

PRAXIS

LIVING THE PRESENCE AND MISSION OF JESUS

Weekly Activity & Connect Guide

– Fall 2020 –

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WELCOME

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- Jesus (Matthew 11:28–30)

How do I experience real connection with God?

How can I be the spouse / parent / friend / neighbor / teammate / leader I want to be?

What do I do when it feels like the busyness of life might overtake me?

How do I overcome the struggles that still hold me back?

How do I make a real difference in the world?

If you are anything like most people who are doing their best to follow Jesus, some or all of those questions have likely resounded in your heart and mind on more than one occasion. Thankfully, we find our answers in Jesus himself.

Practicing the presence of Jesus means following his example and living in a rhythm of inward journey and outward mission. As we engage in the daily practices of Jesus, he draws us in to experience his presence (John 15:1–11) and then sends us out on mission to advance his kingdom (John 17:18, 20:21).

Praxis is defined as the process by which an idea or teaching is enacted, embodied or realized. Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me,” means so much more than to simply agree with his teachings. Following Jesus means not only believing in who he is and what he says, it also means we seek to imitate his example in our own lives. For Christians, the way of Jesus is more than a mere theory or idea. It is praxis, or practice. It’s a way of life and Jesus is the way (John 14:6).

The following activity guide is designed to help you, and those you share community with, to engage in an experience of spiritual formation. Each week there are a few simple but meaningful Presence Activities and Mission Activities to help move you *into* the presence of Jesus and then *out* on mission with him.

Family/Group Activities are provided to help those who live in community [parents & kids, couples, roommates, friends] to experience the inward and outward rhythms together and strengthen their connection with God and one another. Additional Resources are suggested for continued exploration of each week’s Core Value and spiritual exercises. A Connect Discussion Guide is provided to help you engage in conversation and Bible study with others.

You will be relieved to know that spiritual formation (life change) is about practice, not perfection. In other words, you don’t have to “get it right” to be doing it right. So, let’s fully engage in a journey of transformation as we allow Jesus to reshape our values and as we pattern our lives after his.

WEEK ONE

THE GOSPEL OUR HOPE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude]

Good news, friends...Jesus, our resurrected King, is vindicated and victorious! He sits on God's throne over all creation! He has conquered sin and death! He offers us new life and a new identity!

It gets even better...While we look forward to an eternity with Jesus in his kingdom, we don't have to wait until forever to experience it. We can experience real life change here and now. As Jesus himself said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). That message of *good news* is the gospel, and the gospel is our hope.

In the first pages of the Bible, we learn that we were created to live in the presence of God. Tragically, just a few chapters into the story, our rebellion against God compromised our ability to be in his presence. Enter the gospel and our hope: Jesus conquered sin and, once again, we have the ability to live in the presence of God through his Spirit.

So, how do we tangibly experience the hope of the gospel? We experience the presence of God in the same way Jesus did. Jesus showed us the way by embodying the way (John 14:6). Jesus modeled for us a rhythm of moving into the presence of God the Father through silence and solitude and then moving out on mission.

Presence and practice go hand-in-hand. Silence and solitude restore our connection with God, hushing the noise of the world that rages around us and within us. Quiet time spent alone with Jesus draws us into the hope that we have in him. As we journey inward towards deep connection with Jesus, his Spirit transforms our hearts and minds; then, he moves us outward on mission.

The following Presence Activities will guide you inward to meet with God this week. The Mission Activities will lead you outward to be on mission with Jesus. There is no set schedule and no specific day or time for the activities; find a time that works best for you. Experiment with one or two activities, or give them all a try.

Heads up...Experiencing a tangible sense of hope as you engage in quiet stillness with God takes time. Practice as you *can*, not as you *can't*. Anyone who has trained for a marathon will tell you that no successful program begins with running 26.2 miles on day one. Five minutes of silence and solitude is a great place to start.

Remember that all it's about practice, not perfection. You don't have to "get it right" to be doing it right. Let's embrace the journey.

WEEK ONE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude] INWARD JOURNEY

Solitude well practiced will break the power of busyness, haste, isolation and loneliness. You will see that the world is not on your shoulders after all. You will find yourself, and God will find you in new ways.

- Dallas Willard

As often as possible Jesus withdrew to quiet places for prayer.

- Luke 5:16

Presence Activity #1 - Quiet Time

Find a time and place where you can be alone with God: still, quiet and free from distraction. Put away and silence all digital devices.

Quieting the world around us is the easy part. Quieting the world inside of us can be more difficult at first. As distracting thoughts come to mind, do not fight them. Acknowledge the thoughts that compete for your attention, but do not hold on to them. Ask God to help you with those concerns later, and trust that he will. For now, enjoy the quiet in God's presence. .

As John Mark Comer explained, "You can't 'succeed' or 'fail' at this practice. The goal is simply to show up. Resist the urge to say, 'I'm bad at this,' or, 'This isn't for me,' or, 'I don't like this.' Be patient with the practice, and with yourself."

Start with 5-10 minutes. As you can, increase the amount of time you spend in quiet solitude. Over time, this could even become a daily practice for you.

Pray: Father, thank you for meeting me here and now. I am so grateful that through your Son, Jesus, I can rest in your presence. Thank you for giving me your Spirit so that I can experience your presence. Amen.

Presence Activity #2 - Creation Encounter

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. - Psalm 19:1

Carve out some time to be in creation this week. A city park or nature trail is great. It could even be your own backyard. Anywhere you can experience nature as God designed it will work.

The Christian practice of silence and solitude is not about emptying one's mind, as in some religious practices. It is about filling our hearts and minds with God's voice only, drowning out the noise of the world. God speaks to us through creation.

As you walk or sit in creation, listen...Look around...*What do you hear? What do you see? How does the world God gave us reflect his loving care for us?*

Pray: Father, the world you have created is truly amazing. Thank you Jesus, for we know that everything in creation was made through you. Spirit, give me eyes to see and ears to hear what you are doing and saying in and around me. Amen.

WEEK ONE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude] OUTWARD MISSION

The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts.

- Richard Foster

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

- Mark 1:36–38

Mission Activity #1 - Secret Service

Just as Jesus emerged from times of silence and solitude with an increased intention to serve others, we too emerge from our time with him ready to live on mission.

When we practice silence and solitude with God, we are more free to quietly serve others without the need for recognition.

Think of someone you know who often does a lot for others. Quietly drop off a treat or gift of some kind for them.

Don't let them know it was you. Don't tell anyone what you did. God knows. If you do get "busted," or they ask you whether or not you are the "culprit," you can simply say that God must have wanted to encourage them. Or you can fess up to delivering the gift and share with them that you wanted to bless them because they are such a blessing to others.

Let it be a quiet act of love and encouragement from God through you.

Mission Activity #2 - Prayerful Encouragement

When we regularly spend quiet time alone with God, we are transformed. Even in a world fraught with difficulty and uncertainty, silence and solitude enable us to be a non-anxious presence for others. We can offer a perspective that might otherwise be difficult to achieve in the midst of the chaos.

Think of someone you know who is going through a rough season of life. Perhaps it is someone who is very busy.

Spend some time in quiet prayer for them. Ask God to show you what words of encouragement and affirmation you might share with them. He will guide you. He won't give you flattery, or advice for them. Often it is something he has already said in his Word: a particular verse or passage from Scripture. Other times it is a simple reminder of his love.

After you have prayed, write them a card or handwritten note. Mail or deliver it to them.

WEEK ONE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude]

FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family Activity #1 - Take 5

Invite your family, spouse, roommates or friends to experience together something that Jesus did all the time.

The Bible tells us that Jesus enjoyed quiet time alone with God, his Father. Everyone find a place in your home or outside to sit quietly. Hide away all electronic devices, turn off any nearby screens. For families with young children, it might be helpful to set a timer for 5 minutes.

Try not to make any noise and just listen to the quiet. Think about how much God loves you. See if you can hear him speak to you.

Parents can anticipate giggling and fidgeting with younger kids (and older kids too). They might struggle to keep still and silent; that is okay! Remember, they are just little versions of you, and this is a challenge for us too.

Keep the experience positive. The point is not to get 5+ minutes of silence the first time. The goal is to give everyone a positive experience of silence and solitude and to connect the experience with the practices of Jesus.

Regroup and Debrief. Ask a few questions to help everyone reflect on the experience:

- *Was it easy or hard for you to stay quiet for that long?*
- *What were you thinking about when we were having that quiet time?*
- *Why do you think God likes spending time with you so much?*

Family Activity #2 - Creation Walk

Take a walk outside with your family, roommates or friends. This activity is just like the Creation Encounter above, but this time it is a shared experience.

Walk together, but be silent and listen as you walk. Pick up things you find and show it to one another, but refrain from talking.

After a time of walking in silence, ask one another:

- *What did you hear?*
- *What did you see?*
- *What is your favorite thing that you saw today?*
- *How does the world God created reflect his loving care for us?*

WEEK ONE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[What is Silence & Solitude?](#) - Bridgetown Church

[How to Make Room for Silence and Solitude in Your Work Day](#) - Pete Scazzero

Podcasts Episodes:

[Breathe: Being with God in Silence](#) - Emotionally Healthy Leader Podcast w/ Pete Scazzero

[Silence](#) - Fight Hustle, End Hurry Podcast

Sermon Audio:

[The Gospel Our Hope \(2015\)](#) - Tyler Myers & Chuck Sackett

Articles:

[Take a Break from the Chaos](#) - David Mathis

[The Continual Process of Spiritual Formation](#) - Jim Powell

[An Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines](#) - Brett & Kate McKay

Books:

[The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry](#) - John Mark Comer

[Gospel Allegiance](#) - Matthew Bates

WEEK ONE | DEPENDENCY [Silence & Solitude] CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 15, 20:21

The gospel becomes our hope as we embrace Jesus' rhythm of presence and mission.

Key Scriptures:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

- John 14:6

As often as possible Jesus withdrew to quiet places for prayer.

- Luke 5:16

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

- Mark 1:36–38

And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.

- Mark 3:14

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- John 15:4–5

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

- John 20:21

Message Highlights:

- The Gospel: Jesus, our resurrected King, is victorious! He sits on God's throne over all creation! He has conquered sin and death! He offers us new life and a new identity!
- For Christians, the way of Jesus is more than a mere theory or idea: it is practice. It's a way of life and Jesus is the way.
- As we engage in the daily practices of Jesus, he draws us in to experience his presence and then sends us out on mission.
- "Solitude well practiced will break the power of busyness, haste, isolation and loneliness."
- "The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts."
- Jesus modeled for us a rhythm of moving into the presence of God the Father through silence and solitude and then moving out on mission.

Conversation Starter:

- Do you find it easy or difficult to spend time in silence and solitude? Why do you think that is?

Discuss the Message:

1. What are some of the biggest distractions you encounter when trying to carve out quiet time with Jesus?
2. At times it seems as if our culture is afraid of silence and solitude. Why do you think that is?
3. What impact do you feel silence and solitude might have on the level of stress we feel at times (see 1 Peter 5:7)? How might silence and solitude impact our decision making (see Psalm 25:5)? How might it impact our relationships with others (see 1 John 4:19)?
4. Have you ever felt torn between the need for silence and solitude and the needs of those around you? What do you do in those moments?
5. Read Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35 and Luke 5:16. In what ways did Jesus model for us the practice of silence and solitude? What can we learn from his example?
6. In John 10:30, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." If Jesus was already one with the Father, why do you think it was still so important for him to spend time alone with God?
7. In Mark 3:14, we see that Jesus called a small group to "be with him" in order that he might "send them." What is the connection between spending time alone with God and living on mission to serve others?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Pray that God would stir within us, through his Spirit, a deeper desire to spend time alone with him.
- Pray that the time we spend alone in the presence of Jesus would fuel our life mission to serve others in his name.

WEEK TWO

PRAYER OUR STRENGTH | PRAYER

Teach us to pray... That is what Jesus' friends asked him one day (Luke 11:1). They wanted to learn how to pray because they knew that Jesus lived a life of prayer. They had watched him closely and saw how peaceful, intentional, joyful, patient and persevering he was. They were blown away by his integrity, his wisdom and his ability to connect with anyone. They wanted what he had and they knew it was tied to prayer, because Jesus was always praying.

Prayer is our source of strength because prayer was the source of Jesus' strength. There is a story in Mark's gospel about one day when the disciples had clearly forgotten this. While Jesus went hiking with three of his best friends (an amazing story in itself), the rest of the disciples were trying to help a young man with some serious troubles. Sadly, they were failing miserably. Finally, Jesus arrived and it was clear that they needed his help. After Jesus healed the young man, his friends wanted to know why they weren't able to help the guy. Jesus' response was, "You need to pray!"

Corrie ten Boom once asked a great question, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" So often we turn to prayer as a last resort when it is supposed to be our daily source of strength. God understands our tendencies and he gives us grace: lots of it, in fact. Yet, he calls us to draw near to him and pray, just as Jesus did, so that he might strengthen us through his Spirit in ways beyond our imagination (Ephesians 3:20–21). By the way, Corrie ten Boom was a Christian whose family helped many Jews escape the Holocaust, often by hiding them in their own home. Safe to say she would have known about the necessity and power of prayer.¹

As followers of Jesus, we don't pray because it's just "what we're supposed to do;" we pray because prayer is our lifeline to Jesus. That is why the Apostle Paul urges believers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). So why is it so difficult to pray sometimes? There are a lot of reasons. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you develop your habit of prayer: Prayer is not about fancy or spiritual sounding language.

- You can pray out loud or quietly in your heart/mind.
- You can pray alone or with others.
- Not everyone's prayer life will look and feel the same.
- When you struggle to find words, the Holy Spirit is there to help you (Romans 8:26–28).

If you get stuck and just have no idea where to start, lean on God's Word. There are many prayers in Scripture. There is even a whole book dedicated to prayer in the Bible: the Psalms are all timeless prayers in the form of songs. This week's Presence Activities are aimed to help you engage in prayer. Then, drawing from the strength you find from having been in conversation with the Father, Son and Spirit, the Mission Activities will give you some practical ways to live on mission with Jesus. So, let's pray. Prayer is our strength!

¹ Corrie's book *The Hiding Place* tells her powerful life story and is highly recommended

WEEK TWO | PRAYER INWARD JOURNEY

The point of prayer is not to get answers from God, but to have oneness with him.
- Oswald Chambers

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Presence Activity #1 - Prayer Stations (9/21-9/5)

Mark Batterson wrote, “A change of pace and a change of place often leads to a change in perspective.” A renewed sense of purpose and strength often results from carving out a bit of time and getting in a new environment to talk with and hear from God.

Prayer stations are interactive activities set up to help guide you in an experience of focused prayer in a fresh and accessible way. Prayer stations create a common space for people to come pray on their own, with their family or with their small group at their own pace.

Prayer stations will be set up in the West Venue at Madison Park Christian Church from 7:00am-7:00pm, September 21st-25th (Monday-Friday). You are invited and encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to find strength through prayer this week.

If you have any questions about the prayer stations, please contact Elise Ehresman (elise@madisonparkchurch.com) or call the church office at 217-222-2529 ext. 112.

Presence Activity #2 - Patterns for Prayer

Praying biblically is more easily caught than taught. We should take this privilege and responsibility seriously and seek to be more effective models for others. We must plan to pray. No one slips into a habit of disciplined prayer, it requires intentional effort. Daniel, Jesus, Paul and believers in the early church clearly set aside specific times for focused prayer (see Daniel 6:10; Luke 5:16; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 1:16).

One helpful acronym that gives us a pattern for prayer is **A.C.T.S.**:

Adoration - Confession - Thanksgiving - Supplication

A similar helpful reminder and pattern is **The 3 R's**:

Rejoice - Repent - Request

Choose A.C.T.S. or The 3 R's as a guide and write down your specific prayer requests this week to help strengthen your discipline to pray with purpose. Be observant of how your prayer life becomes stronger in this process!

WEEK TWO | PRAYER OUTWARD MISSION

Continual prayer is the ongoing reminder that God's children are always and wholly dependent on their heavenly Father for all things.

- D.A. Carson

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

- Psalm 62:5–7

Mission Activity #1 - Sharing Scripture Prayers

Reflect on this question: What do you most often pray for? Are you simply asking for blessings, or are you praising God, asking him to shape your heart and the hearts of those around you to become more like Christ?

Look up the following Bible verses. Choose the one that most resonates with you in this season. Write it out on a mirror where you and those who come and go from your home or workplace will be able to see it and be reminded that prayer is our strength. You can use a dry erase marker or write it on post-it notes and stick it on the mirror:

- Romans 12:12
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- Psalm 9:1–3
- Psalm 28:6–8

Mission Activity #2 - Speech that is “Seasoned with Salt”

Read Colossians 4:2–6:

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

In that passage, Paul connects prayer and sharing Christ with others.

Pray for God to bring someone to mind who does not know Jesus. Pray for them. Pray for an opportunity to share what Christ has done for you and the life change you have experienced. Pray for boldness and the ability to share without being pushy or preachy. Share with them and pray for the Holy Spirit to use the conversation to move in their life.

WEEK TWO | PRAYER

FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Praying Like Jesus

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he gave us a prayer that serves as a helpful model to guide our prayers:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

- Matthew 6:9–13

With your family or small group, pray for one another using Jesus' prayer. You can pray it word for word or you can use it as a model prayer.

Family/Group Activity #2 - Prayer Wall

This week, look for a visible spot in your house to designate as your prayer wall. Get creative and decorate it as a station to track your prayers. You could use a chalk board, dry erase board, a poster, or even repaint an area of the wall with chalkboard paint. You could also use a text group chat if you would like to have a "digital prayer wall" with friends or family who you do not live with.

Take time to pray for one another's requests. Write a star or check mark next to prayers that have been clearly answered. Keep in mind that God doesn't always answer prayer in the way we expect! Celebrate all God does in this season in and through you. Thank God for hearing all of those prayers.

Look back on this wall or group chat to remember that He is faithful. Take a picture of the prayer wall as a reminder of how God has answered prayers in the past and how he will continue to do so in the future.

Family/Group Activity #3 - Prayer Walk

Take a walk with your family or friends through your neighborhood or a nearby park. As you walk, pray for whatever is on your hearts. Be sure to thank God for the creation around you.

Allow what you see on your walk to flow into prayers of gratitude. Thank Jesus for walking among us. Pray for the people you see, that they might experience God's love today. Pray for anyone else who comes to mind. Pray that God would help everyone in our community to see how much he loves them.

WEEK TWO | PRAYER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Podcasts Episodes:

[Prayer: Trusting in a Wine That Never Runs Out](#) - Pete Scazzero

[The Life of Prayer](#) - Doable Discipleship & Carolyn Baker

Mobile Apps:

[Prayer Requests](#) - Madison Park Christian Church Mobile App

[Echo](#) - Prayer lists and reminders

Sermon Audio:

[Prayer Our Strength \(2015\)](#) - Chuck Sackett

Articles:

[Spiritual Disciplines Are Not About You](#) - Jan Johnson

[Four Ways to Enrich Your Prayer Times](#) - Mark Taylor

[You're Probably Overthinking Your Prayer Life](#) - Dave Hickman

Books:

[Dangerous Prayers](#) - Craig Groeschel

[The Practice of the Presence of God](#) - Brother Lawrence

[Praying the Bible](#) - Donald S. Whitney

WEEK TWO | PRAYER

CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 5:19-20; Luke 11:1-13

Prayer is our source of strength because prayer was the source of Jesus' strength.

Key Scriptures:

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel... I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

- John 5:19–20, 30

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

- Luke 11:1

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- Matthew 6:9–13

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

- John 17:9

Then he said to his disciples, "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."

- Matthew 9:37–38

Message Highlights:

- Jesus' friends wanted to learn how to pray because he modeled for them a life of prayer.
- We often turn to prayer as a last resort when it is supposed to be our daily source of strength.
- "The point of prayer is not to get answers from God, but to have oneness with him."
- Prayer is our source of strength because prayer was the source of Jesus' strength.
- Prayer is not about fancy or spiritual sounding language. You can pray out loud or quietly in your heart/mind. You can pray alone or with others.
- Not everyone's prayer life will look and feel the same.
- When you struggle to find words in prayer, the Holy Spirit is there to help you.

Conversation Starter:

- Describe what you would consider a really good conversation between two people. How is prayer like a conversation with God? How is it different?

Discuss the Message:

1. In John 5:10–30, Jesus said that he did nothing on his own initiative, but only that which his Father showed him. What insight does this give us into Jesus' prayer life?
2. What can we learn about prayer from Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:9–13?
3. Do you find it easy to pray, or is it difficult at times?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul encourages believers to "pray without ceasing." What do you think he means? How are we to pray in this way?
5. What is the connection between prayer and action?
6. Do you think that there are times when God wants us to pray and just wait for him to work on our behalf? If so, how can we discern between those times and the times when he calls us to pray and take action?
7. John 17:9 tells us that Jesus prayed for us. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus is personally praying for you when he talks with his Father?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Thank Jesus for modeling a life of prayer and for praying to his Father on our behalf.
- Pray for our Father to show us the ways in which he is at work in and around us.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would move in our hearts to be even more committed to Jesus' mission.

WEEK THREE

WISDOM OUR COMPASS I SCRIPTURE

If you ask someone whether or not they would like to have more wisdom, their answer will most likely be, “Yes! Who wouldn’t?” Wisdom guides our lives and fosters healthy relationships with others. It makes us really good at the things we do and it keeps us out of trouble. Wisdom leads us in the right direction and enables us to live as we should.

We all know that wisdom is a good thing. The question people wrestle with is, “Where does wisdom ultimately come from?” Is it something embedded in the universe? Does it come from within each of us? If you ask Jesus, he would say that wisdom comes from God’s Word.

The pages of the Bible are full of God’s wisdom. The Psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Just as a compass, GPS or navigation app provides directions based on immovable, fixed points, the Scriptures guide us on our journey through life.

Life is often compared to a journey because that is exactly what it is. You begin somewhere, but you do not stay there. You move, you change, you go somewhere, both literally and figuratively. That is why it is so important to make sure you are always moving in the right direction. We have all experienced what it is like to lose our way on a trip. Some of us have experienced what it is like to lose our way in life. By God’s grace, he can always get us back on track. But we need a compass, something to help us know which destination he is leading us towards each day.

So, how do we gain wisdom? We grow in wisdom by developing our relationship with Christ. Jesus is God’s Word who became flesh (John 1:1–2, 14). By wisdom he created and sustains all things (Proverbs 3:19–20). We grow in wisdom by following his example. Jesus’ entire life was saturated in Scripture. From an early age, Jesus looked to the wisdom of his Bible, the Old Testament writings. By reading the Bible, reflecting on truth and discussing the Scriptures with others, Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:41–52).

God wants his wisdom to be our compass and will give it to us if we seek it (Proverbs 8:17; James 1:5–6). King Solomon is considered one of the wisest people to ever live. When God told him to ask for whatever he wanted, Solomon asked for more wisdom: a wise choice indeed. God granted Solomon’s request and gave him incredible wisdom. Thankfully, Solomon compiled much of that wisdom and passed it on to us in the book of Proverbs.

This week’s Presence Activities will help you engage God’s Word in a fresh way, stretching out to grab hold of God’s wisdom for your life. The Mission Activities will provide you with some practical ways to walk in wisdom, because wisdom isn’t just something we know, it is something we live out (James 1:22).

Wisdom is our compass!

WEEK THREE | SCRIPTURE INWARD JOURNEY

God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.

- Max Lucado

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

- 1 Corinthians 2:6–7

Presence Activity #1 - Hearing His Voice

In John 10:27, Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Let’s consider those words of Jesus. “My sheep listen to *my voice*.” Note that he did not say, “My sheep listen to *my words*.” One’s voice and one’s words are two different things. Our ears hear people’s words when they speak to us, but our hearts hear their *voice*. It is learning to hear Jesus’ *voice* in Scripture that is the key to wisdom becoming our compass in everyday life.

Read Matthew 6:25–34 and 1 Peter 5:6–7 and reflect on these questions:

- Have you experienced the intimate, personal voice of God this past year?
- What has kept you or brought you into a place where you have heard His voice?
- How are you hearing His voice today? What is Jesus conveying to you through the passages you just read? What do you need to hear from Him?

Presence Activity #2 - Distractions & Detours

We all have things that can distract us and lead us to take unnecessary detours. Even worse, sometimes we can get completely lost. Imagine a compass in your mind. The needle of the compass points directly north. If you were to hold a magnet to the side of the compass it will pull the needle to give you a false north. It’s like a distraction that pulls you off course.

Take a few moments to reflect:

- If God is true north, what are the “false norths” distracting your focus away from God?
- As you identify these “false norths,” move them to the edge of the map in your mind.
- Identify them as the distractions for this season of your journey.
- Refocus on true north...focus on God and his voice to be your compass to guide and direct you toward wisdom.
- If there is something distracting you from hearing God’s voice on a regular basis, what can you do to remove that distraction?

WEEK THREE | SCRIPTURE OUTWARD MISSION

Wisdom is knowing what to do next; virtue is doing it.

- David Jordan

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

- James 1:25

Mission Activity #1 - Windshield Time

Some use a navigation app on their phone, others choose to use printed directions, many rely on their vehicle's navigation system to get them to their final destination. Sometimes we make wrong turns and refuse to listen to our navigator.

This week, your challenge is to pray with eyes wide open when you are driving from point A to point B, to be aware of your surroundings and to be reminded that Jesus has left us with the Holy Spirit to guide us daily in staying focused on our final destination beyond this life.

Pray for some of the following during your windshield time and see if the journey to the destination can become something to anticipate as much as your final destination:

- When you are sitting at a red light, be intentional to pray for those in front of you, behind you or across from you waiting for the light to turn green.
- When you pass by a fire station, police station, hospital, etc, pray for those that are serving our community needs.
- When you leave and return to your home, pray for your neighbors and opportunities to serve them.
- When you have a long commute, take intentional time to ask God to bring names and faces to your mind and pray specifically for these persons to make wise choices in their lives.

Mission Activity #2 - True North

Identify someone that you know and respect because they live out the core value of wisdom being their compass. In other words, someone who has Go's Word as their true north. It doesn't mean that they are perfect or haven't learned from bad decisions along the way. Ask this person to get together and share insights that will sharpen you in your pursuit of making wise choices.

Can you think of someone who might be veering away from God's wisdom? Sometimes all it takes to get us back on course is an encouraging word from a trusted fellow believer.

If you can do so without judgement or condemnation, reach out to that person and check in with them. See if they are living with God as their true north. If so, encourage them to stay the course. If not, offer to help them refocus and remove distractions.

WEEK THREE | SCRIPTURE FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Sword Drills

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- Ephesians 6:17

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- Hebrews 4:12

Finding your way around Scripture can be tough at times. A fun way to get better at that is to play the Bible sword game, or “sword drills,” with your family or friends.

Prepare ahead of time by selecting a dozen or so Bible verses. Have everyone grab a Bible and hold it above their head. Call out the Scripture verse references one at a time. When the Scripture reference is read out loud, each person lowers their Bible and attempts to be the first person to find the verse. Ask the person who finds the verse first to read it aloud. Discuss as a group what that verse means.

Keep it playful, reminding everyone that the goal is not to be “better” or faster than others, but simply a fun game to help us all become more comfortable finding our way around God’s Word.

Family/Group Activity #2 - Scripture Memory Verse

Words are so important! The words we hear and read shape how we think and how we act, that’s why memorizing God’s Word helps us grow in our relationship with Jesus.

Take some time this week to choose a few verses from Scripture to memorize together. If you’re not sure where to start in picking a verse, the Proverbs are full of wisdom for life. You can also go to www.biblegateway.com and search the Bible with a topic or keyword.

Write the verse(s) you choose somewhere in the house where everyone can see it. Recite your Scripture for one another before work/school, at dinner time or at bedtime. Pray and thank God for giving us his Word to be our compass in life.

If you are engaging in this activity with a group who you do not live with, you can create a screensaver of the Bible verses you are memorizing together and share it with the group. FaceTime or Zoom to recite your verses for one another.

WEEK THREE | SCRIPTURE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[Wisdom](#) (Video Series) - Bible Project
[How To Read The Bible \(Video Series\)](#) - Bible Project

Podcasts Episodes:

[Wisdom \(Podcast series\)](#) - Bible Project

Mobile Apps:

[Audio Bible & Bible Reading Plan](#) - Madison Park Christian Church Mobile App
[Bible Memory App](#) - Helpful tool for memorizing Scripture
[The Bible App \(YouVersion\)](#) - Bible reading, audio Bible and daily devotionals
[The Bible App for Kids \(YourVersion\)](#) - Bible reading, audio Bible and daily devotionals for kids

Sermon Audio:

[Wisdom Our Compass \(2015\)](#) - Keith Ehresman

Articles:

[Read the Bible](#) - Jon Weece
[The Hardest Spiritual Discipline Is the Most Important One \[Scripture Memory\]](#) - Rachel Bicha
[Why Do We Ignore Parts of the Bible?](#) - John Pavlovitz

Books:

[Core 52: A Fifteen-Minute Daily Guide to Build Your Bible IQ in a Year](#) - Mark Moore
[Eat This Book](#) - Eugene Peterson
[Grasping God's Word: Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible](#) - J. Scott Duvall

WEEK THREE | SCRIPTURE CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 1:1–5, 14–16

God's wisdom is our compass, guiding us in the right direction through life.

Key Scriptures:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- John 1:1–2, 14

The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

- Proverbs 3:19–20

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

- Luke 2:52

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- Psalm 119:105

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- James 1:5

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion...I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

- Proverbs 8:12, 17

Message Highlights:

- Most everyone agrees that wisdom is a good thing, but there is confusion in our culture about where wisdom ultimately comes from.
- If we seek God and ask for wisdom, he will give it to us generously.
- Even Jesus needed to study and meditate on Scripture to grow in wisdom.
- The Bible contains God's wisdom, handed down to us through generations.
- With the Holy Spirit to help us understand, Scripture is our compass, guiding us in the right direction through life.
- God wants us to seek wisdom so that he can give it to us. All we have to do is ask!

Conversation Starter:

- Have you ever been lost on a road trip or when trying to find a certain place? Did you eventually find your destination? If so, how did you find your way?

Discuss the Message:

1. How would you define wisdom? What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
2. What is a compass used for? How does wisdom serve as a compass in our journey through life?

3. What or who is your go-to source for wisdom?
4. Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus “grew in wisdom and in stature.” What do you think about the idea that Jesus himself had to grow in wisdom by putting an effort into understanding God’s truth? What can we take away from that and apply to our own lives?
5. What is the connection between engaging with Scripture and growing in relationship with Jesus? (See John 1:1-2, 14).
6. Psalm 51:6 says, “Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.” It has been said by some that experience is the best teacher. Are there some things we just need to learn the hard way? Explain your response.
7. What decisions in life are too small or too big to filter through Scripture?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Thank Jesus for his example of how to live with the Father’s wisdom as our compass.
- Ask God to give you wisdom as you commit to seek understanding through time in Scripture.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you in making wise decisions in life, not only for yourself but the people closest to you as well.

WEEK FOUR

AUTHENTIC OUR CORE | FASTING

What does it mean to be authentic? Well you know it when you see it, and that's the point. Authenticity is the quality of being real or true. When someone is authentic, there is no pretense about them. What you see is what you get, and what you get is genuine.

Let's be real...Authenticity can be a rare quality in our culture. The temptation to put on a front is ever present. For those of us on social media, that temptation is only amplified. But as followers of Jesus, authenticity is not optional. To become more like Jesus is to become more authentic (1 Peter 2:22).

So, how do we become more authentic, to the point at which authenticity becomes the core of who we are? There are many ways Jesus cultivated authenticity in his own life, several of which we are exploring together in this study experience. But there is something Jesus often put into practice that seems to be deeply connected to authenticity: fasting.

In Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching his followers about what life in the Kingdom of God looks like. When he gets to the subject of fasting, Jesus starts off with, "And when you fast..." (v.16-18). Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "if you fast," but "when you fast." As Jews who sought to observe the Old Testament commands, fasting was already a regular part of their lives. The idea of fasting would not have been new to them. What was new about Jesus' teaching on fasting was that he got beneath the surface of fasting as a religious practice and right to the heart of why we fast.

Fasting is about abstaining from what is good in order to seek that which is even better. Elmer Towns wrote, "When you fast, you stop pursuing food and the other necessities of life to passionately pursue the presence of God." Fasting is definitely not something we do to make ourselves look more spiritual in front of others. Nor is it about doing something difficult in order to get God's attention or earn his favor. Fasting does not define our relationship with God, but it does deepen our connection with God.

Perhaps fasting helps us become more authentic because it reminds us of our needfulness before God. It's hard to pretend you've got everything you need when the pangs of hunger remind you that unless you receive some strength from outside yourself, you'll fade away for good. But as Lynne Baab explained, "Fasting, at its core, is not a discipline of withholding. Fasting is a discipline of making space for God."

If you are new to fasting, this week's Presence Activities will introduce you to the practice and help you take first steps as you are able. If fasting is a regular practice for you, lean in to the activities as a reminder of why we fast and allow it to develop greater authenticity in your life. This week's Mission Activities will help us make the connection between fasting and reaching out to others. Authenticity is our core!

WEEK FOUR | FASTING INWARD JOURNEY

Fasting clears the mind and puts us in a posture of relinquishment. We give in to God better.
- Jan Johnson

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.

- 1 Corinthians 6:12

Presence Activity #1 - Fasting & Prayer

In our culture of busyness, sometimes we fast on accident, skipping a meal here or there because we're in a rush or short on time. Some people fast for health or diet reasons. Nothing is wrong with those reasons for “fasting,” but they are not the same as fasting like Jesus did, with the purpose of spiritual growth.

As long as health concerns would not prevent it, intentionally set aside one meal this week to fast and pray. If you have fasted before, you can fast for a whole day. You do not necessarily have to go without any calories, especially if fasting is a new practice for you. This can be a juice-only or fruit & vegetables-only fast.

Read through the following Scriptures which highlight the connection between fasting and prayer: Daniel 9:3; Nehemiah 1:4; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:3. As you fast, pray often. Ask God to sustain you, thanking him for strengthening you. When you break your fast, read 1 Corinthians 10:31. Thank God for always providing.

Presence Activity #2 - Media/Social Media Fast

It goes without saying that social media use has become an increasingly time-consuming part of life for many of us. Some say that it can even become a real addiction. Maybe they are right, and maybe you can relate. Perhaps social media is not a temptation for you, but you struggle to break free from the 24-hour news cycle or real-time updates on your favorite sports team. Perhaps social media, news or sports are not your thing, but you cannot go one day without your favorite movie or TV streaming service.

Here's the point: Each of us have our go-to distractions that can keep us from experiencing more of God's presence in our lives if we let them. They may not be entirely bad things, but we have allowed them to capture too much of our time and attention. Fasting is a great way to reset our attention on our relationship with God and others.

Reflect on the media and entertainment sources or social media platforms that consume a significant amount of your time. Choose one (or more) to abstain from for a few days, perhaps even a whole week. If helpful, share what you're doing with a friend who will hold you to it. After fasting from the media/social media, take time to reflect:

- What did I truly miss out on while fasting from that media?
- What did I gain by refocusing that time on my relationship with God and others?
- What am I missing out on every week when consuming my normal intake of media?
- What might I gain from permanently cutting back on or eliminating some of my media consumption?

WEEK FOUR | FASTING OUTWARD MISSION

Fasting sharpens and sensitizes our spiritual faculties to become more in tune with what God is doing throughout the world.

- Bill Bright

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

- Isaiah 58:6–7

Mission Activity - Fasting That Reaches Out

While fasting is one of the ways Jesus invites us to draw near to him and experience personal spiritual growth, there is also an element of fasting that involves our impact on the lives of others. We grow through this “reaching out” aspect of fasting just as much as we do by the discipline of abstaining from food or other pleasures to focus on God.

One simple way you can practice a fast that reaches out is by taking the money you would otherwise use for your meals or entertainment and giving that to someone else in need. For example, the money you save from skipping lunch or dinner, or by skipping coffee, could be given to a local food pantry. The money you save from fasting from Netflix for a month or two could be sent to a missionary working in a developing nation.

Decide ahead of time what you will fast from and what you will fast for:

- What will I fast from?
- How long will I fast?
- What will I do with the resources I save by fasting?

At the end of your fast, take what you have saved and give towards one of the local or global missions we support as a church family. If you are not sure how to do that, email our Serve Team Lead, Scott Bates (scott@madisonparkchurch.com) or call the church office (217-222-2529).

WEEK FOUR | FASTING FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Screen Time Fast

Rather than skipping a meal, plan on fasting from the screen for a day. As you take a break from TV, video games and phones, take time to worship. That could be taking a walk together and talking about this week's message, taking some intentional time to pray together or even reading the Scriptures together.

Remember: fasting is all about giving up something good to get something greater. Keep the focus on what is being gained, not on what is being given up.

Family/Group Activity #2 - Fancy Meal, Meager Meal

Plan ahead to prepare a nice meal for someone else. It could be for your neighbors or friends, just let them know ahead of time that you will be delivering dinner and make sure what you plan to prepare is something they enjoy.

Work together to prepare the meal. Go all-out and make it really nice. Deliver it to them together. After you have delivered their meal, return home and share a very simple, un-fancy meal for yourselves.

Discuss together how God sometimes leads us to give up something good to get something even better (i.e. give up the fancy meal for the greater experience of doing something awesome for someone else). Talk about how it felt to give your best for someone else and to do for yourself just what was needed, nothing more. Talk about how Jesus gave up so much to come to earth and give us his best.

WEEK FOUR | FASTING

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[What is the Purpose of Fasting?](#) - Donald Whitney

Podcasts Episodes:

[The Practice of Fasting](#) - Doable Discipleship & Buddy Owens

Mobile Apps:

[Zero Fasting App](#) - Helpful tracking tool for healthy fasting.

Sermon Audio:

[Authentic Our Core \(2015\)](#) - Chuck Sackett

Articles:

[How to Do a Biblical Fast](#) - Sheri Onishi

[The Fasting Track: Sixteen Great Reasons to Fast](#) - Victor M. Parachin

[Does Fasting Even Matter Anymore?](#) - Levi Carter

Books:

[Fasting](#) - Lynne Baab

WEEK FOUR | FASTING

CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 6:25-40

Fasting fosters authenticity as we make space for God to work in our lives.

Key Scriptures:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

- John 6:35

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

- 1 Peter 2:21–22

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

- Matthew 4:1–2

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

- Matthew 6:16–18

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

- Isaiah 58:6

Message Highlights:

- Authenticity can be a rare quality in our culture. It is refreshing to engage life with authentic people.
- Jesus modeled for us what it looks like to be truly authentic.
- Jesus himself is our source of strength; he sustains us.
- Fasting is more than just not eating or engaging in a particular activity. It must be done with prayer and Scripture reading for it to be a life-giving experience.
- Denying the desires of the flesh strengthens the Spirit within us and increases an awareness of our dependence on God.
- Fasting fosters authenticity as we make space for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.
- Just as Jesus emerged from his fast to live intentionally for others, through fasting we develop authenticity and a heart for living on mission with him.

Conversation Starter:

- What is one of your favorite food items that you would have a lot of trouble giving up?

Discuss the Message:

1. How would you define authenticity? Describe what it's like to interact with someone who is truly authentic.

2. What are some things that can cause us to struggle with being authentic?
3. In what ways did Jesus model for us what it looks like to be authentic (See 1 Peter 2:21–22)?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. What does Paul say in that passage that indicates he pursued a life of authenticity?
5. What connections do you see between authenticity and fasting? How can fasting help us develop authenticity?
6. What is the difference between practicing fasting in order to please God and fasting to deepen our connection with God? Which one do you think God prefers?
7. Some people are not able to fast from food for health reasons. What are some other ways we can practice fasting?
8. In Isaiah 58 we see that fasting is not something we are called to do solely for our own benefit. How does the kind of fasting God is looking for lead us to be more engaged in his mission?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Pray that we can become more and more authentic, to live as salt and light in the world.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit's discernment to help us have the right motivations for fasting.
- Pray that God would guide us, meet us and change us in our times of fasting.

WEEK FIVE

CHARACTER OUR CREDIBILITY | STEWARDSHIP

[Simplicity, Generosity & Influence]

Credibility is defined as the quality of being trusted and believed in. But what makes a person credible? How do you really know someone's true character? These are very important questions, especially for those of us who follow Jesus. In Jesus' own words,

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13–16

In that message, Jesus reminds us that the world is watching and that our character is our credibility. True character is revealed by our words and actions, evidenced before others. Jesus said, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:1–8). The proof of our connection with him will be demonstrated by our character in the way we live: both when we know that people are watching us and when we think they are not.

Jesus modeled perfect character for us, but we are not perfect. So how can we develop deep character? Because our life and our testimony are entrusted to us by God, character is really a matter of stewardship. Stewardship is the responsibility of caring for and making the most of that which ultimately does not belong to us. We build credibility with others when we are good stewards of both the tangible and intangible resources that we have been entrusted with.

The spiritual disciplines of simplicity, generosity and influence all share the common thread of stewardship. Simplicity is how we live when God is our highest treasure (Luke 12:15; Philippians 4:11–12; 1 Timothy 6:6–8). Generosity is how we live when we consider others more important than ourselves (2 Corinthians 9:11; Philippians 2:3–4). Influence is the impact our life choices have on the lives of other people (Colossians 4:5–6). When we practice these things the way Jesus did, we develop our character with God and increase our credibility with others.

Our lives are a trust from God and, when we live with character, we have credibility with others in a way that points them back to the one who gave us life: Jesus. This week's Presence Activities will help you reflect on and practice the spiritual disciplines of simplicity, generosity and influence. The Mission Activities will suggest a few ways in which you can demonstrate character, pointing those around you to Jesus.

Our character is our credibility!

WEEK FIVE | STEWARDSHIP [Simplicity, Generosity & Influence] INWARD JOURNEY

My worth to God in public is what I am in private.

- Oswald Chambers

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

- 1 Timothy 6:6–8

Presence Activity #1 - A Knock at the Door

Jesus stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20). He comes in humility and waits for our invitation and consent. He waits for our consent to explore the depths of who we are and to bring his healing and loving touch to the core of our being.

Read Jesus' parable about the great banquet in Luke 14:12–24. David Benner, in *Surrender to Love*, talks about the parable. Jesus says the host of the banquet invites guests who do not come; so then he sends out an invitation to the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame. Benner gives us a unique perspective on the parable:

“Think of Christ as presiding over a banquet at the deep center of our being. His invitation to us is to search out the poor, crippled, blind and lame aspects of our inner self and bring them to his feast of love. Here he stands ready to embrace them with love and welcome them into the family.”

We find a banquet in the center of our souls, and the Master is inviting the most broken parts of who we are to come to the table for a feast. Take some time to reflect on the following questions; write or type out your responses. If you journal, use your journal to process and capture your thoughts:

- What am I most concerned with: how I am perceived by others, or who I really am?
- Have I really given Jesus access to the depths of my heart?
- Am I willing to allow the Lord to know the deepest parts of who I am? Even the most broken parts? The parts covered with shame?
- Thank God for his Son and his Spirit who enters your heart as you open the door for him to speak freedom and truth to your soul.

Presence Activity #2 - Clear the Clutter

Simplicity and generosity go hand-in-hand. When we let go of the things we do not need instead of hoarding, we are more free to give away what we do not need and to share with others. To help clear the clutter and simplify, go through some of the things you are storing and take one of the following actions:

1. Give It Away - Items with value that you do not really need.
2. Sell It - Things you can sell to get money you can use for generosity or real necessities.
3. Throw Away or Recycle It - Things with no real value to you or others.
4. Wait... - Things you aren't sure about yet. Come back to them in 3-6 months. If you haven't used them in that time frame, give them away, sell them, or throw them away.

WEEK FIVE | STEWARDSHIP [Simplicity, Generosity & Influence] OUTWARD MISSION

Simplicity sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others.

- Richard Foster

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

- 2 Corinthians 9:11

Mission Activity #1 - Pitch Out to Reach Out

When we rid our lives of the things we do not need, the simplicity in living frees us to give more of our attention to God. When we give away our things (or sell them and give away the money), we are allowing God to provide for others through our generosity. When we give to others, we have a positive influence on them, a reminder that God sees them and loves them.

Go through the spaces where you store things that you never, or rarely ever, use. Find a few things that might be of value to others. If you know someone who could use a specific item, give it directly to them as a gift. For everything else you find that you can bring yourself to part with, sell them and donate the money. A yard sale, Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace are all great ways to do this. Take any of the cash you get and donate it to a local ministry or use it to buy something for someone in need. If you do not have the time to sell the items, donate them to a local thrift store.

If you want to stretch yourself and grow a little more, choose at least one item that you have been holding onto for sentimental reasons, but you know someone who will use it to meet a practical need. It will be good for you and for them.

Mission Activity #2 - Web of Relationships

The relationships that God entrusts us with are a constant opportunity to influence people with the love of Jesus. How well are we doing at being good stewards of that influence?

Write down the names of the three people you interact with most often in the following contexts: Home, Work/School, Extended Family, Church, Community. For each person:

- Pick one word to describe how you believe you are influencing that person.
- Pick one word to describe how you believe that person is influencing you.
- How do you feel about the way your character is impacting them?
- Is there anything that you need to change?
- Is there anything you want to keep doing, or even do more of?

Consider asking those people whose names you wrote down to give you one word to describe the way you are influencing their life.

WEEK FIVE | STEWARDSHIP [Simplicity, Generosity & Influence]
FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Ready to Be Generous

It is not uncommon for us to see someone on the side of the road or in a store parking lot needing help, asking for food or money. Maybe you have been in that situation and thought you'd love to help but didn't have any cash to give.

This week, set aside some cash or purchase a gift card from a local restaurant or grocery store. Talk with your family or group of friends about why you are doing this. Stash the gift card or cash in your car and pray that God will show you who needs help. Keep your eyes open for the opportunity. After you have been able to be generous, talk about how it made you feel and how you think it might have made the person you helped feel.

Family/Group Activity #2 - ReThink Christmas

Christmas will be here before we know it! Every year, Madison Park anticipates the Advent and Christmas season as we "rethink" Christmas. November through December, we will have an opportunity to celebrate the birth of Christ and God's most generous gift to us by practicing generosity towards others.

What if, instead of asking for gifts only for ourselves, we ask that friends and family celebrate Jesus with us by investing in the needs of others? Have a conversation this week with your family and/or friends to talk about how you might ReThink Christmas together this year.

WEEK FIVE | STEWARDSHIP [Simplicity, Generosity & Influence]
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[Generosity](#) - Bible Project

Podcasts Episodes:

[Simplicity](#) - Fight Hustle, End Hurry Podcast

[Generosity: Abundance or Scarcity?](#) - Bible Project Podcast

[The Simple Life](#) - Doable Discipleship

Mobile Apps:

[Giving](#) - Madison Park Christian Church Mobile App

Sermon Audio:

[Character Our Credibility \(2015\)](#) - Chuck Sackett

Articles:

[Less is More: A Suburban Mom Resists Consumer Culture](#) - Janet McMahon

[Generosity Isn't About Money](#) - Amalya Campbell

Books:

[The Treasure Principle: Unlocking the Secret of Joyful Giving](#) - Randy Alcorn

[Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions](#) - Craig Blomberg

[Lead Like Jesus](#) - Ken Blanchard

WEEK FIVE | STEWARDSHIP [Simplicity, Generosity & Influence]

CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 15:1–8

When we practice Christ-like stewardship, we develop our character and credibility with others.

Key Scriptures:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.... By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

- John 15:4–5, 8

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:16

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

- Luke 12:15

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

- 1 Timothy 6:6–8

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

- 2 Corinthians 9:11

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

- Colossians 4:5–6

Message Highlights:

- Our true character is revealed by our words and actions, evidenced before others. The world is watching those of us who follow Jesus to see if we are credible.
- The spiritual disciplines of simplicity, generosity and influence are all about being good stewards of the life God has entrusted to us.
- Simplicity is how we live when God is our highest treasure.
- Generosity is what we practice when we consider others more important than ourselves.
- Influence is the impact our life choices have on the lives of other people.
- When we practice Christ-like stewardship, we develop our character with God and our credibility with others.

Conversation Starter:

- How do you describe someone with character? What are the qualities of good character?

Discuss the Message:

1. What things do you feel responsible to steward?
2. How did Jesus model stewardship for us?
3. What is the connection between character, credibility and stewardship?
4. Have you ever thought of influence as something we are responsible to steward? How does that change the way we should leverage our influence? (see Matthew 5:16)
5. Read Luke 12:16–21. We live in a culture of excess (more, more, more). What challenges does this present to those of us who want to live with simplicity as Jesus did?
6. What makes generosity such an appealing quality in others? (see 2 Corinthians 9:11)
7. Read 1 Timothy 6:1–11. What practices can we engage in to help us live in simplicity? What actions cultivate generosity? What habits will give us godly influence?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Pray that we might live with contentment; not getting caught up in the accumulation of earthly treasures, happy to live in simplicity.
- Pray that the Spirit will guide us as we seek to live generously, as good stewards of time, talent and treasure.
- Pray that God would enable us to influence those around us, being salt and light, pointing people to Christ.

WEEK SIX

HUMILITY OUR POSTURE | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing]

Over-committed...Over-scheduled...Over-worked...and proud of it! Eugene Peterson said, "Busyness is an illness of the spirit." Most of us would agree with him, yet, many of us wear our busyness like it's a badge of honor.

Why do we do this? Ask someone how they have been and their response will often be, "Busy." Perhaps it's a cultural thing. If you're not busy, you must not be important, right? Wrong. Still, few things are more important to our culture than feeling important, and being busy makes us feel important. Maybe it's because we take ourselves too seriously. When convinced that we're the solution for every problem, we say yes to every opportunity.

Let's admit it; we struggle with pride and a lack of trust in God. When the pressures of life bear down on us, we try to convince ourselves and others that we can handle anything. So, we do our best to keep up with everyone else running full-steam ahead. All the while, we start to worry about our relationships with those who matter most to us, our quality of work, our physical and spiritual health. Our concern is valid, but what's the remedy for the illness of hurry?

Jesus wasn't a busy person. He accomplished much, but he was never rushed. He made time for the things that were important to him. He took time to rest, reflect and connect. He went hiking with his friends (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13). He enjoyed relaxed conversation (Luke 10:38-42). He even took naps (Mark 4:35-41)! Jesus knew that an unhurried pace and times of rest are both a part of living well. He knew what the book of Genesis said about God creating all things, and then resting. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were not tired or just being lazy for a day. God knows what it means to pause and appreciate life.

It's funny how often the answer to our woes is so simple, but also very counter cultural. Instead of trying to be everything to everyone, Jesus practiced slowing and sabbath. This is a profound thought because Jesus is, in fact, everything to everyone. But he didn't live like that. He demonstrated trust in his Heavenly Father. He showed us what it looks like to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit instead of making ourselves and our abilities the center of our thoughts.

Jesus was also incredibly humble (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus was not self-important, and his pace of life reflected that humility. He lived in the confidence that his value and importance was already given to him by his Heavenly Father. He elevated those around him (Luke 7:28). He washed his disciples' feet (John 13:1-20). Instead of making a big deal of himself, Jesus did the opposite. He did much of his work in secret, sometimes specifically asking the people with him not to tell anyone about it.

That's the connection between humility, sabbath and slowing down. When we live with a posture of humility, we recognize that we are not infinitely important and that the One who is has everything under control. We follow the example of Jesus and lean into his rhythms of work and rest. We sabbath by taking a regular day off to rest, to reflect on God's goodness and sufficiency and to admit that we aren't the center of our universe. This week's Presence Activities will help us establish a healthy rhythm of rest and learn to say no to busyness. The Mission Activities will provide us with some ways we can actually serve others more intentionally by slowing down a bit. Humility is our posture.

WEEK SIX | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing] INWARD JOURNEY

Life is tiring. You get to the end of the week, and even if you love your job, still you're worn down emotionally and spiritually. Sabbath is how we fill our souls back up with life.

- John Mark Comer

And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

- Mark 2:27–28

Presence Activity #1 - Rest & Re-Creation

Once we learn that sabbath is about rest, we might naturally tend to think of it as inactivity. Sure, sometimes a "holy nap" is a great way to practice sabbath. However, just because sabbath rest is never busy, that doesn't mean that sabbath cannot be active.

Think about the word *recreation*. It literally means *re-creation*, and it comes from a Latin word that means "to create once again." Creativity and rest are deeply connected. In Genesis 1 we read that God created and then he rested.

What non-work related activities re-energize you (walking, running, lifting, biking, fishing, gardening, painting, playing music, etc)? Which activities put your mind and soul at rest and bring out your creativity? Choose a refueling activity and carve out a little extra time for it this week.

While you engage in re-creational activity, pray and thank God for the gift of restful recreation. Consider committing to a weekly time of re-creation as Sabbath.

Presence Activity #2 - Calendars & Commitments

Jesus accomplished so much in just three years, but he was never in a hurry. How did he do it? He gives us a hint in John 5:30, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Jesus surrendered his to-do list to his Heavenly Father. Time to surrender yours...Get out your calendar or calendar app and look at the month ahead. Where is all of your time going? Can you honestly say that you have consulted God about the things you have committed to (Psalm 90:12; Ephesians 5:15–16)? Are you overcommitted? Pray...

What do you need to eliminate to make more space for God?

Perhaps your calendar is not too full. What day will you commit to rest ahead of time? Mark it on your calendar and intentionally protect that time.

WEEK SIX | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing] OUTWARD MISSION

Sabbath teaches us to rest from pride and ego, to rest from busyness that distracts, to give up prejudice and hatred, and to renew and reset our course.

- Jane Florence

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

- Luke 18:14

Mission Activity #1 - A Gift of Sabbath Rest

When we notice a friend or family member is overbusy, perhaps even battling some fatigue, we often tell them to slow down a bit, to take a night off. We know sabbath and slowing are important, so we admonish one another to put them into practice. It is great advice, but when someone is overloaded, it can be difficult for them to slow down.

This week, instead of just telling a busy friend to relax and recharge, find a way to help them do so. You could do something such as preparing a meal, mowing their lawn or picking up groceries for them. They might refuse your help if you propose it as a question, so make sure they know it would really bless you if they would allow you to serve them. You might say something like, "I know you have been very busy lately. It would mean a lot to me if you would let us make dinner for you. What's the best night this week for us to drop off dinner?" Pray that they would be able to rest and connect with God.

Mission Activity #2 - Sabbath Hospitality

For many people in our community, Sunday morning worship services are the closest thing they have to a practice of Sabbath rest. The First Impressions, Early Childhood and Elementary Ministry teams at Madison Park are committed to creating an environment where people can come to worship and rest in God's presence. A smiling face holding a door open for you, a cup of coffee, a caring team providing a safe learning environment for your kids...these things lift a huge burden and create space for people to rest in God.

If you are not already committed to serving in some capacity on Sunday mornings, sign up to serve with one of the ministry teams mentioned above. By serving just one Sunday a month, you can make a huge impact and help others to experience a taste of sabbath rest. Contact David Beuttel (david@madisonparkchurch.com | 217-222-2529 ext.113) and he will help you with next steps.

Remember: It would not benefit you to sign up for more commitments if you are already too busy. So, your first priority is to slow down and develop a rhythm of sabbath in your own life. Once you have done that, you can then find ways to help others do the same.

WEEK SIX | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing]

FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Chill Night

It's easy to get lost in the shuffle of everyday life. Before we know it, a whole week has flown by. Carve out an evening over the coming week to relax and reconnect as a family. Mark it on your calendar. Something else will likely pop up but, unless it's an emergency, protect that time.

Plan ahead to share a meal and do something fun with your family or friends. Consider ordering takeout so that no one has to cook. Put the electronic devices away and play some games together, watch a movie, visit a park or choose another relaxing activity. As your evening wraps up, take some time to pray and thank God for the restful evening of reconnecting with him and one another.

Family/Group Activity #2 - Sunday Recharge

While we know that sabbath rest doesn't necessarily have to happen on a specific day in particular, Sundays are typically a good day to experiment with an intentional slow down at least once a week.

Pick a Sunday in the upcoming weeks. Mark it on your calendar, so that you don't accidentally schedule an event that day. Remind your family/group the day before that tomorrow will be a relaxing Sunday of rest so that everyone knows what to expect.

Make sure to plan the day's meals ahead of time and lay out clothes the night before so that Sunday morning isn't rushed. There is no sense in starting your "slow down day" in a frenzy! Go to bed the night before at a decent time so that you wake up refreshed.

After Sunday worship, whether onsite or online, eat lunch together. Decide on some activities for the afternoon, both individual and together as a family or group. Encourage kids to spend time doing a hobby they enjoy such as reading, listening to music or going for a walk. Set the example for your children or others by picking relaxing activities for yourself as well.

WEEK SIX | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing]
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[Sabbath](#) - Bible Project

Podcasts Episodes:

[7th Day Rest Series](#) - Sabbath - Bible Project

[Sabbath](#) - Fight Hustle, End Hurry Podcast

[Slowing Down](#) - Fight Hustle, End Hurry Podcast

[Time and the Spiritual Practices](#) - Doable Discipleship

Sermon Audio:

[Humility Our Posture \(2015\)](#) - Chuck Sackett

Articles:

[Meekness and Rest \(Chapter 9 from The Pursuit of God\)](#) - A.W. Tozer

[How to Actually Be More Humble](#) - Matt Ingalls

[A Rest from Our Labor... And In His Work](#) - Mandy Smith

Books:

[Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership](#) - John Dickson

[To Hell With The Hustle](#) - Jefferson Bethke

[Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest](#) - Lynne Baab

WEEK SIX | TRUST [Sabbath & Slowing]

CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 9:1–16

When we live with a posture of humility, we embrace Jesus' rhythms of work and rest.

Key Scriptures:

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes... Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

- John 9:13–14, 16

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

- Genesis 2:1–3

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep 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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

- Exodus 20:8–10

And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

- Mark 2:27–28

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

- Philippians 2:5–7

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

- Hebrews 4:9–10

Message Highlights:

- The people who were confronting Jesus about breaking the sabbath had a misunderstanding of why God tells us to practice sabbath rest.
- God's command for us to practice sabbath rest is not just a rule for us to prove our devotion to him. Sabbath was created for our benefit.
- The Sabbath command to rest was for the purpose of renewal, healing and reflecting on the glory of God.
- God knows our limits and our needs better than we do. He tells us to rest and slow down in order that we might trust in him and experience a more fulfilling life.
- When we neglect rest and allow busyness to overtake us, we start to believe that everything in life depends on us, the weight falls on our shoulders.

- Jesus observed the Sabbath as it was intended to be experienced resting in God and trusting in his Father for healing.
- When we live with a posture of humility, we embrace Jesus' rhythms of work and rest.

Conversation Starter:

- If you had a free day to just unwind, rest and be with God, how would you spend that day? What would you do? What would you not do?

Discuss the Message:

1. Read Philippians 2:5–7. In what ways did Jesus model a posture of humility?
2. Do you find it easy to carve out times of rest, or is it difficult for you to slow down? Why do you think that is?
3. How is taking time to rest a demonstration of humility (see Psalm 46:10)?
4. What do you think about the fact that God himself rested on the seventh day in the creation story? How is God's rest in creation connected to our resting and recreation (recreation)?
5. Read Mark 2:27–28. What do you think Jesus meant by "the sabbath was made for man" and not the other way around?
6. Do you tend to overcommit to more activities than you really have time for? If so, why do you think you do that? If not, what encouragement would you give those who do tend to overcommit?
7. How is slowing down a demonstration of our trust in God (see Isaiah 64:4)?
8. What is one thing you need to remove from your calendar to help you slow down a bit?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Pray that we would embrace our trust in God and learn to practice healthy rhythms of work and rest.
- Pray that God would work in the areas of our hearts that can lead us to overcommit in order to please others or prove something to ourselves.
- Pray that God would meet us in our times of rest, reflection and worship, that we might gaze at his glory and be renewed for the work he has called us to do.

WEEK SEVEN

RELENTLESS OUR COMMITMENT | MISSION [Service]

Emil Brunner once wrote, “The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.” Read that again...”Fire exists by burning.” Once the flame goes out, there is no more fire. The church exists by mission. If we’re not carrying out the mission God has for us, we’re not really being the church.

That’s a pretty heavy thought to take in. So, how do we make sure we are living on mission as God’s people, both individually and collectively? Just as with every other topic we’ve engaged with so far on this journey, Jesus himself provides us with the answer through his own personal life example. When the time came for Jesus to endure the cross, Luke tells us that he “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51–52). Luke clearly wants his readers to understand that Jesus was on a mission. He was not going to let anything distract or derail him from accomplishing that mission. Jesus was relentless.

Jesus’ relentless pursuit of God’s mission, however, did not start there in that moment as he headed toward Jerusalem and the cross. In the Gospels, we see Jesus serving others on a daily basis as he taught, encouraged, fed and healed people. He took on the role of a servant and washed his disciple’s feet (John 13:1–20). We catch a glimpse of the intensity which Jesus brought to his pursuit of God’s mission when he cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15–19). He was constantly serving others as a means of breaking down the barriers that keep people from encountering God.

What does it look like for us to imitate Jesus, relentlessly pursuing his mission? If we follow his example, the answer is simple: serve others. Jesus is our example of what it looks like to live on mission and to embrace serving others as a pathway to connect with God. Even though Jesus is King, he did not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45) and he calls us to do the same. Loving our neighbors does not mean thinking nice thoughts about them, it means to serve them in tangible ways. Who is your neighbor? Whoever needs you to be their neighbor, that’s who.

When we live out the purpose God has for our lives by serving others, we grow spiritually. Service is a spiritual discipline and a formative practice, just as prayer, fasting and solitude are. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus tells a parable that clearly connects serving others with our relationship to him. Being on mission is less about taking a week-long trip or engaging in a once-in-a-while project. While those are great things, service is more of a daily discipline, a way of living.

God’s mission moves forward when we choose to relentlessly pursue a life of service. As a church family, we are committed to serving one another, our community and the world. Our motivation is never to be seen by others (Matthew 6:1–2) nor is it out of pity that we serve. It is through self-sacrificial love that we tackle both large and small tasks, seen and unseen, in response to what Christ has done for us. This week’s Presence Activities are focused on committing our hearts to a life of service and to ensuring that our motivation is pure. The Mission Activities are aimed at helping you explore new and creative avenues for serving as Jesus did.

Relentless is our commitment!

WEEK SEVEN | MISSION [Service] INWARD JOURNEY

Prayer is the mighty engine that is to move the missionary work.

- A.B. Simpson

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

- Colossians 3:23–24

Presence Activity #1 - Relentless Prayers

The mission of God is fueled by prayer. All throughout the New Testament, prayers and requests for prayer are made in connection with the fulfillment of the mission Jesus has entrusted to us.

Look up the following Scriptures in your Bible or on your Bible app. Take note of the emphasis on the mission of Jesus and our call to serve others:

- Matthew 6:9–10
- Matthew 9:36–38
- Matthew 28:18–20
- Mark 10:45
- Galatians 6:9
- Colossians 1:3–6
- 2 Timothy 1:8–9
- 1 Peter 4:10

Choose a few of the verses that stood out the most to you. Re-read the verses you chose. Reflect on what God might be drawing your attention to. Now, go back to those verses that stood out and use them to form your prayer today. For example:

Read & Reflect - For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. - Mark 10:45

Prayer - Father, if your Son came to serve, then I want to serve as well. Give me strength to serve others relentlessly, especially when I'm tempted to be selfish. I want to serve you with my whole life, just as Jesus did. Amen.

Presence Activity #2 - Prayer for the Nations

Carve out some time this week to pray specifically for those who have left their loved ones to go share the gospel and serve others far from home:

- Pray for their strength and endurance
- Ask God to provide for their physical and material needs
- Pray for their ministry to be fruitful, for people to hear and respond to the gospel
- Ask God to raise up more workers for the harvest
- If you would like to pray specifically for the missionary partners of Madison Park by name, go to www.madisonparkchurch.com/serve.

WEEK SEVEN | MISSION [Service] OUTWARD MISSION

The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity.
- Mike Stachura

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
- Acts 1:8

Mission Activity #1 - Love Your Neighbor

Often when we hear talk about “missionary” activity in the church, we tend to immediately think of those who go to far away places to reach others with the love of Jesus. That is great because, as we can see in the Scripture above (Acts 1:8), God has called us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

However, notice in that verse that the church was not only called to reach those far from their home; we are also called to reach those who God has placed right next door to us. Think about your neighbors who live physically closest to you...

*Do you know their names? Their story? Their needs?
Do they know you are praying for them?
Do they know that you are there for them when they need help?*

This week, reach out to and serve your neighbors. This may be as simple as dropping off some baked goods with a note. It could mean inviting them over for a backyard cookout. Whatever you do for them, big or small, Jesus will use it to work through you as you live on mission with him.

Mission Activity #2 - Relentless Encouragement

Missionaries trust that the churches who send them out are praying for them often. When they receive a tangible reminder that this is indeed the case, it is a source of real strength and encouragement.

Go to www.madisonparkchurch.com/serve to see who Madison Park is partnering with for local and global missions. Choose one or more of the missionaries and write their name(s) and ministry individually on a post-it note.

Stick the post-it notes in places you will be reminded each day to pray for the gospel to be lived out and for people to experience life change, just as we have had the privilege of experiencing because of God’s grace.

Now, write a note of encouragement to those who you are praying for. Let them know that you are praying for them. Send that note to them through mail, email or social media. If you need help finding their contact info, contact Scott Bates (scott@madisonparkchurch.com | 217-222-2529 ext.130).

WEEK SEVEN | MISSION [Service] FAMILY/GROUP ACTIVITIES

Family/Group Activity #1 - Serve Together, Grow Together

Pick a local organization whose mission aligns with your values and spend some time volunteering there. If donations are needed, go shopping together to pick up some needed items. If you have children, involve them in the decision making process of what to buy, if possible. Let your friends and family know about the organization and offer to pick up donations from them to deliver as well.

If you're not sure where to start volunteering, [Horizons Soup Kitchen](#) is a great choice. Horizons volunteers serve packaged meals Monday through Friday from 12:00-1:00pm at 224 South 8th Street in Quincy. Their phone number is 217-224-5530. Madison Park volunteers serve on Tuesdays each week; contact Scott Bates at scott@madisonparkchurch.com to sign up!

Family/Group Activity #2 - Won't You Be My Neighbor?

Take the time to intentionally look around the neighborhood or area where you live and identify some areas where you could potentially serve your neighbors. Elderly men and women may appreciate you running some errands for them, doing yard work, washing windows, changing a light bulb in the house or helping them set up electronics.

Neighbors with pets may occasionally need help pet sitting or taking an animal on a walk. If you offer to help someone out, they may be willing to allow you to help, even if they would never ask for help on their own.

Finally, food is always a great idea. The next time you prepare a favorite recipe, make two and take one entrée to a neighbor. Bake cookies together and prepare covered plates of cookies to deliver. Attach a note with your favorite Bible verse. Serving others is fun for everyone. It is an especially meaningful way to teach young ones to serve others so that it becomes their way of life.

WEEK SEVEN | MISSION [Service]
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

[God Calls You To Serve Others](#) - Ravi Zacharias
[Spiritual Disciplines - Service](#) - SalvationArmy

Podcasts Episodes:

[Made for Mission](#) - Doable Discipleship

Sermon Audio:

[Relentless Our Commitment \(2015\)](#) - Tyler Myers

Articles:

[The Eternal and Spiritual Significance of Work](#) - Eddy Sanders
[Things That Hold Us Back From Serving Others](#) - Marney McNall
[Serving to Be the Church](#) - James Jones

Books:

[Crazy Love](#) - Francis Chan
[All In](#) - Mark Batterson
[When Helping Hurts](#) - Corbett & Fikkert

WEEK SEVEN | MISSION [Service] CONNECT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sunday Message | John 18:33–38

God's mission moves forward when we relentlessly pursue a life of service.

Key Scriptures:

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

- John 18:37

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

- Matthew 20:25–26

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

- Mark 10:45

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 6:1

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- 1 Corinthians 12:4–7

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

- Matthew 25:40

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- Romans 12:1

Message Highlights:

- Jesus was a man with a mission. When we pledge our allegiance to our resurrected King Jesus, we commit our lives to advancing his kingdom through sacrificial service.
- We bear witness of the truth about Jesus when we live as he lived, serving others.
- Our motivation in serving others is not to be noticed by others, or as an attempt to earn God's favor. Our motivation is the love and grace God has shown us.
- Jesus was relentless in his commitment to the mission his Father gave to him.
- Every person who is in Christ has been given spiritual gifts and abilities for advancing the mission of God.
- Whenever we serve others, whether in big or little ways, we are serving Christ himself.

- God's mission moves forward when we relentlessly pursue a life of service.

Conversation Starter:

- If you could have one superpower, what would you choose? How would you use it to help others?

Discuss the Message:

1. Jesus is our King, yet he became a servant. How does his example impact the way we engage in serving others?
2. Read Ephesians 4:1–16. How can serving others be a spiritual formation practice?
3. What is the best way to discover what our spiritual gifts for serving might be?
4. How do we decide what specific areas of serving we should commit to when there are so many needs around us?
5. Read Matthew 6:1. How can we make sure that our motives for serving stay pure?
6. In what ways can your vocation become part of your living on mission for Jesus (see Colossians 3:17)?
7. How can we remain steadfast when we grow weary in serving others (see Galatians 6:9–10)? Where do we go to find renewed strength for the mission?

Pray:

- Pray for one another as a group.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower us for ministry and that we would be able to discern what he has uniquely gifted each of us to do.
- Pray that we would have discernment to know specifically what God is calling us to as a church on mission.
- Pray for the courage and confidence in our calling to relentlessly pursue his Kingdom through serving others in tangible ways.

