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## **There is an ancient tradition in the church that gives us the 40 days before Easter to re-center ourselves in Jesus**

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We take a thoughtful and honest inventory of ourselves, our commitments, our way of life

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### **We set aside those things that are distracting us from Jesus**

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And we re-center ourselves in his love, in obedience to his Word

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And so we entered into Lent this past Wednesday with a wonderful evening service guiding us into repentance and renunciation

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### **Our focus together during Lent will be on the spiritual disciplines**

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We'll be talking about a handful, and there'll be three experientials on Sunday nights - you can find out more online

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In addition, there are excellent daily devotionals through Lent that you can sign up for online

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### **We'll be doing baptisms on Easter this year**

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And if you'd like to get baptized, please sign up online, or indicate your desire on a STEPS card and we'll follow up with you

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### **Spiritual disciplines are all about entering into the life that Jesus offers us**

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**John 10.10** I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly.

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Spiritual disciplines are consistent habits of life that guide us into experiencing this abundant life

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Spiritual disciplines help us to see as Jesus sees, to think as he does, to speak as he did, to walk as he walked, to love as he does... to be like him, in every way

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So we can follow him honestly and faithfully - into the fullness of kingdom life, eternal life...

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**Now most of us live lives without much margin, and the thought of adding one more thing to an already crowded life... isn't very attractive, honestly**

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Stress and overcommitment have become our new normal

We're overcommitted in our schedules... we're overcommitted in our relationships... we're overcommitted at work... we're overcommitted financially

And this constant pressure we face - this demand on resources and capacities we don't have - creates a constant undercurrent of stress within us, stress that builds up to breaking point, sooner or later

So then we plan escapes from our stress - a fun evening out, a new toy, an awesome vacation... we create a temporary bubble within which we can forget our stressful reality

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**But it ends... and then we return to the same patterns of life that create stress**

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And so we start planning the next escape... and the next escape has to be better than this one - that's the nature of escapes...

And to afford that next nicer escape, we discover that we need to push ourselves just a little bit harder at work... and so we spiral

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**We're locked into a lifestyle that oscillates between stress & escape**

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And this impossible lifestyle produces exhaustion in us, and frustration, and anger... most of all, **it keeps our lives superficial**

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**It's into this spiral of death that Jesus comes, offering life**

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**Matthew 11.28-30 NIV** "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."

A yoke, in this sense simply means a way of life that binds us to Jesus... to his way of life... and that's really what spiritual disciplines are - a way of yoking ourselves to Jesus

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## Listen to how Eugene Peterson puts it

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**Matthew 11.28–30 MESSAGE** “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

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If these words sound like a tall drink of cold water to a thirsty soul, then you are ready to explore these spiritual disciplines... You are ready to settle down into these unforced rhythms of grace that characterize the life of Jesus

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And that’s what we’re going to be exploring through the rest of Lent

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### **Now, for these spiritual disciplines to have a genuine impact on you, they must become a normal part of your life**

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These spiritual disciplines are all about **process**... and for them to accomplish their purpose in you, it will take practice over time

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And that’s the primary reason we so often neglect them - we want immediate results... and if we don’t see quick results we give up

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### **So what is the long-term outcome of a life yoked with Jesus? Of a life built on these spiritual disciplines**

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We’ll discover Jesus... our eyes will be opened to him for real, and his astonishing love for us, and for all those around us

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We’ll discover ourselves... we’ll begin to understand ourselves at a very deep level and we’ll begin to accept ourselves as God’s own creation - with our gifts and our limitations... we’ll discover the freedom and joy of simply being ourselves

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We’ll discover genuine relationship - it’s only when you understand Jesus, and his love for you... and in that love begin to be free, to be fully yourself... it is only then that you become capable of real and deep relationship...

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We’ll begin to experience life, for real

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## OK, so let's dive in

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The first spiritual discipline, the first rhythm of grace that we're exploring is the discipline of **study**

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## Next week we'll consider the discipline of meditation

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### These two really need to go together

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You really cannot practice one without the other

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In a very simple sense, the discipline of study produces **knowledge** and **understanding**, and the discipline of meditation transforms that knowledge and understanding into **insight** and **wisdom**

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## So let's begin with Study

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### The spiritual discipline of study begins with paying careful and thoughtful attention to reality, to the things that really matter

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The discipline of study is a discipline of focus...

