clear that redemption is only possible "through His blood," that is, by His death (Colossians 1:14). To be redeemed, then, is to be forgiven, holy, justified, free, adopted, and reconciled. The benefits of redemption include:

- Eternal life (Revelation 5:9-10)
- Forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7)
- Righteousness (Romans 5:17)
- Freedom from the law's curse (Galatians 3:13)
- Adoption into God's family (Galatians 4:5)
- Deliverance from sin's bondage (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:14-18)
- Peace with God (Colossians 1:18-20)
- Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

In contrast to Satan who wants to sabotage and destroy, Jesus came to offer life to its fullest. In John 10:10 Jesus says, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* Jesus willingly became our deliverer, the one who was destined to set humanity free. Jesus steps onto the scene and makes this declaration in Luke 4:18, *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."*

Isaiah and Luke agree that only Christ was appointed to offer this kind of freedom. He sets us free by the power of His Spirit; then He maintains our freedom as we learn to live day-to-day in the power of that Spirit. Paul said this of the liberating work of Jesus in Galatians 5:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

But what does this mean in real life? Consider the bondage that comes from childhood trauma and victimization, or the effects of sin patterns like fear, rejection, anger, addiction, unforgiveness, emotional bondage, and lust. There are many different types of “yoke.”

The devil wants you to be enslaved by fear. He knows that when you are captive to your fears you are unable to serve God effectively and so you won’t accomplish many of the things that God has for you. Today, so many people live in fear. There is a distinct difference between being afraid and having a phobia. To be afraid is to be frightened or apprehensive about something; to feel hesitation or regret about something. A phobia (or fear) is an irrational feeling of anxiety or apprehension caused by the presence or anticipation of danger; concern about something that threatens to bring bad news or bad results. To live in fear is to worry about something that may or may not happen. Thankfully, the Word of God says, *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear”* (Romans 8:15).

It is God’s desire that we live our lives free of fear. *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7). The devil, however, does not want you to know that when you belong to Christ, you are no longer captive to fear! Christ has given us authority over the power of the enemy; therefore, we have no reason to fear.

There are so many forms of captivity, it would take several books to address them all. What is important is that Jesus came to set us free from *every* form of captivity imaginable.

The gospel is overflowing with the good news of the Kingdom of God. This good news could be summed up in one word:

What does the word redemption mean to you? How have you seen redemption play out in your life?

What forms of bondage do you need Jesus to redeem you from today?

What causes you the greatest amount of fear?

[illegible]

JESUS CAME TO SET

US FREE FROM EVERY

FORM OF CAPTIVITY



FATHER (Reintroduce)

From beginning to end, Scripture reveals the heart and character of God; but we see Him most clearly in the life of Jesus. Everything Jesus did reveals the Father to us, reintroducing us to our GOOD GOOD Father!

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

John 17:25,26

Before we take a look at God as Father, it is important to address a common obstacle in our intimacy with Him: a father wound. (which is one of the biggest obstacles in our ability to THRIVE).

So often we have a hard time relating to God as Father because of negative experiences in our upbringing, projecting onto our heavenly Father what we experienced with our earthly father. A father wound comes from feeling that we are incapable of satisfying our father's expectations and are therefore unworthy of his approval, affection, and love. A father wound can sound something like this, "All my life I have felt as if I just couldn't cut it in my father's eyes. It always seemed like the bar was raised just above my reach." Unfortunately many people have grown up with an earthly father who was either, absent, abusive, demanding or distracted; leading them to conclude that God is an angry old man in the sky waiting to punish them for not measuring up. [While the emphasis here is on fathers, this can be true of any authority-figure who wounds us in our formative years.]

Deep inside we all long for our father's approval and affection. With every disappointing moment of what-should-have-been-but-wasn't, a brick is placed in our hearts until, brick-by-brick, a person becomes a fortress (or a stronghold!) where no love can penetrate and no love can exit. So many people cannot receive love or give love because they were starved of a father's love. The good news is, regardless of how our circumstances played out with our earthly fathers,

we can gain a healthy view of our heavenly Father which will draw us closer to His presence and break down the spiritual barriers that often alienate us.

God created each of us with a deep desire for intimacy, but as spiritual beings, that desire can only be satisfied when we feel His love at the very core of our being. The truth is, until we allow the Father to fill our hearts with love, we will seek love in places that vandalize our souls yet cannot remove the ache. Resting in His approval, love, and affection is what settles our restlessness and fears, and heals our hearts. Now, instead of hiding from an angry vindictive God who is out to get you when you fail, you are reunited with the Father who is benevolent, merciful, patient, forgiving, and who desires to bless you.

Consider the story of the prodigal son. After he squanders his inheritance he comes to the realization that being back home with dad is where he can thrive. Only he didn't have a healthy view of his father; he thought that his father would punish him and turn him away for his irresponsibility and reckless living. We see this in his comeback speech in Luke 15:17-19, *"How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants."*

Now look at the shocking response from the father:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him... "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Luke 15:20-24

The father runs to his son and collapses on him in a hugging embrace, then, out of delight in his son, throws a party in honor of his homecoming. Can you believe our heavenly Father responds to us in the same way?! He wraps his arms

around us and invites us onto the dance floor to celebrate our deep bond together. Four things about our Father are revealed in this story:

A Forgiving Father **“Runs” More Than He “Shuns”**

A Forgiving Father Is about **Embracing Not Disgracing**

A Forgiving Father **Doesn’t Need Our Come Back Speeches**

A Forgiving Father **Kills Cows And Hits The Dance Floor**

As if that’s not enough, our good Father loves to give us gifts and bless us. Jesus mentioned the Father’s generous heart when talking with a group of earthly fathers:

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:9-11

We have a Father who adopts us as his own and then bestows upon us all resources necessary to THRIVE with abundance, lacking nothing. There are four types of gift our Father lavishes upon us:

Good Gifts for Blessing... Result is Enjoyment

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

1 Timothy 6:17

Contrary to what some people may think, our Father loves to give good gifts for our enjoyment and happiness, whether He blesses us with a boat, a new car, a bonus, job promotion, new baby or season tickets. It delights Him to see us delighting in Him and enjoying what He provides in our lives.

