



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF EDMOND

7 Marks Workbook

7 MARKS OF A DISCIPLE





Table of Contents

4	—	Welcome
7	—	Share Your Story
11	—	Invest in Others
16	—	Read the Word
20	—	Pray Faithfully
24	—	Worship Passionately & Wholeheartedly
27	—	Serve Community
32	—	Give Generously





Welcome to the 7 Marks of a Disciple

As followers of Jesus, we don't need to be convinced that we have been called to make disciples. We understand that this is our mission. But if we are honest, many of us aren't quite sure how to do it. What could it look like? How can I position my life and leverage my time to grow spiritually and multiply? How does this fit with the other facets of my life? Many of us find that we need encouragement, support, and practical tools as we learn how to make the vision of disciple-making a reality.

At First Presbyterian Church of Edmond, we believe that God has called us to participate in His vision of NEW LIFE through JESUS for EDMOND and the WORLD. How do we do this?

Although we all have different lives and exist in our own sphere of influence, we see ourselves as a community of people who want Jesus to make a difference in our lives and whose lives bring new life to the world. That great work happens through the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to display these seven marks of a disciple.

- Share Your Story
- Invest in Others
- Read the Word
- Pray Faithfully
- Worship Passionately and Wholeheartedly
- Serve Community
- Give Generously

These Seven Marks of a Disciple supersede our Seven Core Practices. We believe these have a greater focus and lead us better toward our vision of New Life through Jesus for Edmond and the World. We also like the idea of having marks of discipleship because it suggests discipleship as a work of the Holy Spirit rather than something we do on our own. These seven marks encourage us to continue to cultivate relationships with the people around us as we share new life through Jesus. Our most important work at First Pres is to cultivate these seven marks in all of us, from the lead pastor to a first-time guest. Whether you are from our particular church community or building the Kingdom in other parts of the world, we pray these stories, tools, and tips will serve you well.

This workbook is designed to help you engage with the concept behind each mark, as well as help you integrate it into your life and ministry context, no matter where you find yourself. It can be used in group settings, one-on-one, or individually. The material is intentionally laid out for you to experience the 7 Marks in a practical way. While each section allows you to spend time "looking back" at the previous mark, each section can stand on its own.



Introduction

Your Life

Your relationship with Jesus is the most important thing. Most of us wouldn't argue with this fact, but many of us tend to put our relationship with Jesus on the back burner as we help others develop theirs. Too often, we choose "doing" for Jesus over "being" with Jesus because doing seems more productive, and producing is what is valued in our culture, even the culture of the church.

What you do matters. Who you are matters more. And who Jesus is to you matters the most. The center of the Gospel is what Jesus has done, not what I have done or might do. It is out of a life-giving relationship with Jesus that we seek to bring New Life through Jesus to Edmond and the World! As we seek to live out these 7 Marks, we seek to do so out of our own personal culture and lives rooted and grounded in Jesus. New life can't happen through you until it happens in you! We desire that you be in a personal, thriving relationship with Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit. It is His work that creates the Seven Marks of a Disciple in our lives. His work in us doesn't mean we don't work. As the theologian Dallas Willard said, "God is opposed to works—righteousness, not effort."

Our goal in this section is to get us to reflect on the quality of our relationship with Jesus.

Read Scripture

As the deer longs for streams of water, o I long for you, O God.
I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?

Psalm 42:1-2

Sharing Your Insights

It is often said: "The strength of your ministry is your relationship with God."

Your interior life is reproduced in your external ministry. How have you found this to be true in your personal experience?



The Next Step

See Yourself In Scripture

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

- Are you more like Mary or Martha? Are you too busy doing to enjoy sitting
- Why do you think Martha was anxious and troubled? Does this look like your life?
- What could you do to sit at Jesus' feet more?



Mark #1

Share Your Story

We all have a story. We are each marked with the thumbprint of God and imprinted with spiritual gifts, passions, and dreams that are unlike anyone else's. We are uniquely and wonderfully made—born an original! At the same time, we have a commonality that binds us together. We each have a desire to be known. We long to be seen, heard, and understood. Deep within, we long for a community where we can reveal our heart's desires, disappointments, struggles, and hopes. God has created you to share who you are!

And as we do, we can discover more fully where God is at work in our lives. His grace and faithfulness become clearer. Our trust and confidence in His purpose and plan grow stronger. Cultivating relationships where you can share who you are is critical to the health of our souls and is the building block for sharing new life through Jesus with others.

One caution: you can't rush this process! We are only able to go deeper in our sharing as we grow deeper together in our relationship. It is a journey, but well worth it!

The goal of this section is to share our story, discover where God is at work, and build community.

Begin With Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time today, and we thank you for every person here. God, you have not made us to be alone; you have made us to be part of a community. Holy Spirit, help us to listen fully and share as we are led, so that we might find what you have for us today. Amen.

Icebreaker

Who was your best friend growing up? Tell us about that friendship. What one word would you use to describe your relationship with Jesus? Talk about a time when you felt closest to Him.



Sharing Our Story

Psalm 139, the history of God's people and Jesus' story suggest that our story can be explained in four parts: creation and call, crucifixion, resurrection, and hope. Reflect on the parts of our story. If in a group, break up into smaller groups (two or three people) and ask individuals to share their story in four parts. Practice listening to someone's story as deeply as you can. Prepare to give a two-minute introduction of someone in your small group to the larger group. If there is something you do not want to share with the larger group, please be careful to set that boundary. And only share at the level you are comfortable with.

Creation and call: Where are you from? What are some of the major events in your life? Where do you work? Did you go to college? Where? What are your important relationships? Have you been a Christian for a long time or not? What are some of your early experiences with Jesus or religion? What brings you to this group? Have you met Jesus?

Crucifixion: What are some times in your life when you have been challenged? Where has there been pain in your life? Where have you experienced loss, disappointment, or illness? How did this pain impact you? Do you carry any wounds now? What is hard for you? Where have you struggled with this?

Resurrection: Where have you seen your story take unexpected twists and turns that were life-giving? Where has life been surprising? Where have you seen God work and pour out His grace, especially in the midst of hard things? What are your fears?

Hope: What are your future plans? What do you look forward to? Where are you at your best? Where are you gifted, and how do you hope to use those gifts?

Pay attention to the four themes of creation and call, crucifixion, resurrection, and hope. What did you learn? If in a group setting, introduce someone in your smaller group to the larger group. Please be careful to observe any boundaries set by your small group partner.

Before Jesus went to the cross, He poured out His heart to the Father, asking Him to bless His people. This is what He prayed for you:

"The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see the glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." -John 7:22-24



Mark #2

Invest in Others

We are made for community. Someone invested in you—a parent, friend, teacher, church leader, co-worker or neighbor. It is a golden chain going all the way back to Jesus—who was a master at investing in people. We need people to walk with us, provide encouragement, friendship, direction and to model what it means to be a disciple. None of us get to where we are going on our own. We need each other. God created the body of Christ to function in this way—where no one is independent or can one say to anyone else, “I have no need of you,” any more than an eye can say to the hand or a head can say to a foot. (1 Corinthians 12:21)

Investing in someone else can be challenging. It requires time, flexibility, vulnerability and grace. It calls us to see beyond ourselves and implies we know each other well enough to share life. Investing in someone else is a two-way street. We are not trying to create dependents but disciples. Allowing them to serve us is a key part of investing in someone. Our goal in this section is to understand how we can invest in others in practical ways in the relationships we are cultivating.

Begin With Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are so thankful we are not meant to live this life alone. You have created us and called us to live in community with one another. That means we have the privilege and responsibility to invest in others just as you love and care for us. God, help us to make a difference in the lives of others so they may see you more clearly and experience you more fully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Icebreaker

1. Give each person two pieces of paper, and a pen or pencil.
2. Have each person write their name and three facts about themselves on one paper—the facts must be true, but should be obscure and probably not known by the other group members.
3. Direct the participants to number the other paper with one number for each person present.
4. The leader collects the papers and reads out the facts on each sheet, keeping track of the names that match the facts read.
5. The participants write their guesses next to the numbers on their sheets.
6. Once everyone has completed their sheet of numbers and name guesses, read out the answers and see who had the most correct to determine a winner.

Looking Back

Last time we talked about the mark of sharing your story and asked you to consider some practical ways you could integrate that practice into your life and leadership. What are some ideas that you came up with?

A big part of our story is someone who took the time and energy to invest in us. Here is someone else's story. In Strasbourg, Germany a failed pastor showed up. He had been kicked out the town where he pastored and led. Still a young man, he was world famous and known to be incredibly gifted for his teachings and writings. An older, more experienced pastor named Martin Bucer took the time to invest in his younger colleague and restore him. He taught the young man many great things, and even introduced him to his wife. For three years Bucer invested in him, and eventually this man returned to the town where he used to pastor, and was invited to lead it, fully restored and prepared to change the world. That man's name was John Calvin.

Read Scripture

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-22

Reflection

- What stands out to you as you first read this passage?
- Why do you think one of Jesus' first acts would be to take disciples and invest in them?
- How did Peter, James, and John respond? Do you think they knew Jesus before he invited them or not? (John 1:29-41) Should we be discouraged if someone doesn't initially drop everything to allow us to invest in them?
- Who is someone who invested in you? What did they do?
- How did Peter, Andrew, James, and John show they were serious about allowing Jesus to invest in them? What would someone who wanted you to invest in them allow you to do?

Resources & Ideas

There are many different ways to invest in someone. The following acronym PEACE gives a few ideas of how you can care invest in someone. There is a Biblical idea called “seeking a person of peace” taken from Jesus’ sending out of the 70. He tells them to look for a person who is willing to be invested in and not to be overly concerned or feel defeated by those who reject us, but instead to move on. Jesus says a person of peace will do three things: receive you, listen to you and they will want to serve you, to reciprocate the relationship. Jesus gives us license to seek persons of peace and not frustrate ourselves with those who aren’t looking for that kind of relationship.

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house! And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”

- Luke 10:1-12

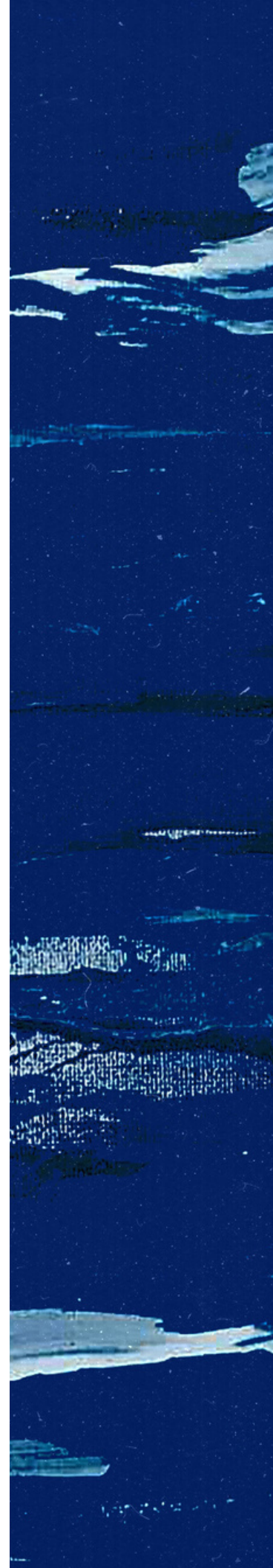
**PURSUE OTHERS • EXTEND YOURSELF • ASK QUESTIONS
CONSIDER YOUR WELCOME • EITHER STAY OR LEAVE**

More Practice Ideas

Try paying attention to three different people this week. Spend a few moments wondering about them. Don’t go out of your way to hunt for them... just pay attention to someone where you normally go in your ordinary everyday life.

- Ask at least 3 questions to yourself about each person
- Pray secretly for each person
- Record your observations and your prayers
- Look for opportunities to build a relationship with someone in your sphere of influence.

Pray for the people you’re noticing. Each of these prayers is just a few seconds!



Example Prayers (from The Nine Arts of Spiritual Conversations)

- God, this person seems to be going somewhere in a hurry. Please protect him and give them peace.
- Lord, she seems very anxious. Grant her a sense of your presence in this moment.
- Father, this personal seems overwhelmed. I pray that a sense of your love and presence would lessen his load.
- God, I believe you are using all the pieces of this person's life to draw him close to you. Thank you for loving him enough to do whatever it takes to bring him into your presence.
- Lord, I pray for this couple's marriage and any children they might have. I pray that they would often find you in their midst today.
- God, may she find you to be sufficient in her struggles today.
- Father, I don't know what's going on inside him, but you do!
- I pray for your joy to overwhelm him today in some undeniable way.



Mark #3

Read the Word

Have you ever read verses from the Bible and felt as though the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to you? As your eyes move across the page, you hear God speak in a way you haven't before. Somehow, the words are no longer just words. They have become living and active, piercing your heart. You feel comforted, encouraged, challenged, or even corrected. God has reminded you of something your heart has forgotten, or He has planted a new thought in your mind. As you live into the truth that He has revealed, you realize that something has changed—you have been changed. The scriptures are like that: active, living, and able to cut to the depths of our soul and grow us closer to God.

Surveys tell us the number one habit of mature disciples is that they spend personal, daily time in the word with God. This simple act leads us to greater intimacy with and understanding with God. Being in the Word is the cornerstone of your relationship with God. But that's not all. As we dive into the scriptures and put them into practice, particularly with a community of people, it grows us closer to God and others! Reading Scripture is a core practice that helps us form and cultivate spiritual friendships as we journey through life.

As Jesus shared life with his disciples, they talked about God's word, and He challenged them to put it into practice. This is where the rubber meets the road, and He knew that this core practice would form and shape them more into His image and lead to a full and abundant life. Our goal in this section is to reflect on scripture together as a way to enjoy intimacy with God and grow closer to Him.

Begin With Prayer

Jesus, we are so grateful for the time to pause and realize you are present with us. Help us to set aside anything that might distract us and keep us from being fully present with You and with each other. God, as we spend time reading scripture together, we pray the Holy Spirit would help us to grow closer to one another and to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Icebreaker

Divide the room into groups of two. Have each person share one brief sentence with their partner they take from Scripture, that they either know to be true or intrigues them. Come back together as a group and let each person share their partner's sentence with the entire group.

Looking Back

Previously we talked about the mark of investing in others. What are some ideas/practical things you can do in your life and ministry context that will integrate this practice?

Moving Forward

How has God spoken to you through His word?

How has the Holy Spirit spoken to you throughout this experience?

Read Scripture & Reflect

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer

Psalm 19:7-14

- What does it say the law of the Lord does? Share a time God's Word refreshed you.
- What does it say the precepts of the Lord does to our heart? When has God's word given you joy?
- What does God's Word do for His servants? Why is it important that we allow God's Word to warn us?
- How do our words and thoughts become pleasing to God? What happens when we saturate our thoughts with God's Word? With what do you saturate your thoughts?



Sharing Our Story

- Where has God's Word challenged you?
- Where has God's Word comforted you?
- Where has God's Word convicted you?

Share any other insights you gained as you read the scripture.

Questions to Consider

How will you integrate reading scripture into your life and ministry context? Brainstorm some ideas. Don't forget to think through where you are connected to others in ministry.

Next Steps

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

What does the Word promise about Scripture and its authenticity and utility for our lives? What would our lives look like if we fully put this verse to the test and let it guide our lives? Pick one way that we see Scripture correcting us this week and attempt to put it into practice.

Resources & Ideas

What has God done in your life today? Celebrate and thank Him for it! Share personal joys or concerns with the group. Invite people to pray as the Spirit leads. Designate one person to close the group in prayer.

There are many different ways to engage in the Word as you read Scripture. One idea is to pick a particular passage to read together, as demonstrated throughout this workbook. Or you could share with one another about your personal time in the Word and what God has been saying to you. These are just a few ideas of how you can read Scripture! The acronym SPECK can prompt you to examine the scripture by looking for:

**SIN TO CONFESS • PROMISE TO BELIEVE • EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW
COMMAND TO OBEY • KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO APPLY**

Here are some possible questions when reading scripture together:

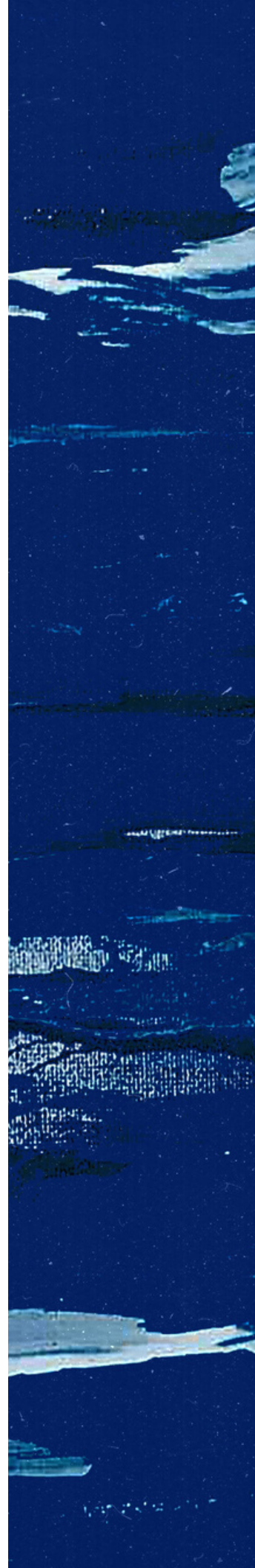
- What struck you the most? What do you think God might want you to do about it?
- What is the Spirit telling you? How does God want you to respond?
- Where do you see Jesus in the Word?

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is Latin for “divine reading,” “spiritual reading,” or “holy reading” and is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It dates back to the early centuries of the Christian Church and was established as a monastic practice by Benedict in the 6th century. It is a way of praying the scriptures that leads us deeper into God’s word. We slow down. We read a short passage more than once. We chew it over slowly and carefully. We savor it. Scripture begins to speak to us in a new way. It speaks to us personally and aids in the union we have with God through Christ, who is himself the Living Word.

Here is an idea of how you could read and practice scripture together: Read a passage of scripture out loud three times, followed each time by a period of silence, and finally an opportunity for each member of the group to share.

- First Reading: Have someone read a passage of scripture out loud and slowly allow the words to resonate and settle in your heart. Linger on the word or phrase that catches your attention and savor it as God’s word to you.
- Second Reading: Have someone read the passage out loud again. Listen to where the word connects with your life right now.
- Third Reading: Have someone read the passage one final time. Listen attentively to what God is saying to you. How is God asking you to respond? What is Jesus asking you to do or to become as a result of His word to you?





Mark #4

Pray Faithfully

Prayer is a vital part of being a community that follows Jesus. It is essential for those who seek to join Him in building His Kingdom. This mark of a disciple helps form and shape our perspective and draws us closer to God. Can any relationship grow more intimate without communication? Prayer is simply communication with God—listening and being heard. Sometimes it takes real faith to pray when those responses don't come immediately.

When we pray with others, we grow in intimacy and understanding with God and one another. This is the power of prayer. That is why we believe prayer is an essential element of a thriving relationship with God. It is as important as the air we breathe! Our goal in this section is to discover different ways to pray and build our capacity to pray faithfully.

Begin With Prayer

God, we rejoice in our relationship with you. We give You thanks that we can approach Your throne of grace with confidence, knowing that You will help us in our time of need. Prayer is such an important aspect of our relationship with You. Grow us closer to You and to each other as You help us discover ways to pray together. Amen.

Icebreaker

Share a prayer from our life that God has answered. Is there a prayer that you consider to be not yet answered? Why or why not?

Looking Back

Last week we talked about the core practice of reading the Word. What are some ways that you are integrating this practice into your life and your ministry context? What ideas/practical strategies will help keep your study of scripture together engaging?

Read Scripture

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth. That is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.'

Matthew 6:5-13

Reflection

- What does it mean to pray like the hypocrites?
- Jesus begins the prayer with "Our Father." How does His use of the word "our" impact you as you think about praying together? How does thinking of God like a loving Father change our understanding of an all-powerful, all-knowing God?
- What are the things Jesus models for us to pray for?
- How can you use the Lord's Prayer as a guide for when you pray together?

Additional Scripture

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:6-7

- What are some other important aspects of prayer?
- How does prayer impact your heart?

Sharing Our Story & Insights

- What has the experience of praying with others been like for you? Where is it life giving? Where is it frustrating?
- How would you like to be able to pray with others?
- How does listening to others shape your prayers?
- How can the insights you've discovered today impact the way you pray together?

Next Steps

Take some time to think through how you cultivate the habit of prayer. What is the current state of your prayer life? With whom do you gather with on a regular basis to pray together? How has praying with others deepened your relationship with God and people?

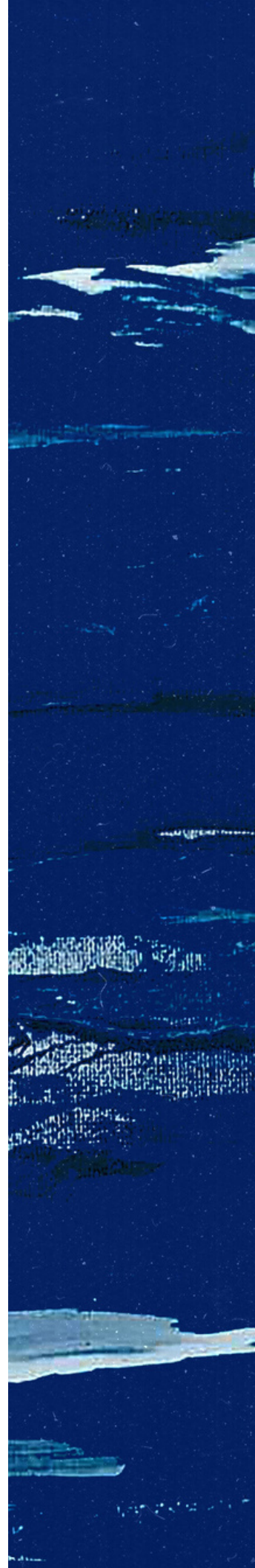
Resources & Ideas

The scriptures have much to say about prayer, and there are many different ways to pray together. Below you'll find a few ideas:

- Give thanks for answered prayers
- Confess sin and pray for strength to face trials
- Pray God's promises over each other
- Pray for particular events, schools, churches, countries
- Listen to what others are sharing with you, and pray back what they are saying.
- Listen to what God may be saying to you as you pray. Don't be afraid of silence and space to be in His presence. Resist the urge to fill it with words. Listening is just as important as speaking!

Prayer Mentor

Many of us pray, but some of us may feel intimidated about praying together. Don't worry if you are a beginner. The best way to learn to pray together is to pray together! (Yes, you read that correctly!) In time, you'll grow and gain greater freedom and confidence to speak. If you are uncomfortable praying out loud, ask someone who feels confident in verbal prayer to mentor and encourage you. If you are one who is already comfortable praying with others, make yourself available to mentor and guide someone in this journey.





Mark #5

Worship Passionately & Wholeheartedly

We are made to worship. We cannot help ourselves. If we do not worship God, we will worship something or someone: ourselves, nature, success, money, status, or family. Our souls crave something to which we can devote ourselves. What better object of worship than an almighty, all-knowing, omnipresent, grace-filled, and loving God? This is why the first commandment tells us, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3).

That command is not a threat. It is an instruction for our good. Also notice that God's action to set us free from slavery first. His action precedes our obedience, or, as an English major might choose to put it, the indicative precedes the imperative. This command should guide all our worship.

Icebreaker

If you could choose to go to one event which would it be: a movie, a play or musical, concert, or you watching your favorite team. Which would you choose and why? How is going to an event as spectator different than participating in worship?

Looking Back

How has your experience of the mark "pray faithfully" shaped your ideas about how you could integrate prayer into the regular rhythm of your life?

Moving Forward: Opening Questions

Take time and think about your favorite worship experience. What made that experience so special? Why was it so memorable? Was something revealed about God? Did you God meet you where you were? Did He reveal something about yourself to you?



Questions to Consider

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard taught about what he called “the theater of worship.” The medieval model of worship, based on a Roman Catholic hierarchy of a priest leading worship, saw the priest as the actor of worship on behalf of all the people, the congregation as the audience, and God as the prompter of worship. Kierkegaard said that model was wrong. God is our audience. The worship leader (in our case, the pastor or music leader) is the prompter. And the person in the pew is the actor. God is the object of our worship. We see this hierarchy in subtle ways today when we ask questions like, “how was worship?” or we use boredom as an excuse not go to worship, or we claim worship is “not meeting my needs.” When we worship, who do we primarily think of? Ourselves or God? Are my needs being met, or is God being glorified?

Read & Reflect on Scripture

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for “our God is a consuming fire”.

Hebrews 12:22-29

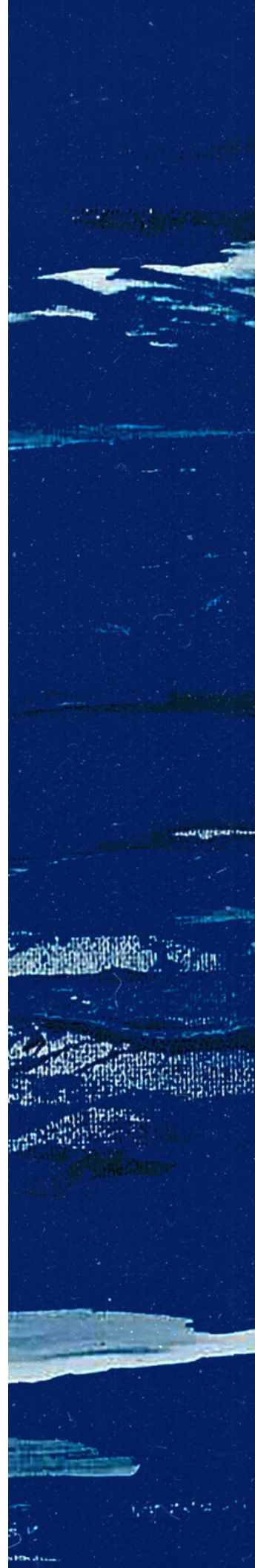
1. Whose is our mediator with God? How does Jesus make our worship effective?
2. How did Jesus become our mediator and pave the way for us to worship? Why is the cross in our sanctuary a good reminder of this?
3. When was the last time you felt God ‘shake the earth’ when you worshipped, or at least shake you? What happened? Do you have any obstacles preventing this from happening routinely?
4. What is our proper response for receiving a ‘kingdom that cannot be shaken’? How grateful are you to worship?
5. What does it mean to you that God ‘is a consuming fire’? How does that inform our worship?

Resources & Ideas

The Jewish people prepared themselves to worship by cleansing themselves in a ritual bath known as a mikveh. It was a regular part of their lives. We don't think much about worship preparation because Jesus has already made us clean and prepared for pure worship of spirit and truth. We can do some work to prepare our soul to be in the presence of God. Jesus has made us worthy, but that does not mean our work is worthless. Here are some simple things we can do to prepare for worship.

1. Study the Scripture that is being preached during the week ahead. The center of our worship is the Word. The entire worship service is built around the proclamation of the Word; being familiar with the Word being highlighted helps us tremendously.
2. Become aware of our baggage. Jesus meets us where we are, and He already knows about our baggage. We don't have to drop our baggage, but we can be aware of what is occupying our thoughts and allow Jesus to minister to us at our point of need.
3. Cut out distractions. Satan works to distract us during worship. He wants our minds anywhere other than on Jesus. We may be thinking about something someone said or everything we have to do after worship or even at work on Monday. Our phones or our smartwatches can be giant distractions during worship. For this reason, it may be a good idea to bring a real paper Bible to worship rather than looking at Scripture on our phones.
4. Keep a regular devotional time. It is difficult for our soul to suddenly find intimacy with God when we just seek it for one hour a week on Sunday morning. When we are accustomed to meeting God, it is much easier to meet Him on Sunday morning.
5. Ask the right question. Ask, "Is God being glorified?" rather than "What am I getting out of this?" We are not the object of worship. God is. If our focus is on Him rather than ourselves, worship becomes much deeper and richer.

Closing Prayer: Pray Psalm 25:1-5





Mark #6

Serve Community

Have you ever looked around and seen people in need? Maybe you've noticed a young, single mother struggling to work and care for her children. Perhaps the man down the street, who seems to wander around and is always searching for food and work, catches your eye. Or maybe you've noticed a community of people that could use a few more resources. There are needs all around us. It can be tempting to feel overwhelmed or underqualified to help others in practical ways, but as we pray and are willing to step out in faith, we will find that we are not only capable and effective but also blessed! Our goal in this section is to understand how we can serve the community around us and see how that service impacts us and those we serve.

Begin With Prayer

God, we are thankful that we are able to learn from you and from each other. Teach us, Holy Spirit, that serving the community is a way that we can tangibly live out your values and show your love. Open our eyes to see people the way you do. Give us courage and strength as we grow and engage those you have put in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Looking Back

How was your experience in worship this last Sunday? Were you more aware of what it means to worship? Was worship about more than your own preferences? Was it richer and deeper than before?

Moving Forward

- Who is a hero of yours that serves others in Jesus' name?
- What is it about that person that inspires you?



Read & Reflect on Scripture

On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, "Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place." But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." And they did so, and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Luke 9:10-17

- How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus said, "You feed them?"
- The scripture says that Jesus kept giving the bread and fish to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. Why do you think Jesus took this opportunity to make this a hands-on experience of serving together?
- What part of this event would have gripped you the most if you had been serving?
- Why is it important that we serve and love our neighbor as well as love God? Why did Jesus command us to do both? (Matthew 22:37)

Sharing Your Story & Insights

What are some of the things you discovered as you discussed the scripture and your own life experience?

- Can you share a risk you took once to serve and love someone else?
- Describe a time when you served community. What impact did it have on you personally? How did it affect your relationships those who you served with? How did it impact the relationship between you and those you served?



Important Perspectives on Serving

“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” - Mark 12:28-34

The second half of the greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, not do nice things for people or make ourselves feel good. If we are going to treat our neighbor as ourselves rather than just do nice things, what are some perspectives we must adopt?

Meet genuine needs. Make sure you’re really helping with a true need. Maybe you’ve heard the story of the barn in Appalachia that gets painted several times every year by enthusiastic youth groups who come to “serve”—only to be given busy work by their leaders who don’t seek out the real needs of the community. Meaningful service must be preceded by dialogue—listening to needs, asking probing questions, and responding humbly to those involved.

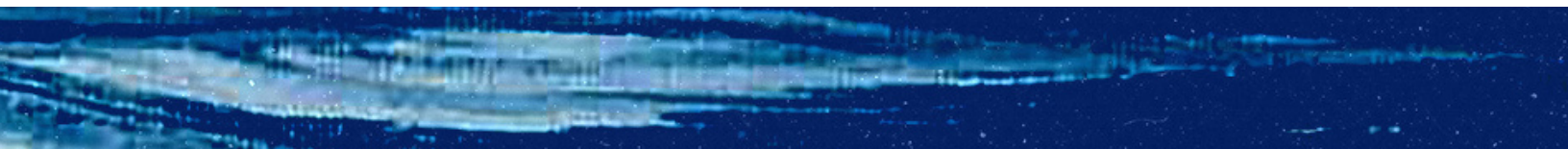
Empower people you serve. When you’re preparing to serve someone who is in material need, it’s important to ask not just what people need but what they bring to the table—how they might actually lead you, not be led by you. As Steve Corbett counsels in *When Helping Hurts*, our natural inclination is to focus on people’s needs. But a better start is to focus on the question, “What’s right with you?”... By asking the poor to tell you what they have, it returns their personal sense of power, gives them their own voice and vision, and begins the healing process.

Give them ownership. Rather than “riding in on a white horse to rescue the unfortunate,” your service is a way to come alongside people who need a partner, not a patron. They are not helpless. Plan your work so that you are eventually not needed, or at least your leadership is not needed because those involved have taken the reins.

Make it sustainable. Consider ways to be involved over time, not just in a one-time burst. Also, consider ways not just to “infuse” help from the outside but to have that help give back in some way. It both dignifies the effort and practically supports it.

Preserve (or build) dignity. A person who is in need typically feels shame or a sense of being “less than.” Ironically, one of the ways they may deal with this is by trying not to show it; they may actually appear ungrateful or resentful. Don’t be surprised by this reaction. Do what you can to make sure you remove all traces of condescension; allow the person to feel their own worth even through their hardship.

When picking and organizing your serving opportunity, these relational principles will guide you so that you can make the largest impact, both on those you’re serving and those you’re serving with. It’s a powerful testimony for everyone.



More Practice Ideas

Jesus spent time debriefing with his disciples after they served community. This is an important part of this core practice. Don't forget to debrief with your small group. Here are some questions you might want to consider:

- What part of the experience did you enjoy the most?
- Who is someone new that you met? What did you learn about them?
- What ideas do you have for serving more effectively the next time?
- Did you learn anything about yourself today?
- Did you learn anything about God today?
- Would you say that you were changed? If so, how?
- Would you say that barriers were broken down?
- For the people we served, what do you think was most helpful or meaningful?



Mark #7

Give Generously

People are usually wired to have a scarcity mentality or a mentality of abundance. It is so tempting in our broken world to live with the former. But what happens when we allow ourselves to be filled with Kingdom resources? What happens when our perspective shifts and we consider God to be our provider, rather than feeling like we must provide for ourselves? This does two things. First, it fills us with gratitude because we begin to understand how much God loves us because He consistently provides for us out of His unlimited resources. It is so much easier and better to have confidence in an all-knowing, all-powerful, loving, grace-filled God. Second, having this perspective helps us to live abundantly. No one gets angry at a child for taking buckets of water out of an ocean or a lake. You might get mad if they kept doing it to your pool. You would certainly get mad if they dumped their bath water in the shower. And you would stop right away if they tried to dump your drink down the sink. It's all a matter of our resources. The greater our resources, the more we are comfortable sharing. If everything belongs to God, whose resources are we sharing—be it time, treasure, or talent?

Begin With Prayer

We are thankful Lord Jesus that you call us to reproduce and multiply. Blessed are you, O Lord, and you have blessed us to be a blessing. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. But who are we, and who are your people, that we should be able to be such a blessing? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! Empower us through your Holy Spirit so that we can give to others what you have freely given us. Amen.

Icebreaker

What is the best gift you have ever received? Who gave it? What do you believe motivated them to give it you? How did receiving it impact you?

Looking Back

Last time you were encouraged to plan a simple way to serve someone.

What have you planned and when will you do it?

If you already had an experience of serving community tell us about it.

Moving Forward

1. Who is the most generous person you have ever known? Were they just generous with their resources or were they generous with their time as well?

2. Where do you think you are most generous: time, talent or treasure? Where do you struggle the most?

3. What would it take in your life for you to be more generous?

Read Scripture & Reflect

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

- What does Scripture promise about who sow sparingly and those who sow bountifully?
- Why is it important that people are not pressured to give beyond their willingness? What do we rob people of when we pressure them to give their time, talent or treasure?
- Who supplies our needs? Why does God provide our needs? What result is He seeking?
- How does our generosity impact others?
- Ultimately, is it our gift or is it God's gift that we are privileged to give?

Thoughts to Consider

What does generosity look like? Is there a standard for what we consider generous and what we do not? The biblical principle of generosity seems to be that our gift should be costly. Our gift should increase our dependency on God rather than being something we don't notice. When Jesus and the disciples were in the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus noticed a lot of wealthy people coming and putting their gifts in the offering box, presumably with too much fanfare and respect. But Jesus noticed something others likely did not. A widow, of very meager means, put in two small copper coins. From a practical standpoint, it was a very small amount. However, in Kingdom terms, it was an astonishing gift because the widow gave all she had. Jesus proclaimed, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:3-4). Generosity, whether it is time, talent, or treasure, causes us to sacrifice. We notice what we give is gone. Generosity forces us to live differently and to give up something we might otherwise have had. Obviously, this can seem pretty arbitrary. But the Bible does provide us with a guide of one-tenth. We notice one-tenth of something—we notice six minutes of every hour, or one dollar in ten. God doesn't call us to give all and live like peasant monks or stress ourselves out with no Sabbath because we give all our time. However, He does want us to know the joy of trusting Him to provide. Practicing the tithe helps us do that.

Closing Prayer

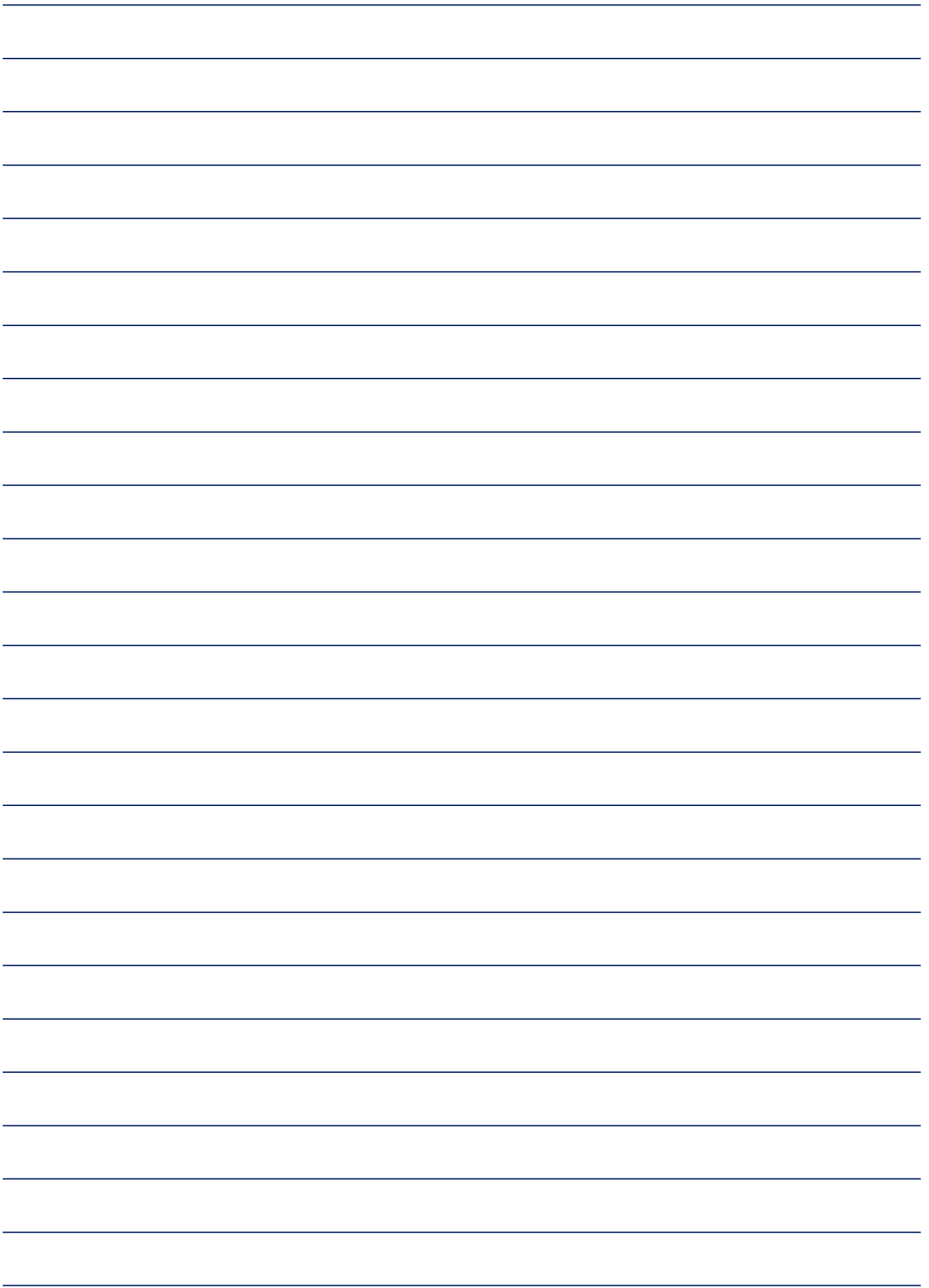
(Taken from Psalm 50):

Lord God we know it all belongs to you. You own the cattle on a thousand hills. Every beast of the forest is yours. The birds of the hills and all that is in the field belongs to you. The world and its fullness is yours. Help us to be generous with what you have given us. Let us offer thanksgiving as our praise and sacrifice to you, order our way rightly and receive the knowledge of the peace of your salvation.

Next Steps

Evaluate your own practice of generosity with your time, talent, and treasure. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you live by an abundance or scarcity mentality. Ask the Holy Spirit to move your heart to practice increased generosity in either time, talent, or treasure.





Share Your Story

Invest in Others

Read the Word

Pray Faithfully

Worship Passionately &
Wholeheartedly

Serve Community

Give Generously

