



# SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

WALKING WITH JESUS DAILY

SEVEN WEEK SERIES  
VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

**vineyard**youth

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

# WELCOME!

## to Vineyard Youth Curriculum

**Hello, friends.** What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposely designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you - the in-the-trenches leader to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

### Each Lesson Will Include:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to live and reveal the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions.
- Times for you as the leader to tune into what God is doing in you and your students' lives.
- Times for students to hear from God for themselves.

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It's important, it's needed, and it's laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!

## Why This Topic?

Discipleship starts from the inside out. We want to help our teens learn to grow their faith on their own, by focusing on their interior life. The Spiritual Practices are time tested paths to connecting with the heart of God and the truth of the Word. This curriculum is an introduction to a life rooted in the consistent practice of connecting with God through prayer, study, and more. Our hope is to encourage teens to go deeper than just "attending church" and truly begin to own their faith and spiritual formation.

## Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader

In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we'd like to keep in mind:

**Plug in your stories** wherever you can. These are bare bones here, you add the meat!

**Experiential learning lasts.** We've tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out. Take some risks!

**Humor is key.** It's hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor!

**Context matters.** We don't know what's going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray/think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers! How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

## These Lessons Are on Video!

Go to [vineyardyouthusa.com/resources](http://vineyardyouthusa.com/resources) to view the video teaching for this series.

Each lesson is taught by Christian Dunn or Jenna Stepp, and you can follow along with the written version.

# PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT

## BIG IDEA

### Practice makes permanent.

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

There's a saying in business that goes something like this: "Your system is built perfectly to give you the results you are already getting." When we are feeling disconnected from God and anxious in life, that is often the result of our "rule of life," or how we are living our lives. This is why for thousands of years, followers of Jesus have emphasized the importance of a rule of life that centers around spiritual practices like reading the Bible, praying, practicing community, and more. What "rule of life," or system, is your life built around right now? Are you getting the results you want (peace, closeness to God, inner strength) or not? What might you need to adjust to get those results? Take some time before this lesson to meditate on this thought and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate any parts of your "system" that may need adjustment.

## STARTER

*(The games in this curriculum are not necessarily related to the topic. They are here as an aid for you as the leader so you don't have to come up with one if you are looking for an ice breaker or relationship builder before you get started with the lesson.)*

Play Celebrity Salad Bowl. You will need a bowl, little pieces of paper, and pens. Students have five minutes to write the names of as many famous people as they can on the little pieces of paper (without telling others what they are writing). When time is up, have them fold them and throw them into the bowl. Then break the students into two teams. One at a time, a person on each team gets up, pulls a name from the bowl, and tries to get their other teammates to guess the name by using words. You can give them thirty seconds or a minute—it's up to you. Play for a while and keep score.

## LESSON

What kind of life do you want? Let me give you some choices. What if you could pick these off a menu?

- Anxious or peaceful?
- Stressed out and feeling behind or having extra margin in your life?
- Insecure or confident?
- Feeling run down or refreshed?
- Distant from God or close to God?
- Hard to hear God or easy to know his voice?

- Confused about God's will or connected?
- Lost for purpose in your life or full of inspiration and forward momentum?
- Lack of vision or full of vision?
- Alone or in meaningful community?

We could go on. It's obvious what you'd choose isn't it?

The problem is, we make choices every day that lead us to the opposite of what we'd say that we'd want out of life. We actually choose stress, busyness, disconnection, and hurry. We don't really think about what our soul needs and we don't bother feeding it, and then we wonder why our soul is shrinking and dying inside. You know how I know? Because that's why you and I are so anxious, fearful, and consumed with confusion. We aren't taking time to connect to our source.

Today I want to introduce a concept to you that has been connecting people to Jesus for thousands of years. But we have to remember that the goal is not to be able to say you do these things. The goal is to be connected to Jesus in relationship. So as we go through all of these lessons, we need to keep remembering that it isn't about the spiritual practice, it's about Jesus. That's always what it's about, and that's where we are going to start.

John 15:5–11 Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Following Jesus is an invitation to abide in him—literally to live there, to make a home in Jesus. What I want you to see is that following Jesus is way more than just believing in him. It is following his way of life. It means choosing to follow his teachings and choosing to put him first before all of our other wants and desires in life.

Jesus talks about this in Matthew 11:28–30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

To fully understand this verse, we need to first know that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi (a teacher). Rabbis had followers they called disciples, which is really a word that means “apprentice.” And every rabbi had a “yoke,” which was the set of teachings (the way of life) that a rabbi’s apprentices would follow. Jesus is saying that his way is the way to life—the “easy way.” the way to a life that brings rest for our souls, the way to fullness of joy.

When we talk about being Christians, we aren’t really talking about just believing something. Yes, believing that Jesus is the Son of God is a huge part of that. But believing isn’t where this should end, only where it should begin. We are talking about choosing a lifestyle.

Part of that lifestyle is building an intentional rhythm to our lives that connects us to a relationship with Jesus. Just as he said, “Abide in me.”

These lessons are on the spiritual disciplines or practices—set of practices that believers have used for millennia to connect them to a relationship with God. In other words, they help us abide in Christ. It is a way of ordering your life so that you are seeking first the Kingdom of God rather than seeking first everything else in life.

A thousand years ago followers of Jesus used to call this a “rule of life.” The word for rule was *regula*, like a trellis used to support vines in a vineyard. Think about Jesus’ words about a vine. A vine has to have something to grow on. Without a trellis, it will die and not produce fruit. That is exactly what Jesus says. Anything that is not connected and abiding in him doesn’t produce fruit and dies.

So what are some of the practices? Here is a list of some of the common ones (yes, there are more):

- Silence and solitude
- Generosity
- Confession
- Reading the Bible

- Prayer
- Sabbath
- Fasting
- Service
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration

## DISCUSS

There is no shame or guilt in this! Let's just do an honest assessment of our rule of life. What spiritual practices do you engage in on a regular basis, if any? If you'd like to practice them more regularly, what stands in the way?

Probably the reason most of us have trouble has something to do with time management. We are too busy. We forget. We have so much going on. It's hard to fit prayer or reading the Bible or serving or sabbath into our lives. I get it. We are all super busy. What if we are too busy?

Imagine we were on a sinking ship and we jumped into the water together. Now suppose I gave you a life vest to put on that would literally save your life. Would you put it on? I imagine you'd say yes. But what if you were holding onto some really important things? In order to put it on, you'd have to let go of your phone, a bunch of money, and your Xbox limited edition? Would you let go of them instead of drowning?

Let's take it a step further. What if a flood was coming and I told you it would sneak up on you and you wouldn't know when it would come? Would you put all that down and hold the vest if the water was an inch deep? A foot deep? At your waist? When would you start doing what you know you need to do to live?