Good Gifts for Building... Result is Transformation





Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:9-11

Even though we may not understand it in the moment, sometimes the gifts our Father gives us are ones that shape our character and accelerate our transformation. The gift of discipline is different from the pain of punishment. God is not interested in punishing us but he is interested in allowing some hardships to chisel away and form us to become more like Christ.

Good Gifts for Bonding... Result is Intimacy

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 1:17

Our Father had provided us with the Holy Spirit to draw us closer to Him. The Holy Spirit can open our hearts and minds to see our Father more fully. The more the Holy Spirit reveals the hidden things of our Father, the more we experience intimacy with Him.

Good Gifts for Belonging... Result is Provision

God sent His Son... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:5-7

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

Our Father has gifted us with adoption papers, declaring us His personal children. We belong to him and are no longer orphans who wander lost in this world looking for a home. In His household there is an abundance of blessing that overflows as He provides us with everything we need to THRIVE.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How was your relationship with your earthly father? In what ways have you projected aspects of your earthly father (positive or negative) onto your heavenly Father?

What part of the prodigal story do you relate to?

What gifts are you seeking from your heavenly Father?

HOLY SPIRIT (Reintroduce)

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:1-5

The Galatians were in danger of leaving the realm of the Spirit for the realm of the flesh; of exchanging dependence on God for dependence upon themselves. Paul's counsel to them was to consider how they started and to stay the course. They had started well and, if they continued in the manner in which they started, they would end well too. So how did they start? Their beginning in Christ was marked by the Spirit both in His presence and His working. His presence captured their love, transformed them, and gave them courage to face the difficulties of life. If the Spirit has grown cold in our lives and in our gatherings, then maybe we need to return to a simpler time and a simpler faith; maybe we need to return to trusting and depending upon the grace of God and the presence of His Spirit among us. Let us not lose what we have, nor what is available to us, by trying to finish in our own strength. Pride says we can do it ourselves, but faith reminds us that it is only through the Holy Spirit that we find life.

The Holy Spirit PROVIDES POWER to be what we are called to be and to do what we are called to do.

The strength of the church is not in the sanctified hearts of its members, but in Him who dwells in the hearts of the sanctified. - Wiley, Christian Theology

The power to grasp God's LOVE

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you,

being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19

The power to be free from the law of SIN and DEATH

Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2

The power to abound with HOPE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

The power to be God's WITNESS

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

The power to do SIGNS and WONDERS

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

The power to overcome the ENEMY

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Ephesians 6:10,11,17b,18a





The Holy Spirit PRODUCES FRUIT in our lives.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23, 25

Here is a list of the fruit the Holy Spirit can produce in our lives:

Love will enable us to appreciate our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and, of course, our family and others around us. Love is taking the initiative to build up and meet the needs of others without expecting anything in return (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:3).

Joy will allow us to enjoy His creation, other people, and our circumstances with an expression of delight; and experience the real, authentic happiness from (and with) harmony with God and others (Proverbs 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13).

Peace is surrendering and yielding to the Lord's control, for He is our ultimate peace! It is allowing tranquility to be our tone and to control our equanimity. Fueled by our harmonious relationship with God we can hand over control of our heart, will, and mind to Him. Once we make real peace with God, we will be able to make and maintain peace with others (Matthew 5:9; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7).

Patience is showing tolerance and fortitude to others, and even accepting difficult situations from them and God without making demands and conditions (Matthew 27:14; Romans 12:12; James 1:3,12).

Kindness is practicing benevolence and a loving attitude towards others (Proverbs 21:21; Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12).

Goodness displays integrity, honesty, and compassion to others, and allows us to do the right thing (2 Thessalonians 1:11, Romans 15:14).

Faithfulness is the "gluing" fruit that will preserve our faith and the other characters of the Spirit as well as identify

God's Will so we can be dependable and trustworthy to God and others (Matthew 25:21; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 2:20; 1 Timothy 1:19).

Gentleness is the character that will show calmness, personal care, and tenderness in meeting the needs of others (Isa 40:11; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Timothy 6:11; Philippians 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 2:7).

Self-Control will allow us to have discipline and restraint with obedience to God and others (Proverbs 25:28, 1 Thessalonians 5: 22, 2 Peter 1:6).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Is your Christian life lived more by your own power or by the Spirit's?

What fruit of the Spirit are you most desiring?

What area(s) of your life do you want to see the Holy Spirit transform?

HEARING (Rekindle)

Life is a never-ending series of choices. Can we know whether we are making the right decisions? Should we consult our horoscope? Maybe we should call the psychic hot-line? Do we go with what the experts are saying or rely on our gut-feeling? Should we look to the stars—or should we seek the Maker of the stars?

God wants to speak to us, and yes, you can ‘know’ that you hear His voice. God wants to have fellowship and communicate with us. That’s two-way communication. Why? Because you can’t really have a relationship unless there is true dialogue. How do we get to know a person? By communicating with them. By talking and listening.

It’s the same with our relationship with God. He talks, we listen. We talk, He listens.