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We're removing our attention from all those trivial things that are constantly distracting us, and settling into a focused consideration of the things that really matter

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### Now we're all very different, and we have a wide range of interests

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Some of us love exploring art and music... others are crossfit Christians... and some others are fascinated with nature and science

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And this incredible diversity in our own interests results in a world filled with an incredibly vast and diverse range of knowledge...

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### We know an awful lot about an awful lot of things

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The Ohio State University presently offers over 200 majors, ranging from...Accounting and Architecture; to Dance & Dental Hygiene; Engineering & Entomology; Meat Science & Music; Religious Studies & Romance Studies; Turfgrass Management and Zoology

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## **And those are merely the undergraduate majors...**

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### **Once you get to grad school, you specialize much, much more**

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I once knew a guy who spent years researching the reed of an oboe for his doctoral dissertation

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## **All of these are systematic explorations of reality**

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And as we're busy exploring reality, we discover that everything is connected in absolutely marvelous and surprising ways

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There's a deep unity to the structure of reality that causes us to wonder...

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### **Is there anything behind it all, that holds it all together? Is there a common foundation that all knowledge is based on?**

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We've been reflecting on that question for thousands of years, and we've come up with a few primary candidates

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## **The first, and perhaps the most vocal candidate these days for the basis of all knowledge is science**

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The basic premise of science is simply this: you pay close attention to the world around you... you pay close attention to reality and make careful observations of what you notice...

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You gather data from your observations... and then you make a hypothesis of what is going on, and then you compare your hypothesis with the data...

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if the data, if the evidence supports your hypothesis, you then use the hypothesis to make predictions, and then you check to see if those predictions come true through experimental verification

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And if all that works out, you offer your data, your hypothesis, your predictions and your experimental verification to others to check...

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And if all this works out, you've developed a scientific theory

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## Science explains an awful lot about our world, and does it really well

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### But science is limited... it is focused on exploring the reality of our physical world

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To those things that we can see, and hear, and taste, and touch, and smell... but it cannot, by definition, describe realities that are not physical in nature...

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So science does a fantastic job of describing our physical reality... but then honest science acknowledges that this reality points to something beyond the capacity of science to grasp or describe

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**NASA:** More is unknown than is known... roughly 68% of the universe is dark energy. Dark matter makes up about 27%. The rest - everything on Earth, everything ever observed with all of our instruments, all normal matter - adds up to less than 5% of the universe.

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What this means is that science realizes that there's reality out there which our senses cannot access, but yet we know must exist based on current scientific understanding

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### So science - good, thoughtful, honest science - has severe limits when it comes to describing reality

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But within its limits, science is wonderful - it's how we learn about all of God's creation that we can access with our physical senses

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## A second candidate for the basis of all knowledge is philosophy

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Philosophy goes beyond the limits of science to ask questions about things like ethics, or issues of mind and consciousness

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Philosophy is brilliant and wonderful and certainly gives you a very powerful set of tools to approaching knowledge

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But thoughtful and honest philosophy inevitably leads us to this sense that there's something far greater out there... something far greater within ourselves, that we struggle to grasp

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## **There is a third candidate for the basis of all human knowledge**

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### **And that is Revelation**

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We know only because God chooses to reveal himself and his creation to us

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**Deuteronomy 29.29 NIV** The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever...

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And we know only because God made us in his own image, able to receive his revelation

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## **And this is the basis of the spiritual discipline of study**

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The gift of God's revelation must be treasured and explored and reflected upon

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To ignore the discipline of study is to ignore the gift of God's self-revelation to us

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## **The Bible gives us three progressively clearer levels to God's Revelation**

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### **First, there's the natural world around us**

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**Romans 1.19–20 NIV** ...what may be known about God is plain to [us], because God has made it plain to [us]. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...

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### **Paul asserts that all creation - the entire natural world - bears witness to God, and is a revelation of God**

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So for Paul, what we call science would simply be us exploring God's self-revelation in the natural world

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So science, and philosophy, and art, and every kind of knowledge that we have access to by natural means - are simply a way of exploring the reality that God has revealed to us

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## Second, there's the Bible... the Word of God revealed to us

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### We look up at the heavens, and study the universe

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And we are astonished at its immensity and marvel at its wonders...  
We are doing science

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### And then we read

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**Genesis 1.1 NIV** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

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## And now our science turns into worship of our God who created the heavens and the earth

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And now that we see all creation in the light of God's Word, we see far more, we understand far more the beauty of God's creation

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**Psalms 19.1–4 NIV** The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

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## We look around at the profound evil that seems to fill our world right now

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We find ourselves overwhelmed with the the casual destruction and disposal of our unborn children... the constant horror of human trafficking, and we wonder... how did all this happen?

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### And then we discover the reason in the Word of God...

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**Romans 1.21–25 NIV** For although [we] knew God, [we] neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but [our] thinking became futile and [our] foolish hearts were darkened. Although [we] claimed to be wise, [we] became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles... Therefore God gave [us] over in the sinful desires of [our] hearts... [We] exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...

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## **And now we have genuine insight into all that is going on around us**

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It turns out that when we ignore the Creator of all reality, we inevitably end up in sin and evil and death and destruction

And then we wonder... what hope do we have, if such evil is so pervasive in the world around us... if such evil is pervasive within all of us?

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## **And then we hear these amazing words from the Bible**

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**John 3.16–17 NIV** 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

**Romans 5.5–8 NIV** And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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## **And now we know that God has not abandoned us to destruction**

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But in his love, he has come to us, to save us, in Jesus

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## **And now we have hope, and our lives have purpose**

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**2 Corinthians 5.14–15 NIV** For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

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## **All this, and much more, we would never know if God had not revealed it to us in the Bible... in his Word**

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We would not know these astonishing realities of sin and evil and love and redemption had God not inspired those who went before us to write it down, and preserve this revelation for us...

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## **This book, this Bible, is precious beyond imagination...**

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**Psalms 19.7–10 NIV** 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.

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## **Third, there's Jesus**

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### **At the heart of God's revelation is Jesus**

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Jesus is the full, final and complete revelation of God

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**Hebrews 1.1–3 NIV** In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

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All you need to know is Jesus... listen to how Paul puts it

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**Colossians 2.1–3 NIV** I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that [you] may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that [you] may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that [you] may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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### **And the deepest revelation of God in Jesus is his self-sacrificial love for us, shown most clearly on that cross...**

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**Galatians 2.20 NIV** The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

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### **Listen to Paul describe how he pursues this knowledge of Jesus**

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**Philippians 3.7–11 NIV** But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

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**At the heart of all things is the knowledge of Jesus**

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**We're going to explore this insight much more next week**

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But for now, let me sum up what we've been talking about

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**The discipline of study is a way of life which sets aside all distractions and superficial pursuits, and focuses us on the things that truly matter**

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And it begins with turning our complete focus on Jesus

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**And with Jesus at the center, we explore the entire Bible**

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And as the Word of God comes fully into focus, we are then able to understand all reality in the light of Jesus...

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And we then discover that every kind of knowledge can turn into beautiful worship... when we are centered in Jesus

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And we then discover that we don't really know anything for real until it turns into worship...

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**Revelation 4.10–11 NIV** ...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

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"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

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## So the discipline of study begins with immersing ourselves in Jesus

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### And then it moves us into exploring the Bible as a whole, in the light of Jesus

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And then we begin to consider everything else that we know in the light of Jesus and the Word of God

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And this fresh understanding of reality will then overflow from our hearts in genuine worship... which is where the discipline of study must always bring us

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## And so I'd like to end with the first few verses of the gospel of John

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Would you close your eyes, and invite the Holy Spirit to open your hearts to Jesus...

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And if you're willing, I'd like you to read these first 18 verses of the gospel of John twice daily - once in the morning when you wake up, and once at night before you go to sleep

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And ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to Jesus

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And we'll pick it up from this passage next week

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**John 1.1–18 NIV** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...

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The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

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The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...

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