## DISCUSS

Let's do an experiment. Get out your phones. Take a look at your screen time. How much time have you spent this week on your phone? Now let's revisit the question: Do you have time to spare for God?

This isn't a guilt trip. It's an honest question. We make time for what we love in life. We make time for what we want. It is possible to be too busy to have a relationship with Jesus. For some people, being an apprentice of Jesus just isn't possible, because they don't have time.

That's why following him is a choice, a choice we make with our time. This isn't much different from any relationship we have with a friend. If we want a relationship, we have to spend time on it.

This teaching series is going to be all about building the trellis for your life.

- Remember this is all about a relationship, not rules and religion.
- This is about giving us a life that is better, not worse.
- Think back to the beginning of this lesson. What kind of life do you want?
- We can choose to create a rule of life that allows us to abide in Jesus and leads to a life of peace and joy and connection to our heavenly Father.

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**This week try to create some space to be with God three different times. It doesn't have to be long. And you can do whatever you want during the time. This is just about trying to create a new habit in your life. See if you can do it!**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree or disagree with the assertion we are making today that spiritual disciplines are important for your spiritual growth, your connection to God, and your general well-being?
2. Which spiritual disciplines are you drawn to? What two or three disciplines do you think you'd be most interested in learning about and trying?
3. Do you think your time management is a problem? Do you spend your time in ways that will lead you to the life you want?



# READ THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS

## BIG IDEA

### LET'S READ THE BIBLE LIKE JESUS DID.

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Take a moment to reflect on Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." How has God's word illuminated your path? Before leading the youth group today, take a moment to be grateful. Pray some prayers of gratitude for how God's word has been a light to your path. Tell him how his word has led you, directed you, and helped you as you've followed his path for your life.

## STARTER

Play the game "two truths and a lie." Have everyone write three statements about themselves on a piece of paper. Two of the statements need to be true, and one needs to be a lie. The goal is to make it hard for others to know which one is the lie, so instruct the teens to pick truths that others may not know about them, and to pick a lie that seems probable. Next, each person reads their three statements, and people vote for the statement they think is the lie. Once everyone has voted, the person reveals which statement was a lie. Everyone who guessed it correctly gets a point. The person who read their statements gets a point for every person they tricked. Do this for everyone, total up the points, and declare the winner.

## LESSON

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON:** Take a quick moment and check on the **Weekly Challenge from last week!**

### Matthew 4:1–11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning

you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

What can we learn about what Jesus thought of the Scriptures?

- God’s word is enough. It has what you need!
- God’s word is coherent. It isn’t contradictory—even when it seems to be (like Satan quoting Psalm 91 about protection, but Jesus quotes Deuteronomy on not testing God).
- God’s word is authoritative. When Jesus quotes the Scripture, then it seems the issue is settled.
- It shouldn’t be deconstructed or pulled apart when we don’t like it. As Matthew 5:17 says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
- We are called to practice it. Look at Matthew 7:24: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”
- The Word is inspired. Mark 12:36 says, “David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:” Jesus saw the Scriptures as being inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Most importantly, he knew that it was about him! Luke 24:27 says, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Jesus thought the Scriptures were important. He saw them as central to faith, as coherent, as inspired, and as a necessary part of what we need to follow him. How should this inform how we view the Scriptures?

*(For the Leader: Share about how reading the Bible has been instrumental in your faith development.)*



## DISCUSS

Have you ever thought about what Jesus thought about the Bible?

Now that we've talked about this some, does it affect your thinking about the Bible? What stood out to you?

Here are some practical reasons that we should read the Bible. Remember this is something God wants FOR you, not FROM you.

- **To connect with Jesus.** We can't take for granted how much we need this, and we can't take for granted that it will happen automatically.
- **To hear him speak to you and transform your life.** How many of us long for direction in our lives? This is always where I start. How many of us long for transformation—to be who God says we can be?
- **To learn about what it means to follow Jesus and know his will for your life.**
- **Calling.** This is the most inspirational message ever told. And you are part of it. This is all about finding your place in God's great story.
- **Clarity.** I often look at people who don't know God or his word, and wonder how they decide on right and wrong. Here are a few questions from my own life:
  - Why should I be generous? It goes against other moral messages, so why should I be?
  - Why should I care for the poor? It goes against caring for myself, so why should I?
  - Why should I remain faithful to my wife? It goes against seeking my own pleasure, so why should I?
  - Why shouldn't I cheat, even in the little things? If I can get away with it, why does it matter?
- This world is going to continually throw confusing ideologies at you. If you aren't grounded in the Word of God, where do you get your compass for life? How do you decide?

## DISCUSS

What do you like about reading the Bible? What do you not like?  
How is it hard for you?

### Seven Practical Tips for Getting Started

What follows are seven practical tips for getting started with a daily practice of reading the Bible.

#### 1. Choose a Time and Place

Choose a time and place that you know will work. When I was young, the best time for me was very late at night—like midnight :Now that I'm in my 40s, it's much earlier, like 8 a.m. The point is to choose a time and a place that will help you to do it consistently. Are you a morning person? Do you find your mind is more settled at night? If you read in bed, will you fall asleep? If you wait until nighttime will you forget? Pick a time and place that you love and that will make you excited to read.

#### 2. Set a Goal

I love accomplishing goals I set. Decide how many times you want to try and read the Bible in a week. Ideally, a "practice" is something you do every day, but if you aren't reading at all right now, start with three times a week and build from there.

#### 3. Quality over Quantity

I would rather read five to ten verses and really think about them (maybe even read them again) and pray about them than read a whole chapter, or a whole book. Don't get me wrong, it is good to read larger sections too. But in general, when I am reading for devotions, I focus on a smaller section and apply it to my life.

#### 4. Choose Wisely

The Bible is a library of books that convey a unified message of God's redemption story for humanity. However, not all books are as easy to understand as others. If you are new to reading the Bible, I suggest the following:

- The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They are the stories of Jesus' life and are easy to read, exciting, and interesting.

- The short letters (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, James, etc): These are short letters that early leaders wrote to believers. They are full of life application.
- The Psalms: Are you poetic or artistic? These are so great to read if you love poetry and art.
- The Proverbs: Are you a thinker? These are great wisdom for life and easy to apply. You can read one a day!
- Stories from the Old Testament (OT): The OT is huge and has so much wisdom in it. To get started, look up some of the stories and read them (the life of David, for instance).
- Pray!
- Pray before, during, and after reading. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about how what you are reading can impact your heart.

#### 5. Ask Questions

If there are things you don't understand, don't worry. You can always ask someone you trust who is further along in their understanding of the Bible.

#### 6. Journal Your Thoughts

I have always found it helpful to write down the verse I've read and what God is showing me. When I skip that step, I often forget the insight God has given to me.

#### 7. Give Yourself a Break

If you read one day and you "get nothing out of it," don't sweat it. No big deal. Just come back another day. Honestly, most of the time when you feel this way, God is actually doing something in your heart and you just haven't noticed what it is yet. There's no need to be hard on yourself or get discouraged. If you do get discouraged, reach out to someone.

#### The SOAP Method

If you aren't sure what to do when you are reading, here is a very simple method that you can start with. You don't have to do it this way, this is just one tool that may help you. There are many ways to read and be touched by God's word.

#### Scripture

Pick your passage and read it at face value and watch for God to highlight something to you. Think about questions like, "What was the author trying to say here?" and "What is the main point of this passage?"

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

### Observation

Pick something that stuck out to you. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- What is God revealing or highlighting to me?
- What is touching my heart?
- What is something I don't understand?
- What is something I never knew?
- What is something that rubs me the wrong way?
- Is something convicting me—challenging my worldview or how I live my life?

### Application

Once you have decided on something that has kind of stuck out to you, then think about application. Ask yourself: How can I apply this observation to my life? What is one practical thing I can do as a response to what God is showing me through this passage?

### Prayer

Then, you can turn your observation and application into a prayer. Sometimes it also helps to write it down somewhere so you can go back later and read what God has been showing you.

**The challenge for this week is to try out this spiritual discipline. Set a goal. Maybe decide to try and read your Bible four times this week. Pick a section and stick with it. If God shows you something about yourself or life or him, take a note so you can remember it. Then next week we'll talk about what stuck out to you.**

1. How does hearing about what Jesus thought about the Scriptures challenge your own view of them?
2. What practical tools were helpful for you as you think about starting to do this spiritual practice?
3. What books of the Bible do you think you'd like to start reading, given the list that we went through?
4. What do you foresee being your greatest obstacles to this spiritual discipline, and how can you plan ahead to avoid them?

# LIVING ABOVE THE NOISE

## BIG IDEA

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

### LEARN TO LIVE ABOVE THE NOISE.

The priority of Jesus' solitude and silence is everywhere in the Gospels. It's how he began his ministry. It's how he made important decisions. It's how he dealt with troubling emotions like grief. It's how he dealt with the constant demands of his ministry and cared for his soul. It's how he taught his disciples. It's how he prepared for important ministry events. It's how he prepared for his death on the cross.

As youth leaders, caring for our souls through the ongoing practice of both silence and solitude is crucial.

Before youth group, find a space to be alone with Jesus and breathe. Notice the distracting thoughts that come up. Allow yourself to bring those distractions to him and place them at his feet. Return to silence and listen for what he wants to say to you. What do you notice?

God uses silence and solitude to help us experience rest for our souls and to help us hear his voice above all the noise. He welcomes us to bring our distractions, burdens, and frustrations to him.

Recall the words of Matthew 11:28–30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

## STARTER

Name that Sound is like charades but using sounds. Break up into teams. Each team can pick one person per round to be the "noise maker" and the rest of the group has to guess what the noise is. (Follow the basic rules of charades or pictionary). Before group, create cards for them to choose from.

## LESSON

A few suggested cards:

Train	Birds chirping	Dogs
Bicycle	Wedding toast	Guinea pig
Baby Crying	Cats	Horse galloping
Eating corn	Ambulance	
Eating soup	Fire alarm	Add your own!
A break up	lawnmower	

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON: Take a quick moment and check on the Weekly Challenge from last week!**

Our world is full of noise. The sounds are different depending on where you live. It could be the buzz of cars, the sounds of neighbors mowing their lawns, or birds chirping or coyotes howling.

Think about the sounds in your home. What do you hear? Is it the sound of the TV, music playing, little kids fighting, or something else? What about the sound in your room?

Our world has become increasingly noisy over the past hundred years. What inventions from the last hundred years are the noisiest? (Let them brainstorm.)

What effect do you think noise has on our bodies? Our minds? Our spirits?

In 2014 Environmental Health Perspectives published a study showing the link between noise and our well-being. You may find it obvious to hear that ongoing noise affects our sleep quality and quantity, but did you know increased noise can be linked to increased stress, annoyance, and distraction? These factors, when left unchecked can lead to issues such as heart disease, hearing loss, and more.

You may be thinking, "Whoa, that escalated quickly. Who cares if I have music playing 24/7 or the TV on in the background? I can have time with God and text my girlfriend at the same time, right?"

Actually, scientists (and Jesus) invite you to consider a better way. As followers of Jesus, we try to follow Jesus' lead and do as he did. When we look at Jesus' life, one



of the most repetitive habits we see, besides healing people and teaching, is his habit of intentionally going away from the crowds and spending quiet time with his Father God.

Did you know that one of the core spiritual disciplines is silence and solitude? And it's one that we know Jesus practiced. Why do you think that this is a core discipline?

- Have you ever tried silence with God for an extended period of time?
- What happens to you when you let yourself enjoy silence alone?

Well, we are glad you came tonight. Since youth group is a place where you can grow, learn and try new things, we are going to try silence.

We are going to play the quiet game. The first person to speak has to clean up with me after group. For sixty seconds, we are going to practice the spiritual invitation of silence. (Set a timer for sixty seconds.) Everyone, get comfortable. If it helps you, close your eyes. Remember, the goal is for this room to be silent for sixty seconds. You have heard that miracles can happen right? Let's try this. *(Sit for 60 seconds. Embrace the awkwardness. If 60 seconds doesn't seem long enough, go for more!)*

## DISCUSS

When you are finished, ask the group:

What did you notice?

Did anyone instantly want to grab their phone?

What came to your mind?

Did anyone love it?

Did anyone hate it?

Why? Why not?

Did you notice that even though it was quiet, your mind was not silent? We humans have noise on the inside. When you have put down your device, turned off the Netflix, and taken out your ear buds, you still hear it. Maybe it's your to do list, the fear of the tryout, or the conversation you overheard before class. We hear noise, voices, lies, fears, truths, and questions that leave us feeling restless, even when things around us quiet down.

Part of growing in our relationship with Jesus includes learning how to bring all this noise to him and find the silence that he invites us to. As you know, this doesn't

just happen. Life, culture, and relationships would keep us plugged in 24/7 if we allow it. And sometimes we all that as a way of escaping the hard things that Jesus wants to heal. Silence, both outer and inner silence, is a special spiritual disciple that can literally change you from the inside out.

Jesus invites us into a lifestyle of getting away from the external noise and being with him every day. He offers us a way to take our internal noise and give it to him so that we are changed. We are filled with an inner peace that stays with us when we are not actively praying. In Matthew 11, he calls it “rest for our soul.”

How can we do this? It starts by spending time with him. This is where the solitude part comes in, Jesus loved getting away from the crowds to be alone with God. (And all the introverts just fell a little more in love with Jesus.)

**Let’s take a glance at the scripture:**

*(If your group is big enough, give a verse to each group or simply share a sampling of verses. They will start to see the pattern. If time is an issue,- or if you have junior high in the group,- pick three to five verses.)*

**Bible Verses on Jesus’ Solitude and Silence**

(All verses are NIV 1984 unless indicated otherwise.)

- “At once the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” (Mark 1:12)
- “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35) Note that everyone was looking for Jesus, but after his time in prayer he told his disciples that it was time for them to move on to another village.
- “[Despite Jesus’ plea that his miracles be kept secret] the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:15-16; see also Mark 1:45)
- “Once again Jesus went out beside the lake.” (Mark 2:13)
- “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.” (Mark 3:7)
- “Jesus went out to a mountain side to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him.” (Luke 6:12–13. See

also Mark 3:13)

- “Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables.” (Matthew 13:1–3)
- “Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” (Mark 6:31–32)
- “After [Jesus] had dismissed [the crowds], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was [still] there alone.” (Matthew 14:23; see also Mark 6:46)
- “Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’” (Luke 9:18; see also Mark 8:27)
- “Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.” (Matthew 15:29, ESV)
- “After his brothers had gone up to the feast, then [Jesus] also went up, not publicly but in private.” (John 7:10, ESV). Jesus walked ninety miles from Galilee to Jerusalem, which gave him about five days in solitude.
- “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” (Luke 11:1)
- “Again [the religious leaders in Jerusalem] sought to arrest [Jesus], but he escaped from their hands. He went away again [walking about five miles] across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. And many came to him.” (John 10:39–41, ESV)
- “They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” (Mark 14:32)

Wow, Jesus took solitude pretty seriously huh?

There is something sacred that happens to us when we take the time to get away with Jesus and allow him to take all the noise that distracts us. In Psalm 62, King David prays, “My soul waits in silence for God only.” We are invited to do the same—to get away and bring the inner noise to him, so we can enjoy his silence.

#### **Prayer Walk Exercise**

If your youth group has the ability to go outdoors, invite the group to take a prayer walk with Jesus. (Leave all cell phones and such in their chairs or in a cell phone holder.) Have them walk the grounds and tell Jesus about the “noise” on the inside

that comes up. Find an object (a rock, leaf, stick, flower, gum wrapper (ew) that represents that noise. If you can't go outdoors, you could bring items into your space, and just try this indoors.

Give them five minutes to walk in silence. The only rule is that they have to be silent and can't distract their neighbor (solitude).

When they gather back into the room, give them space to sit and bring their burdens to Jesus. You might consider having large rocks or bricks available for them to place their burdens on. Once everyone has placed their burdens on their "rock," have them take a deep breath together.

If your group has the grace for it, encourage them to stay here for a few minutes in grateful silence. Encourage them to listen for whatever God wants to speak to them. If that's super new to your group, you may encourage them to think about something they are thankful for and have them share that with God in quiet prayer.

## DISCUSS

- What did you notice?
- Did anyone instantly want to grab your phone? (The goal in asking this again is to help them see addictive patterns that distract.)
- What came to your mind?
- What did it feel like to give those things to Jesus?

This is his invitation to us in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus takes our burdens and offers to give us a burden that is light, and rest for our souls. Following Jesus is not meant to be a heavy burden that depletes us. Quite the opposite! This invitation from Jesus is core to how we as his followers can relate to him!

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**This challenge is a hard one! Three times this week, set aside three minutes a day to be silent with Jesus. Try it!**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How can you take this invitation to silence and solitude into your week? How can you build this into your schedule?
2. Do you think you'd find benefits from spending quiet time alone with God on a regular basis? If so, what would they be?
3. Does it feel uncomfortable for you to be quiet with God?
4. What is your biggest barrier from having more time with God?

# PRAY FIRST, NOT LAST

## BIG IDEA

**MAKE PRAYER YOUR FIRST THOUGHT, NOT AN AFTERTHOUGHT.**

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Before leading your group through this, take a moment to be still with God. Invite his presence and do this exercise: Envision three things in your life that you are carrying and see yourself handing them to God to carry. What is his response? How does he help? How can you continue to give these to him in the days to come?

## STARTER

You will need some large red plastic cups for this game (or something similar). Break the group into pairs. Each pair will put a cup on the ground between them. The objective of the game is to be the first one to grab the cup, once the leader gives the command, "Cup." Here's how you play: The leader will give these commands in any order, and for as long as they want: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. The people playing have to put their hands on whatever body part the leaders says. Eventually the leader will say, "Cup," and they both try to grab it. Whoever succeeds get a point. Play until one person has two points. Then have winners play each other in the same fashion until you get the ultimate winner.

## LESSON

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON: Take a quick moment and check on the Weekly Challenge from last week!**

As followers of Jesus, prayer is central to our identity. Just a quick look at the Bible shows you that prayer is foundational to most of the greatest stories:

- Esther before the king
- Daniel for interpretation of dreams
- Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
- Disciples after resurrection
- Peter in jail

The New Testament writers were straightforward about when to pray: ALWAYS.

- If you are anxious, pray (Philippians 4:6)
- If you are suffering, pray. (James 5:13)
- If you sin, pray for each other. (James 5:16)
- If you need wisdom, pray. (James 1:5)
- If you are sick, pray. (James 5:14)
- How often? At all times. (Ephesians 6:18)
- For how long? Without ending. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- For whom? All people. (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Where? In every place. (1 Timothy 2:8)

Jesus, as we've seen already, withdrew often to do what? Pray!

- Luke 5:16—"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Paul modeled this as well:

- "God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you." (Romans 1:9)
- "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers..." (Ephesians 1:16)
- "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you..." (Colossians 1:3)
- "We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers..." (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3a)
- "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day." (2 Timothy 1:3)
- "I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers..." (Philemon 1:4)

Ephesians 6:18 sums it up for us: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

Most famous Christians would agree:

- "God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil." — Mother Teresa
- "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." — Martin Luther
- "To get nations back on their feet, we must first get down on our knees." — Billy Graham
- "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" — Corrie ten Boom

## DISCUSS

How important is prayer to your life? How often do you pray, and what do you pray about most often?

Our main point today is to make prayer your first thought, not an afterthought.

So often in our lives, we don't see prayer as this powerful tool that God has given us, but as an afterthought, a last-ditch effort. Why is this?

Our goal for this lesson is to encourage you to start embracing a life of prayer.

- We could give many, many teachings about prayer.
- Our goal isn't to teach you all the ways you could pray today.
- Our goal is to establish a spiritual practice of praying.
- Our goal is to help you start thinking first of prayer, instead of last (or not at all).

Jesus tells us this story, found in Luke 11:5–13, after his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray:

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight



and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

## DISCUSS

What lessons about prayer do you think Jesus is trying to teach his disciples through that story?

Here are a few thoughts (if these haven't already been discussed):

- God loves us and wants us to ask him, just like a good parent wants their children to feel free to approach them.
- We can ask God with boldness. We don't have to be afraid or feel like it is selfish to ask God for things according to his will.
- Prayer is based in relationship (the emphasis on him being our Father).
- Sometimes prayer requires perseverance.
- Most of all: God wants us to pray! Ask! Seek! Knock!

At its most foundational level, prayer is talking to God. We don't need to overcomplicate it. Prayer isn't a performance or part of a spiritual "to do" list. Remember, all the spiritual practices are based in a relationship with God. He loves us and prayer is about talking to him because he loves us, and we love him.

We can work to cultivate prayer in at least two ways:

1. Set aside time to pray. This kind of prayer is focused, and it's an important part of building a lifestyle of prayer. Think of it as a chance to have an uninterrupted conversation with him.

2. Pray throughout the day when you think of him, or need him, or need direction, or anything. This is more of an ongoing awareness of the presence of God who is always with you. We can be in and out of conversation at all times, no matter what we are doing.

There are so many ways to pray, here are a few to get you started:

- Prayer of thanksgiving: it is good to spend a little time each day thanking God.
- Prayer for you: What's going on in your life that you could use his help in?
- Prayer for faith: What would you like to see grow in your life?
- Prayer for others: Who are you hurting for? Who do you love? Who can you bless?

Remember, our main point today is: Make prayer your first thought, not an afterthought. Let's ask God to change how we think about prayer, and let's start practicing prayer as a normal part of our daily life, instead of an afterthought we only go to when we really need something.

Before we close, let's spend two minutes in prayer. Let's quiet ourselves before God and spend a little time in prayer. Try one, or more than one, of the prayers we just talked about.

## APPLICATION

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**This week, set aside a few minutes every day to pray. Use your phone or a journal to write down what you end up praying about, and keep track of what God does. Your notes can be brief—just something to jog your memory.**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What stands in the way of you praying more? Do you feel any obstacles in your way when you try to pray, or when you think about praying?
2. Do you think of yourself as someone who values prayer highly?
3. What do you think would be different about your life if you started practicing the spiritual practice of prayer on a regular basis?

# CONFESSION LEADS TO HEALING

## BIG IDEA

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

### CONFESSION IS A TOOL FOR HEALING AND FREEDOM.

Don't you just love a new journal, a blank canvas waiting for your creativity, or a day off with no agenda? There is something precious about the rhythms in our life that allow us to let go of the things that weigh us down, take a deep breath, and start fresh. When scripture tells us that his mercy is new every morning, it's like an invitation to that deep breath of hope. Is this what you are experiencing today? Are you starting fresh today or are the cares of yesterday clouding your heart, mind, and spirit?

Unfortunately, statistics and life experience have shown us that leaders are often the last to bring our heavy burdens to God as instructed in Matthew 18:28. That means we may find ourselves trying to plan with a distracted and heavy heart. Wherever you find yourself today, Jesus invites you to come near and bring your struggles, regrets, and distractions to him. In this teaching, we will be talking about the joys of confession and having a fresh start with our Father God. Why not take a moment now and bring your whole self before him?

Take a moment to breathe deep and let the Holy Spirit be near.

Reflect on anything that is causing you to feel distracted or upset. Take that before Jesus and talk to him about it like you would talk to a trusted friend who has the supernatural power to comfort and guide like no other. If you know there is something you need to confess and ask forgiveness for, take a moment to do that now too.

As you experience his forgiveness, allow yourself to reflect on his unconditional love. Is there someone you can reach out to that could pray with you before you move on? James 5:16 encourages us to confess our sin one to another so that we may be healed. God's desire is for you to experience healing and freedom in every area of your life. We are all a work in progress, and we all need to experience his grace in a fresh way each day.

As you dive into this lesson, remember that his mercy is new every single day. That's not just a promise for the youth in your group, but it's also for you.

## STARTER

Play the game “never have I ever.” Everyone starts with 10 fingers “up.” Decide who will go first, and that person says a “never have I ever” statement. It should be (obviously) something they have never done. They should try to say something that they’ve never done, but they think others will have done. For everyone else, if they’ve done it, they put a finger down, if they haven’t, then they don’t put a finger down. Go around the circle taking turns with “never have I ever” statements. Each time players put a finger down if they’ve done the thing that is said. The winner is the person with fingers “up” when everyone else doesn’t.

## LESSON

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON: Take a quick moment and check on the Weekly Challenge from last week!**

Have you ever been afraid of the dark?

(For the Leader: Share a story from your own life or have one of you leaders ready to share a quick intro story.)

It’s always amazing to me the way something like a tree or a lamp can look so creepy in the dark but so harmless once you turn the light on. The same is true with the parts of our lives that are painful or separate us from God’s presence. When they are hidden or in the dark, they seem to have a lot of power.

## DISCUSS

Have you ever had something you wanted to hide? Maybe you told a lie or broke something at home that you didn’t want your parents to find out about. Share a story about a time you knew you were in trouble and tried to hide it.

Hiding things is not new. In fact, we see this play out at the very beginning. Let’s take a look at the first book of the Bible. Do you know the story?

*(For the Leader: You know your group better than anyone. If you have shared the story of creation/fall/redemption often with this group, feel free to do a light review. However, if this is new for even one of them, take this opportunity to review the core gospel message with them.)*

When God created mankind, his intention was to have a close relationship with us. You may remember stories of God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden.

Imagine how cool it would be to take an evening stroll with God. If you could take God on a walk anywhere in our area, where would you take him? (Let them respond.)

I wonder what God and Adam and Eve talked about. Maybe the latest species to be named or what herbs they had discovered that day? I wonder what God wanted to tell them.

God had only given them one rule. Do you remember what it was? Not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. One rule.

#### **Genesis 2:15–17**

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."

So we know what happened right?

In the very next chapter we see the enemy of mankind question God's instruction and encourage Adam and Eve to follow their own way, make their own rules, and go against what God asks. So they ate from the tree. Ever wonder what that fruit tasted like? I sometimes picture it as an epic movie scene where it starts out sweet and then dissolves into sour as they come to realize that they have lost the beautiful plan that God had for them. I am sure you can picture it too.

Have you ever experienced something like this? Something that sounded like such a good plan, but then when you realized the consequences, it felt much less awesome? Maybe you noticed a loss of connection with your parent, or your friend? Maybe you felt the need to hide it like Adam and Eve did. Let's look at the next chapter.

#### **Genesis 3:8–13 (NASB)**

Now they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me some of the fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Whoa! They sound like us. They hide and then blame someone else when they get caught. Okay, maybe that's just me.

Thankfully, we serve a really loving God that didn't wipe out humanity and start over! Instead, God makes a way, a path for us to be able to restore what has been lost because of Adam and Eve's sin. In the very next chapter, He shares his plan to send Jesus to pay the price for sin. God is not okay with leaving us in the dark, hidden in our pain and sin. He wants us to be healed and to have a relationship with him. He wants us to be able to look him in the eye and see his love and not feel like we have to cover parts of our lives away from him. So he made a path.

Here is the path:

- Sin (going our own way and not following God's instructions) causes us to be separated from God.
- Jesus came to defeat sin through his death on the cross.
- We have access to forgiveness because of what Jesus did.
- He offers us a supernatural do-over.

*(For the Leader: If you have a whiteboard, I suggest actually doing this rather than just saying it.)*

Think of it like a whiteboard. You start with a nice clean slate, ready for the beautiful, colorful pictures of life that God wants to draw and color with you. Then sin comes in like a spoiled kid that wants to steal the beauty of your picture, kill the joy of your journey with God, and destroy God's plan for you with an ugly black smudge (if you love the color black, use pink or whatever color you want to represent sin and the enemy's plan to separate you from God's plan). But Jesus is like the awesome eraser that comes to give us a clean start, to clear the stain of sin away and let us start fresh with the life God wants to build with us. And he is with us all the time, so every time sin tries to smudge things up, we can let Jesus bring forgiveness and healing.

Sounds like a sweet gift doesn't it? But how do we open it? How do we access the eraser (to continue with the whiteboard example) and live in it in our real lives?

Let's look at a few verses:

- "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." (Ephesians 5:8, 11)
- "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

This gives us some idea: We start by believing in who Jesus is and what He did for us. Then, we are invited to bring his light into our dark places. This is often called confession. What do you think of when you hear that word?

Sometimes in spy movies, the whole goal is to get someone to confess to something so that they will be punished. Right? But this isn't what we hear in 1 John, is it? We confess our sin and are cleansed. It's like turning on the light and realizing that the scary monster is just a tree or a light. Our sin may still have some consequences that we have to walk out, but Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness and allows us to start again with freedom.

As Jesus followers, we can do this every single day. His work on the cross is done, but our work of walking in light every day is a part of our journey here on earth. Confession is a tool to stay in the light.

So who do we confess to? Does it have to be just God? To a priest or pastor? Or who?

Let's look at one more scripture, **James 5:16a (NASB)**: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed."

If we look at the three scriptures we've talked about (Ephesians, 1 John, and James) we see three areas of confession.

- Ephesians talks about exposing the "deeds of darkness," which involves your personal willingness to see the areas of your life where you are walking in your own rules, not following God's instructions, and missing the mark of the kingdom life he has for you.
- 1 John talks about confessing those places to God and allowing what he did on the cross to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.
- Finally, James talks about how confessing to our trusted brothers and sisters in Christ can also bring healing. There is something so powerful about living in authentic community with yourself, with God, and with others. Imagine having no areas of your life that you feel you have to hide. This is the freedom of life that God invites us to.

*(For the Leader: Instead of our normal discussion questions, we are going to end this time with a reflection question that is for each student to work through quietly on their own. You may want to give them a piece of paper and allow a few minutes before wrapping up.)*

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

### Reflection questions:

Are there any places in your life that you are hiding from God and others? Take a moment and talk to God about it if you are able.

**Spend some time asking the Lord if there is anything in your life that is weighing you down, and you need to confess. Then pick a safe person whom you trust, and set up a time to share what's going on in your life, and get some prayer.**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What stands in the way of you praying more? Do you feel any obstacles in your way when you try to pray, or when you think about praying?
2. Do you think of yourself as someone who values prayer highly?
3. What do you think would be different about your life if you started practicing the spiritual practice of prayer on a regular basis?



# GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

## BIG IDEA

### GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK, BEFORE YOU BREAK YOURSELF.

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

Can I recommend a book? The book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer has really helped me grow in my practice of the Sabbath. As a leader who is most likely further along in life than you, I can tell that this is one of the most important practices for those in ministry. It is so easy to minimize its importance and glorify what is essentially workaholicism in the name of the Lord. But you only do that to your own detriment. “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” as Mark 8:36 says. Right? Check out the book. It will be good for your soul.

## STARTER

Give everyone in your group three small pieces of paper. Have them each write down a person, a place, and a thing. Then fold them and put them all into a bowl. Break into two teams. Each team gets 30 seconds for one of their people to pull papers from the bowl and try to get their teammates to guess it by using only words. Obviously they can't use the word on the paper! If you want to make the game last longer, once you get through all the papers, put them back in the bowl and use them for charades: no talking—just actions!

## LESSON

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON: Take a quick moment and check on the Weekly Challenge from last week!**

When someone asks you how you are doing, what are the typical responses you get from people? (Not counting the “I’m good!” that people say reflexively.) People often answer that they’re tired. Or they’re busy. Right?

### Hurry Sickness

Yes, hurry sickness is a real thing. An article on Psychology Today's website says this: “By definition, hurry sickness is “a behavior pattern characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness; an overwhelming and continual sense of urgency.” As if that isn't bad enough, it's also defined as “A malaise in which a person feels chronically short of time, and so tends to perform every task faster and to get flustered when encountering any kind of delay.”<sup>1</sup>

**Let's take a quiz<sup>2</sup> to see if you suffer from Hurry Sickness:**

1. Do you often feel in a hurry to get things done?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often
2. Do you tend to walk fast?  
a. Yes b. No
3. Do you tend to talk fast?  
a. Yes b. No
4. Do you get irritated or upset with other drivers or when you're stuck in traffic?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often
5. Do you find it difficult to just sit and daydream or recall memories?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often
6. Do your spouse, friends, or colleagues ever tell you to take it easy or slow down out of concern?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often
7. How often do you find yourself interrupting the person with whom you are talking?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often
8. Do you get impatient while waiting in line or in traffic?  
a. Never or rarely b. Occasionally c. Often

How did you score?

We are living in a society that celebrates being busy, overworked, tired, and hurried. It is seen as a badge of honor to be busy. But is that the pace at which the kingdom of God works? Is this the pace of Jesus?

### God's Not in a Hurry

When we look at Jesus' life, what do we notice? We see him slowing down. He's taking breaks. Going off in the morning to be alone. Spending time in the wilderness alone. Celebrating the Sabbath. Hanging out with his friends on boats. And more. Jesus, even when Lazarus was sick, wasn't in a hurry.

And the thing that is important to see is that God isn't in a hurry. God is love, and you can't rush love. Check out this quote from Japanese theologian names Kosuke Koyama:

"God walks slowly because he is love. If he is not love, he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow,' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love."<sup>3</sup>

What if, in order to really know God, we need to slow down? A lot?

## DISCUSS

What do you think taking a Sabbath means? Do you know anyone who does it? What do they do? What do you do?

### Sabbath Is God's Answer to Hurry Sickness.

Today's spiritual practice that we want to learn about is Sabbath.

*Are there any Office fans here? Remember the song? (For the Leaders: If you want to play the clip of Andy Bernard trying to remember the Kit Kat song, it's pretty funny. Maybe even hand out Kit Kat bars as a funny reminder to take a break once a day, and once a week.)*

Today's main point is give yourself a break before you break yourself.

You are not an infinite resource. You are limited. You can run yourself out. You can burn yourself out. This is why Jesus said in Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

God made Sabbath for you because you need it. Sabbath literally means to STOP. It is "stop day." He knows we need to take breaks, or eventually we will break from overwork and hurry and stress.

God himself stopped on the seventh day of creation and built into the rhythm of life the need to take a break from working and hurry. Genesis 2:2–3 says, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

And then he built it into the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:8–11 says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The question is how do we do this in 21st-century America? What if one time per day, and one day per week, you stopped? That’s it.

**Stop once a day.**

(We covered this in depth in the first four weeks.) As Matthew 6:11 notes: “Give us today our daily bread.”

**Stop once a week.**

As we saw above in Exodus 20:8–10.

Studies have shown that taking breaks does the following:

- Reduces stress
- Gives you a chance to move
- Boosts your immune system
- Improves your sleep
- Adds years to your life
- Restores mental energy
- Increases creativity
- Boosts productivity
- Improves focus
- Improves short-term memory
- Reduces your risk of heart disease

Taking breaks actually helps you to enjoy work and play more.

**What Is the Point of Sabbath?**

- Rest
- Enjoyment
- Connection (God and others)

So what do you do on Sabbath? Anything that brings you rest, enjoyment, and connection to God and others. Take a break, before you break yourself. Find rest. Find enjoyment. Find connection.

*(For the Leader: Share how you practice this discipline.)*

## DISCUSS

What would your ideal day off, your ideal Sabbath, look like if you were shooting for rest, enjoyment, and connection with God and others? Be creative.

**Remember our big idea: Give yourself a break, before you break yourself.**

Here are some of the benefits of doing a weekly Sabbath:

- Breaks our dependency on ourselves
- Breaks the illusion that we are limitless
- Breaks the hold of materialism
- Breaks us of the illusion that we must be working for things to go well
- Restores order and balance to life
- Reconnects us to God and love
- Reconnects us to what's important to us
- Reconnects us to each other

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**This weekly challenge should be fun! Pick one day this week, and use it as a Sabbath. Focus on (1) Rest, (2) Enjoyment, and (3) Connection. What would make that an ideal day of rest? Go for it, and be creative!**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Sabbath is something we should practice today, or is it just an old idea that doesn't apply anymore?
2. What do you think it would look like for you to practice Sabbath?
3. What would you have to change in order to practice Sabbath?
4. Why do you think God wants us to do this? Why do you think it's so important?

# BETTER TO GIVE

## BIG IDEA

**GOD ENTRUSTS US WITH GOOD GIFTS SO THAT WE CAN BE GENEROUS GIVERS FOR HIS GLORY.**

## YOUTH LEADER SOUL CARE

In what way do you need God's provision today? Maybe you need supernatural grace, healing, or financial breakthrough. We serve the same God who created the stars. He loves to give good gifts to his children when we ask. (Matthew 7:11) Take a moment right now and ask God for what you need. Maybe it's simply the wisdom and grace to lead your group this week. Maybe it's more. Trust that he knows, He cares and he is moving on your behalf.

## STARTER

Because we are talking about giving today, a fun game might be "guess that gift." Wrap up five different gifts. Then let people shake them, hold them, smell them, etc, and try to guess. You can have people write their guesses down. Whoever gets closest to each one, wins the gift!

## LESSON

**BEFORE THE STARTING THE LESSON: Take a quick moment and check on the Weekly Challenge from last week!**

Today we are going to talk about the practice of generosity. First, I have a few questions:

1. How many of you love getting gifts?
2. Who loves giving gifts?
3. What's the best gift you ever received? (Give plenty of time to answer.)
4. What's the best gift you ever gave someone? (Give plenty of time to answer.)

If you are like most people, you feel inspired by stories of crazy generosity. Think of classic tales like Christmas Carol and Cinderella. Think about stories of organ donors or those who adopt cute old dogs that need a new start.

Matthew 6 gives us clear instructions about where we should invest our treasure of time, talent, and money. Verses 19–21 (NASB) say, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and

steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

I love stories about crazy generosity and those who live free from the love of money. I want to tell you the story of a pastor named Rick Warren who wrote a popular book called *The Purpose Driven Life*. His book is the second most translated book in the world, second only to the Bible. The Warrens had lived a lifestyle of generosity before he made any money, but when book sales took off, they did something incredible that they continue to do to this day. Rick Warren and his wife Kay live on 10 percent of their income and donate the rest to charity. Did you catch that? As of 2019, his net worth is over \$25 million, but instead of living a crazy luxurious life and giving a little away, they flipped that around. This is what he told *Forbes* magazine in 2013, “I drive a 12-year-old Ford, have lived in the same house for the last 22 years, bought my watch at Wal-Mart, and I don’t own a boat or a jet.”

In fact, following the success of his book, he stopped taking a salary from his church, and he even gave back the salary he earned during his first 25 years there. As shocking as this set of choices and values might be to people who envy wealth and influence, Pastor Rick makes his purpose evident. “I gave it all back because I didn’t want anyone to think that I do what I do because of money. I love Jesus Christ,” he said. “The Bible teaches that we are to love people and use money, but we often get that reversed and you start loving money and using people to get more money. Money is simply a tool to be used for good.”<sup>4</sup>

Here’s the part I want us to take a closer look at as we explore generosity as a spiritual discipline: Pastor Rick took this important point (money is simply a tool to be used for good) to heart at an early age. “At age 17,” he said, “long before *Purpose Driven Life* came out, I began living on the 10/10/80 principle. Give the first 10% to God, save the second 10% for your future and then learn to live on the rest.”<sup>4</sup> Wow, let’s look at that again!

As a teenager, it became his practice to give 10 percent to God, 10 percent to savings, and live on the rest. But notice that as his income increased, he gave more and more away and lived on not 80 percent but 10 percent. Some of the causes that the Warrens give to include global poverty, church planting, global disease, and more.

## DISCUSS

What causes are close to your heart that you would love to be able to support? What do you think helped Rick and his wife Kay continue to live a simple life even after they had an increase in wealth?

How can we become generous people? It starts by knowing our God.

God is an awesome gift giver. Creation itself shows us how delighted he was to create the earth to be enjoyed and protected. I can imagine how excited God must have felt when he created the flowers, knowing how much humans would love the variety of colors, scents, and the fruit they would bring. I can imagine he might have laughed when he created the pig, knowing how much we would eventually obsess over bacon. (What do you put bacon on?)

What else do you think he enjoyed creating for us? Check out Genesis 1:29–30: Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

As we look further through the scripture, we see that God just keeps giving. Sadly, humanity didn’t follow his plan for us to enjoy creation with him in the garden. Do you remember what happened? If you keep reading in Genesis, sin entered the world when we chose to rebel against God’s instruction and we became separated from him. Greed and envy entered our world.

But thankfully, God loves to give good gifts. At the same moment that he saw that we were separated from him, he revealed his plan to bring us back, a plan for our sin to be forgiven and our relationship with him to be fixed (Genesis 3:15). This plan was giving his son Jesus.

*(For the Leader: Maybe your group has heard the gospel many times before, or maybe you have someone new tonight. Take this moment to share a little more about who Jesus is if you feel like your group may not know it well.)*

You may have heard the scripture from John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God so loved the world (you!) that he GAVE. He gave his son to conquer sin and death so we could be reconnected with him. God is a generous God.



## DISCUSS

Take a moment to thank God for your favorite part of creation and for his son Jesus.

Go around the room and have each person share something they are grateful to God for.

We've established that God is a generous God. Now let's talk a little bit about what it means for us to be Christians. The word Christian actually means "little Christ." In other words, as we follow God, our goal is to become more and more like him. Think of it as "mini-Me" of Christ.

What does that mean for us when it comes to giving? Let's go back to Genesis.

In one of the first of the creation stories, God gives humans dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the animals of the land (Genesis 1:1–2:4). Have you ever heard the word dominion?

The Hebrew word for dominion does not mean "to dominate" or "to exploit." Rather, it means "to take responsibility for," as a ruler would be responsible to ensure the well-being of those in the realm. This portrayal puts human beings squarely in a caretaker position in regard to the gift God gave us in creation. As you well know, he gave us the gift of creation, not so we could use it for our own consumption, but that we could steward it for the good of others. But it doesn't end with just the gift of creation.

James 1:17 tells us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Whoa! Catch that? Every good and perfect gift we have comes from him and is ultimately for HIS glory.

Let's think about it:

1. What other gift (besides creation) do you have?
2. What does it look like to be generous with the other gifts God gives us?

Let's look at another verse: "Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others." (1 Timothy 6:16-17, NLT)

Each one of us has something different that God has given us. What is in your hand? What has God already given you that you can share with others?

There is a church in Nepal in a very poor town. Many of the people in the church did not have much money at all. They worked hard to get enough rice and an occasional chicken for their families. These families had very little in terms of stuff, but they were full of joy and loved helping each other. One mother would take the rice that was for their family and each week she would put nine cups of rice in the family jar and one cup in a bag. When she had four cups of rice in the bag, she would sell the rice at the market and give the money to the local church as her gift to God. The church was able to care for many of the families in their community because of the generosity of members like her. This mom gave out of what she had in such a generous way. She may not have had a lot of money, but she was able to share what she had with a joyful heart knowing that even the rice on her table came from God and could be used to partner with him to care for her community.

As it turns out, God's plan to care for creation, for the poor, for your neighbor, and for the world includes each of us taking the gifts that he has given us and giving a part of them back to him. We are stewards or caretakers of these gifts. Every bit of rice is from God, every book sale is from God.

When we view generosity as a form of stewardship—the idea that we taking care of someone else's stuff and that stuff doesn't belong to us—we can begin to see that everything we have is actually God's and therefore we need to see how we are handling what we have been given.

From a biblical perspective, we can give freely and with joy because we know;

- Everything belongs to God.
- We are caretakers.
- We have the privilege of giving.

Think back to the story of the Warrens and of the mom from Nepal. Generosity is a practice that can be done no matter what your income looks like. Whatever is in your hand can be used by God to bless others and to bring him glory.

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**This will be fun! Pray about blessing someone this week. You can decide to be generous with your time, or your money, or even your talent. Sometimes it helps to have a goal, so what if you decided to find a way to spend \$5 on someone else? What would you do? Do something generous this week and see what you learn!**

## SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What is a way that you can be generous this week?
2. Maybe you have experienced the temptation of greed or envy in regard to money. Take some time to reflect on your own feelings around money and talk to Jesus about it. How can you face these temptations this week?
3. Matthew 6:19–21 (NASB) says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” What does it look like to store up treasure in heaven?

## END NOTES

- 1 Rosemary K. M. Sword and Philip Simbardo, PhD, “Hurry Sickness: Is the Quest to Do All and Be All Costing Us Our Health?” *Psychology Today*, February 9, 2013.
- 2 Seth Barnes, “Radical Living,” July 16, 2008, <https://www.sethbarnes.com/post/do-you-suffer-from-hurry-sickness>.
- 3 John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2019), Kindle Edition.
- 4 Laura, Robert. “Pastor Rick Warren Is Well Prepared For A Purpose Driven Retirement.” *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 25 May 2015, [www.forbes.com/sites/robertlaura/2013/03/21/pastor-rick-warren-is-practicing-what-he-preaches-and-getting-ready-for-retirement/?sh=6b9b9c684dbf](http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertlaura/2013/03/21/pastor-rick-warren-is-practicing-what-he-preaches-and-getting-ready-for-retirement/?sh=6b9b9c684dbf).

# WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We're pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we're confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

## Each lesson includes:

- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to reveal and experience the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions each week.

## Why This Topic?

The spiritual practices (or disciplines) are the “trellis” upon which the fruit of our spiritual life can grow. They are the daily connection to the love and life of Jesus that every believer longs for. Our hope is to introduce students to six of the practices so they can begin to experience the love of Jesus in powerful and personal ways. Each week introduces a new one, and gives practical tips on how to start on this life changing journey.

## About the Authors

### *Jenna Stepp*

Jenna Stepp has been leading in the Vineyard since 2002, first as a youth pastor and then as one of the founding directors of a Vineyard gap year program called HLI. She is currently the lead pastor of Saltwater Vineyard, a church plant in the Saco Bay area of Maine. Jenna loves to ski, garden, make music with her family and is passionate about seeing others empowered with the living hope of Jesus.

### *Christian Dunn*

Christian and his wife Mandy live with their four amazing kids in Pennsylvania. He has worked in youth ministry for 20 years and is currently serving as the National Youth Director for Vineyard USA. He recently planted CityLight Vineyard Church in Newark, DE, and is the author of “Finding the One: How Dating Prepares You For Marriage” and “More Than Spectators: Empowering Teens for Ministry.” He is excited about imparting to young people a passion for following Jesus, discovering their gifts, and pursuing their ministry callings.