God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to take our place and to die for us. He did this so that we could once again have fellowship with Him. In the book of Hebrews we see that we can have access to God’s very presence, *“having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way”* (Hebrews 10:19-20a).

He also wants us to be fulfilled, blessed, and successful in the plan that He has established for our lives—so that we can be a reflection of His love and a blessing on the Earth. In Jeremiah 29:11 the Lord makes clear His intentions for His people, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

We see in Genesis 3:8a, *“they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”* This is how God wants to relate to us today. He desires to walk with and to communicate with His children.

He wants to talk to us. And He invites us to listen.

There is more good news—we can actually hear His voice. The Bible, God’s love letter to mankind, makes it clear that we were created to have two-way communication with Him.

Jesus tells us in John 10:27, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."*

But as a child of God we don't have to walk blindly. We can have confidence that we will hear His voice. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:14, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* Conversely, this Scripture implies that if we are God's children (if we are born-again) we will be led by His Spirit.

The most difficult part of hearing God is that it takes time to learn to discern His voice—and it takes a humble heart. Jeremiah 29:12-13 says, *"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*

We can't demand that God speaks. We are unlikely to hear Him by shaking our fist at the sky and shouting, 'all right God, let me hear you!' But we are instructed to "ask, seek, and knock," and the Bible promises that God will open the door. God will reveal Himself to those who humbly seek Him.

The Lord manifests Himself to us (and through us) as we humbly seek Him. A passage in Proverbs 3 makes it even more plain, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

As we seek to hear God's voice, we need to be alerted to the fact that there are other voices whispering into our ears as well. There are three voices that we must learn to tell apart: the voice of God, the voice of our own fleshly desires, and the voice of the Devil. But Jesus tells us in John 10:4b-5, *"the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

So God *will* speak, and you *can* hear His voice, *but* you must be careful! Our flesh can scream pretty loud (especially when we are under pressure, or we want something very badly); and the Devil is the father of lies—he is a masterful deceiver. No matter how long you've been a Christian it is important to objectively confirm that you are following the Holy Spirit and not another voice.

GOD WILL

REVEAL

HIMSELF

TO THOSE

WHO

HUMBLY

SEEK HIM

So how can we objectively confirm whether we're hearing the voice of God? The Bible gives us seven basic filters through which every possible leading should be judged. We are to carefully examine the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (as well as the words and actions of godly people who may have influence on us) using these seven filters:

Scripture:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (KJV)

The Holy Spirit Speaking to Our Heart:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them.

Hebrews 8:10-11 (ESV)

The Prophetic Gifts:

*(word of knowledge, word of wisdom, personal prophecy)
Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.*

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (NASB)

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Joel 2:28 (NIV)

Godly Counsel:

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Proverbs 11:14 (KJV)

The Peace of God:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you

were called in one body; and be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 (ESV)

Circumstances/Timing:

After these things he (Paul) left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers.

Acts 18:1-3 (NASB)

(This relationship between Paul, Aquila and Priscilla—which happened as a result of circumstances—became one of the most strategic partnerships in the book of Acts).

Confirmation:

By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

Matthew 18:16 (NASB)

Many times the Lord will confirm His direction to us through three, four or more of these filters, especially when we are in the process of making an important, life-changing decision.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you believe we hear from the Lord? What apprehensions do you have when reading “hearing from God”?

Have you had any memorable moments when you felt like God was speaking to you?

What do you feel like God is speaking to you about today?

WORD (Rekindle)

If we want to be people that know who God is and experience more of His presence in our lives, we need to be people who are reading God's Word. Though we have easy access to God's word it takes intentional effort and planning to develop a consistent rhythm of being in the Word. To be a person *of* the word we need to be a person *in* the word, working toward consistent engagement with the Scriptures daily. Below are five essential ways to engage with the Bible (adapted from Navigators, The Word Hand, 1964).

HEARING

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Romans 10:17

Listening to an audio Bible or hearing the Word taught by godly pastors and teachers provides fresh insight into the Scriptures to challenge and expand your own understanding, as well as stimulating your own appetite for its truth.

READING

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1:3

Reading the Bible is often the way God speaks to us most directly. Many people find it helpful to use a daily reading program or other systematic approach to drawing lessons from the Bible.

STUDYING

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Acts 17:11

Earnestly studying the Scriptures allows God's Word to speak directly to our hearts—to correct, encourage, and edify us. Writing down your discoveries will help you organize and remember them.





MEMORIZING

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:9-11

Memorizing God's Word gives us instant access to the Sword of the Spirit when we are faced with temptations and opposition by Satan. By holding passages from the Bible in our minds, we are also able to have them readily available for witnessing or in encouraging others with a "word in season" (2 Timothy 4:2).

MEDITATING

Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers.

Psalm 1:2, 3

When meditation is used in conjunction with each of the other methods, the Spirit begins to move deeply in our hearts and speak to our souls. As we meditate on God's Word—thinking of its meaning and application in our lives—we will discover His transforming power at work within us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How can you make time to read the Bible consistently?

What can you do to get the most out of your reading time?

What Bible passages have inspired you the most?

POWER/AUTHORITY (Reemerge)

As new creations we have been put in a position of power and authority—a position delegated to us by God through Jesus Christ. When you made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, Colossians 1:13 says you were “*delivered from the dominion of darkness.*” The word dominion can be translated to power or authority. You have been delivered from the power, or authority, of darkness and placed into God’s kingdom. Jesus said, “*All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore*” (Matt. 28:18,19). That power is part of your inheritance in Jesus; you have entered this position of authority because you are in Him. Consider the following dynamics of your power and authority:

JESUS SECURED OUR POWER AND AUTHORITY

Jesus succeeded in securing all power by going to the cross, dying. One of the many reasons Jesus came to earth was to win a decisive victory over the powers of darkness. Jesus humbly sacrificed Himself for the redemption of the world, and so “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil 2:9, 10). After securing that power and authority, He freely gave it over into the hands of those who would believe in Him—you and me. We get a glimpse of this when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection from the dead. It was at that time that He delegated the authority to carry out His ongoing work.

Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Matthew 28:18-20

WE ARE SEATED WITH HIM IN HIGH AUTHORITY

In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul prayed a prayer for the body of believers in Ephesus. One part of that prayer was that they would know the exceeding greatness of his

power.

I pray that you may know... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion.

Ephesians 1:19-21

That exceedingly great power (which God used to raise Jesus from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies) is the same power that dwells in us. Ephesians 1:21 tells us that Jesus is seated far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named. God raised Jesus from the dead and set Him far above all other authority—not only the power and authorities in this world, but also those in the heavenly realm.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6

As believers, we are seated with Him in that highly exalted place of authority. Where? Far above every principality and power and might and dominion. As part of His body you are seated with Him in that heavenly place and are equipped with the same power and authority that He has over the enemy and his devices.

WE HAVE THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD TO EXERCISE OUR AUTHORITY

In Christ, you have power, or authority, over Satan and are to give him no place in your life. You are united to Jesus. You are filled with the Spirit of God. You have been given the Word of God. Those three elements are enough for you to carry out your spiritual authority here in the earth. You don't need any more power. You have all the power necessary. You simply have to exercise your authority. Jesus has already done everything necessary to secure the victory over sin, sickness, demons, and fear. You are called to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might!

WE HAVE AUTHORITY TO STAND AGAINST SATAN

One of the most vital areas of the believer's authority is the power to successfully stand against Satan. Ephesians 4:27 says, *"And do not give the devil a foothold"*. In the sixth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul describes the armor that we as believers are to wear in combat against Satan. He explains each piece of that armor, but not once does he say that God will put the armor on us or that God will fight the devil for us. He says, *"YOU be strong in the Lord. YOU put on the whole armor of God that YOU will be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. YOU take the whole armor of God that YOU may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, YOU stand."* God has given you the power and the authority to stand against Satan and his destructive works. He has provided the armor, but it is your responsibility as a believer to put on that armor and stand against the devil. James 4:7 says, *"YOU resist the devil, and he will flee from YOU."* The armor and the weapons are at your disposal. In Christ, you have the power and the authority to take the Word of God, the name of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit and run Satan out of your affairs!

WE HAVE AUTHORITY TO ACT AS NEW CREATIONS

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17,18

What does it mean to become a new creation in Christ? The moment you believe in Christ, there's a spiritual metamorphosis—everything changes! This is a matter of faith and not sight. While the Holy Spirit does His transforming work in you, you must make the decision to allow Him to do it, and you do so by choosing behaviors that invite His transforming power. YOU put off the old self. YOU use the Word of God to renew your mind. YOU put on the new self, which is created in righteousness and true holiness.

WE CAN WALK AND MINISTER FROM A PLACE OF AUTHORITY

In His earthly ministry, Jesus said such things as “Be healed,” and “Pick up your bed and walk.” In Acts 3:6 Peter said to a disabled man, *“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth get up and walk.”* He spoke and ministered with authority.

The God of the universe lives inside you! Become God-inside-minded and you will begin to walk in this authority. You live in a world that is full of evil influences. Satan wants to see to it that you forget the reality of being born again. He wants to see to it that you never realize the authority you have in Christ Jesus, because when you do, you are absolutely dangerous to him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does authority mean to you?

In what areas do you need to exercise your in-Christ authority?

Where do you feel authority can be better understood in your life?

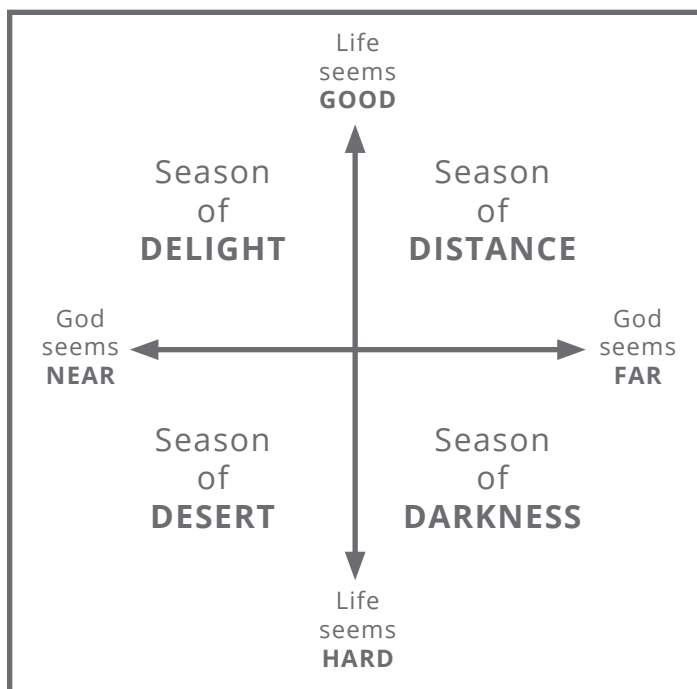




SEASONS (Reassure)

Life is made up of seasons. Some seasons are full of joy, celebration, and breakthrough. Other seasons are heartbreaking and overwhelming. Oftentimes we define who God is by our seasonal circumstances, but part of thriving is being able to recognize what season we are in and have clarity about what God is up to regardless of how we feel about Him.

Having an idea of what God may be up to in a given season can help us to approach it with the right perspective, enabling us to thrive, even when our difficulties may convince us that God is distant or has abandoned us. God teaches us different lessons through different seasons. The chart below can help to identify what season we are currently in and what God might be doing in these moments.



Season of DELIGHT

God seems Closer, Life is good

Sample Text: Psalm 112:1-9

A Lie: "You have ARRIVED"

You offer a GENEROUS Faith

Season of DISTANCE

God seems Distant, Life is Good

Sample Text: Psalm 37:7

A lie: "You are IGNORED"

You offer a STEADY Faith

Season of DESERT

God seems Closer, Life is Hard

Sample Text: Psalm 7, 27, 31, 34, 52

A Lie: "You are a FAILURE"

You offer a PERSEVERING Faith

Season of DARKNESS

God seems Distant, Life is Hard

Sample Text: Psalm 10, 22, 42

A lie: "You are ABANDONED"

You offer a RAW Faith

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What season would you say you are in right now?

What are you learning in this season?

How is God revealing Himself in this season of your life?

RHYTHMS (Rearrange)

Values drive our decision making and determine our priorities. Unfortunately we can voice our values but miss seeing them lived out in our lives. Values that are not consistently lived out are merely good intentions. This is why the word “rhythms” can be a better word for values. *Rhythms* are strong, repeated values, adopted to position us to be formed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. They posture and position us to receive the fullness of life that God promises. They help us embrace the opportunities in front of us and overcome the obstacles that beset us. They equip us to face both our hopes and dreams and our fears and nightmares. Without values, we live rudderless lives.

The Reason for Rhythms

A solid set of rhythms (values) will bring **CLARITY** and **CONVICTION** to your choices regardless of the season you are in. These rhythms communicate and shape your:

- **PRIORITIES** - the things that are most important to you
- **PRINCIPLES** - the things you will not compromise
- **PRACTICES** - the things you choose to do regardless of how hard or easy it is

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:23

RHYTHMS POSITION YOU

Your formational rhythms position you for **ACTIVE SURRENDER**. That is, they are intentional efforts that place you in a surrendered position before God so He can:

Bless You

For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

Psalms 5:12

Transform You

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

R H Y T H M S

STRONG REPEATED
VALUES, ADOPTED TO
POSITION US TO BE
FORMED INTO THE
LIKENESS OF JESUS
CHRIST BY THE POWER
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Amaze You

The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

Matthew 15:31

Consider the following list of Rhythms:

DYING: The Christ-Centered Life - Jesus declares that dying to self, dying to our agendas, dying to our preferences and ideals and making Him the center of our lives actually leads to a fuller, more abundant and more meaningful life.

LIVING: The Spirit-Filled Life - In place of our feeble, inadequate and debilitated strivings Jesus promised to empower us by His Spirit. He has provided us an endless supply of His life being lived through us and in spite of us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

CULTIVATING: Community with Others - As image-bearers of God humanity was created to live in community. The church is in its greatest expression of love when we live in close proximity with each other and gather around the person of Jesus.

ALIGNING: Prayer & Humility - Aligning is about creating space in our schedules to meet with God, giving Him permission to search our hearts and minds for any thought, feeling or motive that is out of alignment with all that He desires for us.

STEPPING: Into the Misery & Margins - Stepping into the margins is more than awareness or advocacy, its about associating, sharing life and rescuing those who have been ignored and victimized by this cruel world.

LEVERAGING: All That We Have - Leveraging all that I have for God's greater purpose is about realizing that all I have has been entrusted to me by God so that I can play a part in his redemptive story for this world and my life.

BREATHING: The Word In & Through Us - The Bible is

more than a how-to, self help book. Breathing God's Word is first about taking in a deep breath and inhaling all that He desires for us to take in. At the same time, His Word is not intended to just remain in us but that we would learn to exhale and breathe His words to those around us.

WORSHIPPING: Glorifying & Enjoying God - Worship is a lifestyle and so it permeates every aspect of our lives. Worship is seen in how we manage our money, how we run our business, how we parent our kids, how we respond to people and how we manage our dreams and ambitions. The heart of worship is a heart that enjoys God for who He is and all that He has done for us.

IDENTIFYING: Baptism & Communion - Being a Jesus follower means being a part of something bigger than our individual selves. Baptism and communion are sacred experiences that represent both the individual, inward commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus and the corporate, outward sign of being connected to a local community of Christ followers—the local church.

NURTURING: Family on Mission - A family that serves God by being on His mission, changing the lives they touch as well as their own. As families pray together, discuss God's Word together, serve together and love a broken world together it empowers them to live out their faith and rhythms side by side.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are the top five values in your life?

Which "Rhythms" would you like to be more consistent?

What will help you be more consistent in your Rhythms?





RECHARGE (Release)

Everything these days is go, go, go! We live in a society that celebrates being busy and stressed. But what is that stress really costing you? Exhaustion, quick meals, and no time to play aren't leaving you fulfilled, that's for sure.

As humans, we have limited amounts of internal resources. If we don't rest, but just keep going, we burn out. Our need for rest is part of what it means to be human, and essential to our thriving.

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

Genesis 2:1-3

When you feel your best, you'll do your best. Start carving out personal time to recharge and you'll be surprised to find you accomplish more work during a shorter period of time.

Know Your Limits

Don't take on more than you can handle. Knowing your limitations will help you with time management by keeping you from over committing. Leave time for love and laughter.

Exercise

We often hear, "Exercise is good for you." Well, it is. It's critical to a healthy mind, body, and spirit. Work off negativity by following a healthy routine recommended by your doctor or physical trainer. When you feel healthy it shows in your appearance and in the way you communicate to others. It's not about dressing up your exterior yet forgetting about your overall health.

Eat Right

Healthy foods help recharge your body and give you energy. Look into a dietary plan that will help you to eat healthier so that you feel energized. Cut down or out the fast foods and invest in cooking at home more. Know what you're putting into your body, but make it fun instead of a chore.

Make Time for Yourself

Alone time is good. It provides an opportunity to reflect, plan, and relax without interruptions. We are quick to say we don't have time for ourselves, but it comes down to managing your time properly. Saying "No," so that you can recharge, is necessary.

Try setting aside a small chunk of time each day to walk, exercise, read, or do something that doesn't involve others. (If you're single, don't search for ways to fill your time and space, value the time you have alone and make use of it.)

Develop Your Spiritual Relationship

Invest in yourself by taking time to meditate, pray, or do something that connects you to God in an enjoyable way. When you understand who you are and what your purpose is, you'll begin to live with peace and passion. It will become difficult for things to disrupt your spirit.

Forgive

If you have someone in your life that hurt you and you haven't forgiven him or her, now is the time to do so. This is not about them as much as it is about you. To forgive means to let go of toxins that are destroying you. Letting go is a tremendous way to recharge your life by removing the heavy burden of pain, anger, and hatred.

Give Back

Give of yourself as a reminder of how much you really have. Volunteer at a shelter, food bank, senior home, or anywhere that allows you to see your blessings. We are quick to point out what we don't have but seeing it from someone else's perspective can be humbling and bring appreciation.

Mix Things Up

Explore life by venturing outside of your comfort zone. Go to an art gallery, hike, skydive, or any other enjoyable, educational, or peaceful activity. Infuse a little laughter and excitement in life and spread the enthusiasm.

Invest in Healthy Relationships, and End the Unhealthy Ones

We THRIVE when we have relationships that encourage us to be who God made us to be. Surround yourself with people

What does rest look like for you?

How do you recharge and manage stress?

What will you do differently to create margin for recharging?

[illegible]





VP3

ADVANCE

ADVANCE is about living a life of meaning and impact, freed from regret. It is about broken, limited people discovering their divine calling and purpose in life. It is about helping to change lives while our own lives are changed in the process. ADVANCE is about leveraging our time, talents, and treasures to leave behind a positive legacy. We start life with a dream that our lives will matter, but quickly feel like failures or shame-filled corpses. God created each of us with a purpose in mind: to be extraordinary people doing extraordinary things for the advancement of His brilliant work, yet God's intention gets lost in the clutter and the chaos of daily demands which halts our forward motion. ADVANCE is about being able to look back on your life with a God-given satisfaction that you're leaving this world a better place. As we discover our unique calling and assignment, we can see ourselves as part of a winning team that lasts through all eternity. In this section we will help you:

- **Emphasize** the importance of living for others and cultivating **Your Legacy**
- **Embrace** that you were created for something meaningful and special with **Your Cause**
- **Emerge** as a person of influence and calling in **Your Work**

YOUR LEGACY

Everyone leaves a legacy whether they plan to or not. Everything we say or do leaves the imprint of our lives on those around us. As long as there is breath in your body, there's an opportunity to leave a rich legacy of hope.

Have you seen the movie *Gladiator*? It's a hero-to-zero-to-hero tale of perseverance, redemption, and revenge. There is a quote in the movie that states:

"What We Do In Life Echoes In Eternity" - Maximus

Your legacy will continue after and follow you in life. You will be remembered for the attitude, presence, words, and actions that left a pleasant fragrance or putrid stench. In order to establish a great legacy, there needs to be intentional effort every day with the help of the Holy Spirit. Start your legacy list today and begin to live in the fullness that God created you to experience. Here is an example of a legacy list containing ten traits you may want to be remembered for by your family, friends, and co-workers:

JOY

Legacy of joy in the midst of difficulty

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:2-3

In this life we are going to have troubles even when we aren't the instigators of it. There is no such thing as a trouble-free life, so we need to expect bumps in the road and dig deep in our spirit to find joy in the midst of them. Joy comes from knowing God is in control of (and can bring good out of) every situation in our lives.

GRACE

Legacy of receiving and giving grace

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

God gives us great grace to accomplish His will right where we are. Being on the receiving end of undeserved grace and mercy makes it easier to pass it on to others. Giving grace involves releasing your loved ones to experience everything God has created them for and allowing them to make mistakes along the journey without being condemned.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Legacy of encouraging and inspiring others towards greatness

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Hebrews 3:13

There's always something to bring people down—a discouraging word, a disapproving look, or disrespectful actions. But we can be instruments that build people up when we show up in the home, work, church, or community. Great personal joy is a beautiful by-product experienced when other people are inspired by our words and actions.

GENEROSITY

Legacy of giving my time, treasures, and energy for kingdom work

But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

2 Corinthians 8:7

As believers in Christ Jesus, our legacy should be one of incredible generosity with our time, money, and energy. God promised that He will supply all our needs and grant our desires according to His will. Our legacy is bolstered when we live free from selfish ambition and refuse to hoard earthly treasures for ourselves.

FORGIVENESS

Legacy of modeling forgiveness

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each

other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

It's much easier to talk and think about forgiving others than to actually offer it. However, God gives incredible freedom to us when we choose to forgive those who have offended us. Christ's sacrifice at the cross is most modeled when we forgive as He has forgiven us.

LOVE

Legacy of unconditional love for my family and friends

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

Many of us grow up believing that people deserve our love when they do something worthy of our affection. However, God has called us to love unconditionally as He has loved us. Through His grace, the legacy of agape love can reach down through many generations of family and friends.

INVESTMENT

Legacy of leading and discipling people to Christ

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

It's easy to take for granted the amazing gift of salvation given by God the Father through Jesus Christ. It can be intimidating to share our faith or invest in others, yet seeing a life transformed increases the determination to reach out to the lost. It takes time and effort to disciple people in Christ, but God gives us the wisdom and strength when we trust in His direction.

OBEDIENCE

Legacy of hearing and doing God's Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:22





ADVANCE IS ABOUT
LIVING A LIFE OF
MEANING AND IMPACT,
FREED FROM REGRET.
IT IS ABOUT BROKEN,
LIMITED PEOPLE
DISCOVERING THEIR
DIVINE CALLING AND
PURPOSE IN LIFE

God wants us to leave a legacy of applying His Word rather than just sitting around accruing knowledge about it. God's Word is powerful and compels us in the right direction. However, obedience is only possible when we admit our inability to obey and trust the Lord to give us what we need to follow through.

WORK/VOCATION

Legacy of doing good and productive work

Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

1 Corinthians 3:13

Much satisfaction is found in giving our best in the work God has given us to do. It isn't always easy and sometimes we're tempted to quit, but through perseverance and strength from the Holy Spirit, we can accomplish our goals and aspirations through the different seasons of life, both in and outside of the home.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does "legacy" mean to you?

What do you most want to be remembered for?

In which of the ten areas of the legacy list do you most want to grow?



YOUR CAUSE

People are generally happier when they have meaning in their lives; and part of living a meaningful life is having the feeling of making a difference in the world. You were created for something amazing—and it's important to discover what it is!

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is 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.

Ephesians 2:8-10

This passage reveals that we have been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” This raises an obvious question: What are the good works God has prepared for me?

Many of us would be inclined to answer this question by pointing to specific things Christians tend to do as an expression of their faith. Good works would include: attending worship services, praying regularly, studying Scripture, giving generously from our financial resources, joining a small group, going on mission trips, caring for the poor, working for justice for the oppressed, loving our neighbors, and so forth. These are some of the good works God has prepared for us. As people who have been transformed by God's grace through Christ, we *are* called to engage in these activities.

But if we think of good works only in these terms we miss that God's plan for us is much broader and deeper. Looking again at the Ephesians passage, the Greek original reads more literally, “which God prepared in advance, so that we might walk in them.” The language of walking was used by teachers in the time of Paul in the same way we might talk of living or engaging in a certain lifestyle. In other words, the good works of verse 10 are not merely religious activities scattered throughout an otherwise secular life. Rather, the good works encompass the whole of life. Everything we do should be done by God's grace for His purposes.

Within each of us is a passion waiting to be released upon

the world; the challenge is finding it. You have something significant to contribute to our world, distinct and unique. This is not about finding your career because your passion doesn't always have to pay; it can but it doesn't always happen that way. Your passion, or your cause if you will, is found at the place where your deep gladness and the world's great needs meet.

This is what you will contribute and it is very needed. Many of us can identify where the world's great needs are but struggle to figure out what we can possibly do about it. I urge you to consider that you are uniquely gifted to contribute toward the needs you see around you, particularly where they intersect with your passions.

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation.

Philippians 2:12

Living out your cause *is* working out your salvation. Talk is cheap but when we live out our faith in tangible ways that impact the world and improve lives, our faith is put on display as authentic. The world is full of broken lives and tragic circumstances and God's heart breaks for them. As we live out our cause, our hearts join with God's and we experience a deeper connection to Him resulting in a more fulfilling life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are you passionate about?

What things break or burden your heart?

Where do you get excited in helping others?



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC NOVEMBER, 1964 CHINA PRESIDENTS PART I GEOGRAPHIC REPRINTS RANGER 7 VIKINGS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SEPTEMBER, 1964 PEAC CORPS ANCIENT GLASS CHESAPEAKE BAY VIET NAM RAILROAD
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC APRIL, 1967 RHINE RIVER WASHINGTON GALAPAGOS TOWER OF THE WINDS
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JULY, 1967 FLORENCE FLOOD LAKE POWELL THAILAND SCILLY ISLES GIANT
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JUNE, 1967 ILLINOIS FRENCH RIVERA ANTARCTICA LA GORCE MEDAL NEW BOOKS TURTLES
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAY, 1967 EASTERN CANADA HOBOKAM INDIANS MAGNETIC DATTING
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MARCH, 1967 SIBERIA NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART SQUIDS GUADALAJARA WHITE GORILLA
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC APRIL, 1966 CEYLON CONSHSELF THREE SPACE RENDEZVOUS WYOMING
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC FEBRUARY, 1966 BOLIVIA ST. AUGUSTINE ALICE SPRING COMET YANKEE VIETNAM
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JANUARY, 1964 U. S. CAPTIV. RETURN TO TRISTAN MT. SINAI NIGHT RIVING
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC NOVEMBER, 1963 STATE PARKS SIKKIM ADVENTURES BOOK MALAYSIA ECLIPSE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC OCTOBER, 1963 NILE MAP ANNIVERSARY EVEREST EXPEDITION NILE MONUMENTS KING TUT
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AUGUST, 1963 TEST DISNEY DEVON FLORESCENT SEA LIFE CHIMPANZEEES
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JULY, 1963 CENTRAL CANADA MAP CIVIL WAR ONTARIO ATHENS BYZANTINE SHIP
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DECEMBER, 1965 WINDWARDS CHIMPANZEEES GALILEE DOCTOR FISHES SEEING THE U.S.A.

YOUR WORK

Work is part of God's good design for us.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:15

But when sin entered the picture, work was cursed.

*Then to Adam [God] said...
Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;
And you will eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground.*

Genesis 3:17-19

Because of the Fall, work is hard. Work involves sweat and toil, thorns and thistles. Or, if you prefer, work involves stress and overtime, belligerent bosses and mundane meetings. Not everything in the world of work is as it should be. Work has been cursed. But work is still good.

It's important that we see both the goodness of work in God's original creation and the struggle of work under the Fall. If we only see the good, we'll be frustrated when things don't go as they should. If we only see the bad, we'll have a hard time doing our work to the glory of God. Work is not all good, and it's not all bad. It is part of God's good creation, which has been tainted by the Fall. And God is at work to redeem work.

Romans 8:20-21 says, *"The creation was subjected to frustration... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."* Through us, God is after the renewal of creation. Grace doesn't just change our eternal destiny, it changes our entire basis for living. Redemption affects every part of us; and through us, God's redemption is extended into the world around us.

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So redemption in Christ must transform our view of work. Work is not a necessary evil; it is a calling. Work has great spiritual significance because it is a chance for God to be glorified. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:31: *“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* A similar command is given in Colossians 3:17: *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”* When you show up at your job, you’re there for the glory of God. God wants to be honored in what you do and in how you do it.

What are some ways that God can be glorified in our work? Consider these biblical ideas:

- God is glorified when we put our whole selves into our work, with a view toward pleasing God, not men (Col 3:23-24).
- God is glorified when we are honest, even when it hurts us or prevents us from getting ahead (Ps 15, Gen 39).
- God is glorified when we honor our superiors and submit to their authority (1 Tim. 6:1; Rom 13:7).
- God is glorified when we treat our work associates with kindness and respect (Luke 6:31; Rom 12:18).
- God is glorified when we expose fraud, dishonesty or unethical behavior (Eph 5:11-13).
- God is glorified when we approach our work prayerfully (1 Thess 5:17).
- God is glorified when we avoid complaining or grumbling, even in less-than-ideal work situations (Phil 2:14-15).
- God is glorified when we refuse to make idols of work and money (Matt 6:24; Ecc 5:10-12).
- God is glorified when we plan diligently for the future (Prov 21:5).
- God is glorified when we live simply and give generously (Prov 22:9; 1 Tim 6:17-19).
- God is glorified when we trust Him to provide today what we need for today (Matt 6:11).
- God is glorified when we rest from work (Deut 5:13-15; Ps 46:10).

In all these ways and many more, we can do our work to the glory of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How can you make your work environment better for others?

How can you use your professional skills to serve God?

How can God be glorified in your work?

VP4

CONCLUSION

Over the course of Vertical Pursuit you have examined your CORE to understand how the center of who you are impacts all that you do; explored how to get out of survival mode in order to THRIVE as you live life centered on Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit; and invested in the future by planning how to live your life now in order to partner with God as He works to ADVANCE His Kingdom here on earth.

VP is not a one-time discipling experience; it is a lifestyle of relentless pursuit of God in all that we do, always moving forward and always advancing. The goal of VP is not only to inflame your own Vertical Pursuit, but to equip you with a tool to use as you come alongside others and encourage them to pursue God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the life He has for them.

As we conclude VP we leave you with two challenges:

1. Look back at your answers to the reflection questions and ask God deeper questions about each area of your life.
2. Find one other person (or a small group of people) to lead through VP, guiding them a few steps further along their journey by pouring into them what God has poured into you.

May God fill you with hunger for Him and empower you to relentlessly pursue Jesus and the life He has for you.

Resource Page

This book barely touches on so many topics. The resource page contains some additional materials to further your growth and learning: **gracechapelonline.org/vp**





VP5

QUOTES

Core:

"My mom used to say that I became a fighter and a scrapper and a tough guy to protect who I am at my core." - Vin Diesel

Identity:

"Jesus came to announce to us that an identity based on success, popularity, and power is a false identity—an illusion! Loudly and clearly He says, 'You are not what the world makes you; but you are children of God.'" - Henri Nouwen

Character:

"Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." - Abraham Lincoln

Heart:

"The best way to not get your heart broken, is pretending you don't have one." - Charlie Sheen

Mind:

"Whatever terrible things may have happened to you, only one thing allows them to damage your core self, and that is continued belief in them." - Martha Beck

Healing:

"Healing is not just the absence of pain, but the presence of wholeness." - Mike Tatlock

Strongholds:

"As long as our minds rehearse the strength of our stronghold more than the strength of our God, we will be impotent." - Beth Moore

Thrive:

"An easy life is rarely meaningful and a meaningful life rarely easy." - Oliver North

Holy Spirit:

"The Scripture makes it clear that this planet would already be a literal hell on earth were it not for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world." - Billy Graham

Word:

"People cheer the Bible, buy the Bible, give the Bible, own the Bible - they just don't actually read the Bible." - John Ortberg

Rhythms:

"Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value." - Albert Einstein

Recharge:

"Show me a worrying person and I will show you a person who does not know how to relax." - Albert E. Cliffe

Advance:

"And Jesus, the heart of the Christian faith, is the wildest, most radical guy you'd ever come across." - Bear Grylls

Legacy:

"What we do in life echoes in eternity." - Marcus Aurelius

Cause:

"We aren't just thrown on this earth like dice tossed across a table. We are lovingly placed here for a purpose." - Charles Swindoll

Work:

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible." - T. E. Lawrence

OTHER NOTES:

