

FOLLOW

a guide for
following Jesus
in community
on mission.

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

CONTENTS

FOLLOW: FOLLOWING JESUS IN COMMUNITY ON MISSION	7
WEEK ONE	
01 FOLLOW	14
WEEK TWO	
02 IDENTITY	28
WEEK THREE	
03 FORMATION	42
WEEK FOUR	
04 WHOLENESS	56
WEEK FIVE	
05 COMMUNITY	70
WEEK SIX	
06 SENT	82
WEEK SEVEN	
07 RENEWAL	94
APPENDIX Icebreaker Questions	106

MISSION

Living in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus

VISION

To be an inter-ethnic, intergenerational community of disciples partnering with Jesus to bring about renewal in Escondido, North County, and to the ends of the earth.

FOLLOW: FOLLOWING JESUS IN COMMUNITY ON MISSION

WELCOME

Dear Fellow Followers,

Welcome to Follow, a journey of learning to follow Jesus in community on mission. We're so grateful you're stepping into this journey. In a world pulling us in a hundred different directions, Jesus' simple, life-changing invitation still stands: "Follow me." (Matt. 4:19) This course is our intentional "yes" to that call.

At Emmanuel Faith, we define a disciple as someone who is following Jesus in community on mission. That's the shape of this journey, and it shows up in our disciple DNA:

- D** - Daily time with God: creating space to be with Jesus.
- N** - Nurtured in Community: processing growth with others.
- A** - Active on Mission: joining Jesus in His work where we live, learn, work, and play.

Our hope for you is simple yet profound: that you will encounter Jesus afresh, grow confident in your identity as His beloved, and experience real transformation that touches the deepest parts of your being and your relationships, shaping you into someone who makes disciples wherever you go. We pray that you'll feel the gentle tug of the Good Shepherd and find your pace with Him: unhurried, attentive, and joyful.

Your investment matters, so show up, stay present, and trust the process. This is not a content dump; it's a relational apprenticeship. The steady rhythm matters more than the pace. You'll get out what you put in. Bring a Bible and the Companion Guide. Make space each week for the Practice and for reflection. Share honestly in your group. Celebrate small steps. Ask big questions. The aim isn't perfection; it's progress, "working out" what God is already "working in" you (Phil. 2:12-13).



A few things to know as we begin:

- 1. This course is built for community.**

Discipleship isn't a solo project. Follow is meant to be walked out with others, whether that's a few friends around a table, your life group, a class at church, or even our whole church family leaning in together.
- 2. The journey will take intentionality.**

Over the course of the next few weeks, we're going to invite you to do some deep work. To get the most out of it, we recommend three things. First, commit to spending time with God daily. Second, ask him to help you grow. Finally, when things get challenging or uncomfortable, push in, don't drift away.
- 3. You'll want a Companion Guide.**

Everyone in the group needs a copy of this Companion Guide. You can grab a print version at Emmanuel Faith or download the free digital PDF at efcc.org/follow. We recommend the print version as it keeps you off your devices and gives space for notes and reflection, but if digital (or free) works better for you, that's great too.
- 4. Each topic takes about 1-2 hours, plus Group time.**

It will depend on how long your group wants to linger in discussion and whether you use the optional group practices. Don't rush. Make room for God to do His work in you.

We believe the Holy Spirit loves to meet ordinary people who make simple, consistent room for Him. Expect fresh courage to obey, freedom in places that have felt stuck, and a growing desire to bless our city. As we follow Jesus together, our prayer is that the aroma of Christ would linger in our homes, workplaces, schools, and streets; little foretastes of the day He makes all things new.

Thank you for saying yes. Let's take the next step following Jesus in community on mission.

Grace + Peace,
The Follow Team at Emmanuel Faith

DISCIPLESHIP PLAN OVERVIEW

OUR GOAL:

To build a disciple-making culture that is intentional, reproducible, and maximizes every opportunity to help every disciple take their next step with Jesus.

OUR DEFINITION:

At EFCC, we define a disciple as someone who is: Following Jesus in community on mission

PATHWAY	PRACTICES	PROGRAM	TOOLS
Follow Jesus	Daily time with God	Worship	REST Journal
in Community	Nurtured in community	Groups	Questions
on Mission	Active on mission	Service	Prayer Note

FOLLOW COMMITMENT

At Emmanuel Faith, we want Follow to be a safe and sacred place where real life and real faith meet. Our goal is to create an environment where you can be honest about your story, wrestle with questions, and experience grace without fear of judgment. We are not here to fix one another; we are here to walk with one another as we follow Jesus together.

Growth happens best in an atmosphere of trust, so we ask every participant to help protect that space by maintaining confidentiality and showing care. What is shared in your group stays in your group. Speak with honesty, listen with empathy, and extend the same grace you hope to receive. Also, be mindful not to monopolize the time; we want everyone to have a chance to share and be heard.

The best way to get the most out of this journey is to make it a priority—your presence and participation matter, not only for your own growth but for the growth of others. If you anticipate missing more than two gatherings, we encourage you to join a future Follow group when you can be fully engaged.

MY COMMITMENT:

I will make every effort to attend all sessions, participate openly and with respect, and maintain complete confidentiality about what others share in our group.

Signed: _____

Date: _____





Week One

01 | FOLLOW

Text: Matthew 4:12-19
Memory verse: ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
(Matthew 4:19)
Song: *The Jesus Way* by Phil Wickham
Additional Resources: *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer

WEEK 1 | Follow

Everyone is a disciple. Every one of us is following someone or something. The real question isn’t, “*Am I a disciple?*” but “*Whose disciple am I?*”

The word disciple (Greek: mathētēs) appears 261 times in the New Testament, underscoring its central role in the story of Jesus and the early church. The Gospels describe those who left everything to follow Jesus; people learning His way of life, walking in His presence, and being shaped by His teachings. In Acts, the word expands to include all believers, men and women, learning to live in obedience to the risen Christ.

Throughout Scripture, a disciple is someone who listens, learns, and lives in response to Jesus. Being a disciple isn’t just about believing certain truths; it’s about apprenticing your whole life in the way of the Master. We rightly call Jesus Savior and Lord, but He is also Teacher, and He wants to show us how to live the life we were always meant to live.

This first week invites you to wrestle with one question: *Am I following Jesus?* Not simply, *Do I believe in Him?* But, *Am I learning, step by step, to walk in His ways?* Following Jesus isn’t just about a moment of faith; it’s about a lifelong movement of transformation, learning to live with Him, become like Him, and do what He did.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Luke 5:1-11

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- Circle the words or phrases that stand out to you.
- What did Jesus do? What did he promise? What did he call the disciples to do? What did they do?
- Pause, maybe close your eyes, and picture yourself in the story. Where do you see yourself?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it? What is he asking you to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Come and See** | John 1:35–39

Ryan Paulson

I vividly remember the first backpacking trip I ever went on. I was a late addition to the roster. When I first tried to sign up, the trip was full, so I landed on the waiting list. Two days before departure, someone got sick, and suddenly, I was in. What I didn't realize was how unprepared I was. I'd never been backpacking. I didn't know how to read a map. And I only knew a handful of the people who were going.

When we arrived at camp, we were issued our gear, loaded up, and headed toward the trailhead. Somewhere in the miles that lay ahead, my life was quietly, unexpectedly changed. I'll never forget standing on the summit as the sun rose, watching mountain ranges stack up like layers of watercolor. I remember thinking, If I had said no... I would have missed this. One simple yes opened the door to an experience that shaped me forever.

Following Jesus often works the same way. In John 1, two future disciples begin following Jesus. They were curious, a little unsure, maybe even awkwardly close. Jesus turns, looks them square in the eyes, and asks the question He still asks every one of us: **"What are you seeking?"**

They respond with a question of their own: **"Where are you staying?"** It sounds odd to us, but it was their way of saying, "Who are you really? Can we come close enough to find out?"

And Jesus' invitation couldn't be simpler: **"Come and see."**

Notice what He doesn't do.

He doesn't demand a doctrinal statement.

He doesn't require certainty.

He doesn't hand them a checklist called "Discipleship."

He simply invites them into a relationship, into proximity, presence, and discovery.

Discipleship always begins with holy curiosity. Something in us whispers, *maybe there's more to Jesus than I've known. Maybe He really can reshape my life.* None of us starts following Jesus because we've figured everything out. We follow because we've seen just enough of Him to want more. And it begins with one small step: opening the Scriptures, showing up in community, whispering a prayer, asking an honest question, paying attention to the tug in your soul.

DAY 2 | **Lean In** | Mark 3:13–21

Lynette Fuson

Have you ever had a child tap you on the shoulder and say, "I want to tell you a secret"? What do you do? You lean in. You listen intently because that little one, at that moment, is the most important person in the world. You are treasuring what that child has to say by being *with* them.

Maybe it's visiting an elderly person. They have lived a full life and are content that they will soon be with Jesus. Yet in their last moments on earth, they long to impart further wisdom. So, you lean in and listen intently. You are uniting with that person, being *with* them.

Listening intently can also happen in nature. A walk on the beach, meandering through a meadow, hiking a mountain pass... While there, you lean into the experience, listening intently for God to reveal Himself through His creation. You are experiencing God in His creation by being *with* Him.

"Being *with*" requires leaning in. It means tuning out the noise around us and becoming fully focused on who we are *with*. That little child, elderly saint, or sacred piece of nature is not asking you to do something – they just want you to be *with* them—to lean in.

Mark 3:14 says, "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." Being *with* Jesus does not eliminate God's command for us to go out and proclaim His truth, but being *with* Jesus is a precursor to doing *for* Jesus.

Author Skye Jethani says, "Life *with* God entails treasuring, uniting, and experiencing... the call to dwell or abide is an ongoing state of being, not an invitation to chat once in a while." Being *with* God means leaning in; being close enough to hear his voice, receiving whatever he has for you, whenever he has it, and through whatever method he determines to deliver it.

Revelation 21:3 says, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God." Jesus longs to be *with* you—do you long to be *with* Him? Jethani goes on to say, "it is only when we grasp God's unyielding desire to be *with* us that we begin to see the ultimate purpose of the cross." This was exactly Jesus' intention as He spent time *with* His disciples. Had Jesus not spent time *with* them, they would have had no basis for doing anything *for* Him.

Treasuring who God is and what He has done for us allows us to be united *with* Him, through experiencing Him—not only for eternity, but also and absolutely for today. Your God is inviting you into a personal and intimate relationship *with* Him. Will you decide to lean in?

DAY 3 | **No Two Ways About It** | Luke 9:57-62

Scott Smith

I think we live in a world that likes to hedge its bets. Some young adults (I have heard this with my own ears) talk about how crazy it is to get married without a prenuptial agreement. The thought of making an “all-in” commitment is ludicrous. Others will make a commitment to this or that and intend to keep it *unless something better comes along*. When it does, they bounce. In sports, you can bet on both teams. Even in the stock market, you can short the same stock you are holding with the intention of selling it at a higher price. In the language of today’s text, our culture seems to value the ability to “put your hand to the plow” while “looking back,” ostensibly to make sure something better isn’t coming along.

But this approach doesn’t work in the Kingdom. Why? First, nothing we would “look back” on would even come close to being as valuable as the Kingdom of God! (See Jesus’ Parables in Matthew 13:44-46) So it would be kind of dumb to turn down something infinitely more valuable than what we have just to hold on to what we have. Yet people do it all the time.

Second, a commitment to the kingdom of God can be a costly one while we still live in this world. Jesus knows and models this. I recall a wise pastor who mentored me when I was considering vocational ministry. He told me to be very sure about pastoral work because it isn’t always an easy life. He was right, as the first church I served in after seminary went through a nasty, divisive split. Had I not been sure of my calling and commitment to that calling, I might have been tempted to hang up my spikes.

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, not only is He calling us to live in the most valuable realm there ever will be, but He is also calling us to make a full commitment to Him because He knows that anything less will jeopardize our effectiveness and usefulness (which in turn affects His glory and our joy). So, while Jesus’ teaching may seem a bit intense and heartless, it really isn’t because He is fully aware of the costs and rewards of following Him and living in His Kingdom.

DAY 4 | **Will You Accept His Invitation?** | Matthew 11:28-30

Caroline Chaiban

Do more... Be more... The pressure builds like a drumbeat in the background of our lives. Expectations stack up. Responsibilities multiply. The world chants, “*More! More! More!*” And somewhere inside, we brace ourselves—*Don’t break. Don’t crack. Keep going.*

But above all the noise, there is another Voice—A gentle whisper. A holy invitation:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

What if you took Him at His word? What if you laid it all down at His feet—the fears, the hurt, the striving, even the weight of who you think you must be? Instead of struggling to carry our burdens, what if you let Him carry you?

Your Heavenly Father longs to free your hands so they can hold His. He invites you to rest—not just physically, but deep in your soul. When you feel like you can’t take another step, He offers His strong shoulder. When you feel alone, He wraps you in everlasting love. In His arms, you are safe (Psalm 91:4-6). In His arms, you are loved (Romans 8:37-39). In His arms, you are enough (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus invites you to take His yoke—not a burden, but a bond. A way of walking so close to Him that your steps fall into rhythm with His. His yoke is perfectly fitted for you. His pace is one your soul can actually bear.

But can we trust His pace? When life screams for speed and productivity, can you gently turn your attention back to His steady steps beside us? Can you feel His nearness, guiding you forward, carrying what you cannot?

Every burden you release into His hands, He lifts. None are too heavy, none too small (John 16:33). The weight that crushes you cannot crush Him (2 Chronicles 20:6). The One who conquered death (John 3:16-17) has already carried your heaviest burden—your sin—because He desires a relationship with you (Romans 5:8-10).

If He carried the greatest burden, can you trust Him with all the others? The hands that shaped your heart are reaching out, waiting patiently to lift what weighs you down. On His yoke, there is a place made just for you. Will you accept His invitation to rest?

PRACTICE | **Practicing the Presence of God**

Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite monk, is one of the best-known voices on intimacy with Christ. He called this solitude of the heart, “Practicing the Presence of God.” Brother Lawrence was not a priest or teacher, but a lay brother. Following a near-fatal injury during the Thirty Years’ War, he entered a Carmelite Monastery in Paris, crippled, and became their cook. While his daily routine included the mundane tasks of a cook, he did so with a passion to know and be known; for his Lord to be ever-present in every part of every day. Lawrence was said to be “never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit.” He claimed that this was not spirituality, but the “practice of the presence of God in all ways and in all times.” During his almost 50 years as a monk, he was sought out by monks and outsiders alike for the beauty of his soul.

Practicing God’s presence means “discerning and developing habits for discerning and awareness of God’s presence.” This comes in part through “noticing.” Noticing draws our attention to the creation that surrounds us and the Creator who has formed a beautiful tapestry of goodness, mercy, and grace right before our very eyes. Noticing takes our attention off ourselves and invites us into the presence of the Almighty.

Start your day by noticing God’s presence.

- Go for a walk outside. Try not to think about anything in particular—just notice.
- Breathe deeply and slowly.
- Listen.
- Smell.
- Look.
- Feel.
- Ask God to reveal Himself.
- Call out names of God.
- Call out his blessings.
- Be still and know.

The Bible uses phrases such as “abiding,” “remaining in Christ,” “walking with God,” and “keeping in step with the Spirit.”

The following are 13 images that portray what it means to practice God’s presence. These are not one-time actions but ongoing practices. Choose a few to read, ponder, and practice this week, then share your experience with someone.

- **Abide:** John 15:4-5
- **Love:** Matthew 22:37-40
- **Set your mind:** Romans 8:5-6
- **Walk (in step with the Spirit):** Galatians 5:16, 25
- **Set your heart:** Colossians 3:1-2
- **Rejoice:** Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16
- **Pray:** 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- **Give thanks (in all circumstances):** 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- **Run (with endurance and perseverance):** Hebrews 12:1-2
- **Submit/Offer (yourself):** Romans 12:1-2
- **Press on:** Philippians 3:12-14
- **Dwell:** Philippians 4:6-8
- **Remember (God’s faithfulness and provision):** Deuteronomy 8:2-3

GROUP QUESTIONS

Each week as you gather with your group, you will find questions to help you learn, grow, and connect. The goal is not to attempt to answer each question, but to engage with Scripture and discern what Jesus is saying to you.

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Introduce yourself and share a little bit about your life and what you hope Jesus will do in you through this course.
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Matthew 4:12-19 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- As you look back on your life, who or what has had the greatest impact on your spiritual journey thus far? How and why?
- What did “Follow me” actually require for Jesus’ first disciples? Go back through the passage and note what the disciples did. What does following Jesus mean for us today?
- How is following Jesus different from believing in Jesus? How are the two ideas connected? Which of these do you tend to focus on more? Why?
- Look back in the text and note that before Jesus calls the fishermen, Matthew points out the pull of voices, kingdoms, and crowds all around Galilee (vv. 12-17). What are the dominant voices you see shaping our culture today?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- Who or what is discipling you most prominently today?
- What is Jesus saying to you?
- How do you feel about what Jesus is saying?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER

- What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?
- Pray for one another to follow Jesus in community on mission.

6. GROUP PRACTICE

- As a group, make a list of prayer requests you revisit each week. (Note: these are prayer requests about how you want to follow Jesus, not about your aunt’s broken arm... though that’s important too!)



Week Two

02 | IDENTITY

Text: Matthew 4:19; John 1:11-12; 1 Peter 2:9-10
Memory verse: ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)
Song: *Who Am I* by Needtobreathe
Additional Resources: *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller

WEEK 2 | Identity

Discipleship begins not with what we do for God, but with what God has already done for us. Our starting point is not something we earn or achieve; it’s the gift of a brand-new identity. In Christ, the verdict is already settled: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1). We are forgiven, declared righteous, and set free, not because we worked for it, but because Jesus secured it.

From that place of grace, we learn to live as people who are “alive in the Spirit” (vv. 5-13). We are no longer defined by our past or enslaved to old patterns; we are empowered to live as people of the new creation. The Spirit doesn’t help us perform better; He makes us new from the inside out.

And at the deepest level, discipleship means learning to live as beloved sons and daughters of God, and it does require learning. Just because we have a new identity, it doesn’t mean that our old patterns and pains completely disappear. As we walk with Jesus, we learn to trust in who he says we already are by listening to the Spirit who whispers to our hearts, “You belong to God.” We are invited to surrender to the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father.

This is where following Jesus truly begins, not in striving to become something, but in resting in who He’s already declared you to be. Everything else in the journey flows from this identity of grace.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Romans 8:1-15

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 2 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Born Again** | John 3:1-9

Sharon Chapman

Everyone is born physically alive, but not everyone is spiritually alive. Spiritual life results from receiving Jesus Christ.

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 1:3)

“Yet to all who... believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12)

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:6)

God’s Spirit makes you into a completely new spiritual creation with an entirely new identity. You are His reborn workmanship! The “Who I Am in Christ” affirmations (see the Practice section for this week to read more about Who I Am in Christ affirmations) confirm the attributes of a born-again Christian’s new identity.

Throughout your life, you have received messages about who you are. Some messages agree with your born-again identity. Some do not. Sadly, those messages have sometimes led you to see yourself as unacceptable, insecure, and insignificant. These negative views of identity often become who you think you are.

The good news is that, once you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, your identity changed radically to one who is accepted unconditionally, totally secure, and greatly significant. In Christ, your identity is redefined because of your relationship with Him. Your past no longer defines who you are.

You might be asking, “If I have a new life with a new identity in Christ, why do I still feel the effects of my past? What does God want me to do about these old ways of thinking?” God loves us so much that He has told us what to do:

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

When you choose to believe everything that your new birth includes, you will increasingly put off your old self and put on your new self. Are you willing to “be made new in the attitude of your mind”? Start by reading the “Who I Am in Christ” affirmations. Ask God to show you what is preventing you from living like they are all true about you.

DAY 2 | **New Creation** | 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Sharon Chapman

God has completely transformed you into someone entirely new, giving you a full life in Christ.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10b)

Living in your new identity is not automatic. God doesn’t instantly change your behavior or erase all your wrong thoughts. But He is available to help you change.

“For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants.” (Philippians 2:13, Living Bible)

With God’s help, you can discard old messages you received from your past and embrace the truths of your new identity. As you do this with the help of His Holy Spirit, God will continue to transform you. Then your thoughts and behavior will reflect the new life He has given you.

For instance:

You no longer have to believe or live like you are rejected, unloved, or shameful. You are God’s treasured possession. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

Nothing in all creation can separate you from God’s love. (Romans 8:35-39)

You no longer have to believe or live like you are guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned. You are forgiven and free from God’s condemnation. (Romans 8:1-2)

You will never be alone. God’s Holy Spirit lives in you. (1 Corinthians 3:16)

You no longer have to believe or live like you are worthless, inadequate, helpless, or hopeless. You can do all that God has planned for you. He lives in you and will enable you. (Philippians 2:13 and 4:13)

You have been given all you need to live the life God created you to live. (2 Peter 1:3)

You may be thinking, “How can I discard wrong messages from my past and embrace my new identity? I’m not even sure how to identify wrong messages. Even if I do, I have no idea how to discard them.”

The best place to start is to ask God to reveal where you have believed something that doesn’t agree with Him. Your new life is based on a relationship with Jesus. He wants you to come to him for help. Take a close look, with God’s help, at attitudes and beliefs that are driving your behavior. You don’t have to stay stuck in your old ways—you are a New Creation!

DAY 3 | **Christ Lives in Me** | Galatians 2:20

Sharon Chapman

Your new life in Christ includes the presence of God's Holy Spirit living in you.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20a)

"...you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit..." (Ephesians 1:13b)

To experience the fullness of your new life in Christ, it will be necessary to surrender all that conflicts with the Holy Spirit.

"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

Sometimes a stronghold makes it difficult to live your new life. A stronghold is a habit or a way of thinking that controls how you live. God has given us instructions in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 for surrendering strongholds.

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

Paul mentions we have been persuaded to believe things that do not agree with God's truth, resulting in strongholds. So, what can you do? God says **Take them captive! Make them obedient to Christ!** Take a thought captive by asking if it agrees with what God says is true. Make it obedient to Christ by choosing to believe it (if it agrees with what God says is true) or by refusing to believe it (if it disagrees with what God says is true).

Further obedience requires replacing wrong thoughts with God's truth. For example, if I believe I am not good enough, I need to realize that is not how God sees me. It is a lie! He says I am His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). I am complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). I am His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6).

I must accept and embrace these truths to keep the lie from influencing how I live.

As you surrender thoughts and attitudes from your old identity, your new life in Christ will become an expression of His love, not your old self. You'll become increasingly sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. Satan will lose the ability to influence your thoughts. What a gift we have through Jesus Christ, who lives in each of us!

DAY 4 | **A Chosen People** | 1 Peter 2:9-10

Sharon Chapman

Purpose flows naturally from identity. A surgeon performs surgery. A mail carrier delivers mail. A born-again child of God lives to show others the love and goodness of God. You have not just been saved *from* something. You have been saved *for* something.

"You have been chosen by God himself—you are priests of the King, you are holy and pure, you are God's very own—all this so that you may show to others how God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were less than nothing; now you are God's own. Once you knew very little of God's kindness; now your very lives have been changed by it." (1 Peter 2:9-10, Living Bible)

"God gave us the ministry of reconciliation... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." (2 Corinthians 5:18b, 20)

Being certain of who you are in Christ will determine how you represent Him because your life will always reflect what you believe. As you mature in Christ, your identity will not come from what you do; what you do will flow from your security in who you are in Christ. Once you are certain of God's love, acceptance, and approval, you don't need to work to earn it. You serve from gratitude for all He has done for you. You are freed to become Christ's ambassador and an agent of reconciliation between others and God.

"Come follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19)

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, your calling is a mission to disciple others to grow in their understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done for them.

"For we are God's workmanship created in Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

God has created you uniquely different from every other person. Likewise, His purpose for you is uniquely designed and prepared in advance by Him. The specific way in which you will serve God is a calling you receive as you abide in Christ. You don't lead the way; you follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. So, as you spend time with your Lord, ask Him to show you what He wants you to offer to others whose hearts and lives He wants to impact through you. He chose you because he loves you!

PRACTICE | “Who I Am in Christ” by Neil T. Anderson

Did you know that your God, your Creator, is head over heels in love with you!? Accepting and believing who our Creator says we are isn’t as easy as it sounds, because we are wired to be in control and do things our own way. Truly understanding and living out the truth that we are who God has created us to be comes from practice.

Read through the following list. Circle one statement in each section that you wholeheartedly believe. Celebrate this! Tell someone about this truth that you know as a child of God.

Next, circle one statement in each section that is hard for you to believe. Read the passage connected to the statement every day for a week, asking the Holy Spirit to help you see yourself as the dearly loved child that your God created you to be.

I Am Accepted

- I am God’s child — John 1:12
- I am Christ’s friend — John 15:15
- I have been justified — Romans 5:1
- I am united with the Lord, and I am one spirit with Him — 1 Corinthians 6:17
- I have been bought with a price; I belong to God — 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- I am a member of Christ’s body — 1 Corinthians 12:27
- I am a saint — Ephesians 1:1
- I have been adopted as God’s child — Ephesians 1:5
- I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit — Ephesians 2:18
- I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins — Colossians 1:14
- I am complete in Christ — Colossians 2:10

I Am Secure

- I am free forever from condemnation — Romans 8:1–2
- I am assured that all things work together for good — Romans 8:28
- I cannot be separated from the love of God — Romans 8:35–39
- I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God — 2 Corinthians 1:21–22
- I am hidden with Christ in God — Colossians 3:3
- I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected — Philippians 1:6
- I am a citizen of heaven — Philippians 3:20
- I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind — 2 Timothy 1:7

- I can find grace and mercy in time of need — Hebrews 4:16
- I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me — 1 John 5:18

I Am Significant

- I am the salt and light of the earth — Matthew 5:13-14
- I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life — John 15:1, 5
- I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit — John 15:16
- I am a personal witness of Christ — Acts 1:8
- I am God’s temple — 1 Corinthians 3:16
- I am a minister of reconciliation for God — 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
- I am God’s coworker — 2 Corinthians 6:1
- I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm — Ephesians 2:6
- I am God’s workmanship, created for good works — Ephesians 2:10
- I may approach God with freedom and confidence — Ephesians 3:12
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me — Philippians 4:13

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Matthew 4:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- What are the three words Peter uses to describe a disciple’s identity in 1 Peter 2:9? Which of them is hardest for you to believe? Why?
- As you look back on your life, what are some of the false identities you’ve believed? How has that affected you?
- According to Peter, how is knowing our identity connected to the way that we live?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- What is Jesus saying to you?
- How do you feel about what Jesus is saying?
- Read through the “Who I Am in Christ” affirmations listed above. Which do you struggle to believe the most? What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER

- Pray for one another to follow Jesus in community on mission.





Week Three

03 | FORMATION

Text: Philippians 2:12-18
Memory Verse: ¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)
Song: *New Wine* by Hillsong or *Becoming* by Jason Gray
Additional Resource: *You Are What You Love* by James K. A. Smith

WEEK 3 | Formation

Discipleship isn’t just about believing new things; it’s about becoming new people. Jesus invites us to follow Him so that, over time, His life takes shape within ours. Paul describes this process as a Spirit-empowered partnership: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose” (Phil. 2:12-13).

Transformation doesn’t happen automatically, and it’s not something we can produce by sheer effort. Real change is neither passive nor performance-driven; it’s cooperation with grace. As Paul reminds us, we are to “train ourselves for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). That means arranging our lives around rhythms, practices, and postures that make space for the Spirit to do His forming work in us. It’s not about trying harder; it’s about training wiser and drinking deeper; learning to live from God’s power rather than our own willpower.

This change goes deeper than behavior modification. It’s about having our hearts reshaped so that love becomes the engine of our lives. As we practice new habits, the Spirit brings growth, which produces confidence, which leads to joy. That joy then spills over for the good of others, as we “shine like stars in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

Formation is not a self-improvement project; it’s learning to yield to the life of Christ within us. When we stop striving to earn and start surrendering to grace, we begin to live freely and fully as the people we were always meant to be.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 3 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Being Transformed into Glory** | 2 Corinthians 3:18

Jaisen Fuson

I don't consider myself to be a patient person. I want people to think I'm patient, but inside I'm vanquishing a volcano of acceleration toward completion. "Stop and smell the roses," sounds like a convenience afforded to few; or is it?

Backpacking has been a lifelong recreation and spiritual encounter for me. The beginning of the trip is always a shift from comfort into bearing the load and adjusting my gear. This requires patient and attentive awareness of friction points and unbalanced loads. You don't become an experienced trekker on your first journey; you gain this over time, with blisters bearing witness to the transformation. My hikes have primarily been in the mountains. As elevation increases, oxygen decreases, and a reduced pace becomes essential. The slowness of the journey reveals the reason why the trek is meaningful. As I slowly gain altitude, I notice subtle changes. I notice flora in the transformative processes of life. The same plants blooming at a lower altitude in a beautiful array are in bud at elevation. I notice the subtle changes in the rocks and trees as altitude increases, and water unexpectedly appears. If the lack of oxygen were not there, I would speed past these magnificent creations. The delay is a necessary aspect of hiking; it provides the opportunity to behold, wonder, and discover joy. The slowness makes the journey and the struggle meaningful.

In 2 Corinthians 2:12-18, we encounter Moses, the law, and the gospel of Jesus in a new light. Moses' awareness was formed by his journey. Moses experienced a profound transformation by choosing to say "Yes" to God, encountering the Divine along his journey. This encounter was so powerful that his transformation had to be veiled to allow others to be in his presence. The passage references a lifting of the veil that is later understood through Jesus' fulfillment of the law. What we may overlook in this short passage is how Moses' life feels both strangely distant and deeply familiar to our own. Though God used him as a remarkable leader, Moses was still human—marked by weakness, complexity, and grace. Which parts of his story echo in your own? Self-righteous. Vindicated. Judged. Scorned. Rejected. Alone. Afraid. Found. Tested. Tried. Humbled. Searching. Lost. Redeemed. Moses' formation was in response to his inner longing to know his creator. It led to a path of patient wandering. Not in isolation, but in an emerging observation and participation in the slow work God can bring to the observant wanderer. May your journey of following Jesus bring renewed hope in the God who encounters those on the path to find him, in unsuspecting places, as your pace is slowed.

DAY 2 | **The Slow Work of God** | Galatians 4:19

Francie Overstreet

"...until Christ is formed in you."
Galatians 4:19

If you've ever watched HGTV or been involved in a building project, you know that construction almost always takes longer than expected. The blueprint is drawn, the materials gathered, the foundation laid, and then the real process of formation begins. But there are always surprises—unanticipated problems, delays in materials, weather issues, and so on. Years ago, we bought a home in a new tract before it was built and were assured it would be finished by a certain date. Of course, it wasn't. Delay followed delay, but eventually we moved in. Building takes time—and the same is true of spiritual transformation.

When you trusted Christ as your Savior, you became part of His forever family, secure in that identity. But that moment was only the beginning of the journey. As Paul writes in Colossians 3:10, we "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." And again, in Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." Spiritual transformation is a lifelong process of becoming more like Jesus, and it simply cannot be rushed.

It is, in many ways, "the slow work of God." As we grow in intimacy with Him, we gradually come to understand who He is. Formation isn't instant; it is incremental. Over time, you begin to notice God's presence and activity in your daily life—often realizing with surprise that He was there all along. You start to experience His nearness and sense the need to surrender areas of your life that you hadn't recognized as barriers to growth. You discover the joy of slowing down and reflecting on the ways He makes Himself known. "Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10).

As you grow in self-awareness and learn to recognize the inner voice of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit, His purposes for you become clearer. This takes time, and you must extend grace to yourself when the journey feels difficult. Often God invites us to wait, to slow down, to simply be with Him. It is His work in us, unfolding on His timetable. But take heart, because He has given us a beautiful promise: "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)

Is the slow work of God encouraging or discouraging to you? Think about a time you were surprised by God's presence. Who helps you discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in your spiritual transformation?

DAY 3 | **Renew—Rewire—Replace** | Romans 12:1–2

John Riley

When the Apostle Paul wrote Romans 12:2, he did not know about brain chemistry or have insights from today’s brain research. But he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, who knows human brains better than scientists or psychiatrists ever will. That is why Paul’s words are confirmed through modern insights. The verse reads, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Ever since those words were penned, believers have experienced transformation through mind renewal. A process of forsaking past patterns, false beliefs, and unhealthy alignment with the world’s patterns of sin, and replacing those harmful ways with new patterns, belief in Jesus’ saving love, and alignment with God’s way of truth and forgiveness.

Only recently have brain studies revealed that believing the right things about God and his love can help heal and physically rewire the brain’s composition. Timothy R. Jennings, M.D., writes in his book, *The God Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life*,

“When God’s methods for increasing brain health (*Rom. 12:2*) and nurturing mental stability are applied, the brain circuits of the prefrontal cortex actually grow stronger and, despite previous damage, healing ensues. Healthy connections grow and develop. If you are someone who has suffered abuse during childhood, or if you’ve struggled with an overly active limbic system resulting in too much aggression, irritability, impatience, anger, lust, selfishness, fear or insecurity, don’t be discouraged. God’s methods bring healing. And what are God’s methods? Truth, love and freedom. In order to be beneficial, treatment must be applied; truth is only beneficial when it is understood, believed and applied” (p. 56).

Growth in Christ, renewal, doesn’t come from trying harder; it comes from believing better. A believer’s brain will create strong pathways or neural networks based on God’s truth, and old or inactive pathways will be destroyed and replaced. So, let’s not be conformed to this world. Let’s be transformed by the renewal and rewiring of our minds.

DAY 4 | **The New and Improved You** | Colossians 3:9–10

Tammy De Armas

“Do not lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. In its place you have clothed yourself with a brand new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more about Christ, who created this new nature within you.” (Colossians 3:9–10 NLT)

Paul uses the image of putting on new clothing to parallel our ever-changing transformation as we live a life renewed by Christ. The person He created us to be. If we look at the choices in our lives prior to receiving Christ as our Savior, they will look undeniably different than after.

Years ago, I spoke at the grand opening of a pregnancy center a few blocks away from my college campus. The person who was speaking at this event was not the person who had graduated 25 years earlier. I was completely changed physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This hadn’t happened overnight, yet it was a resounding difference that evidenced that God was transforming my life from the inside out. While I knew that “old self,” she was no longer part of me.

The transformation continues daily for those who have chosen to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We get to choose the “new” self to put on. Do we follow Jesus or meander down our own path? This new identity is not static. There is a continual process of growing into Christ’s likeness. The new self is others-focused as we pick up our cross and follow Jesus. This daily choice isn’t always easy. That old self can push to “be worn” by a simple choice in the day. Formation happens one decision at a time. In fact, it is a moment-by-moment choice to listen and live in this new nature. As we choose to grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus, we want to spend time with Him and study the Scriptures. We begin to think differently.

I wrote “simple” in describing the choice to be made. It isn’t always simple and can often be more of a wrestling match as we struggle to choose Him. As the Spirit lives in each believer, this new self is transforming us MORE into the image of Christ. We have an active dependent part and are never left to do it alone.

PRACTICE | **Formation**

“Spiritual Formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”
– Robert Mulholland

Who is forming you?... Self-formation vs. God-formation

Spiritual formation is God’s design for every disciple; for everyone who desires to follow him. The question that we must consider is, *who* is forming me? We tend to be “graspers,” resisting being held by God or “manipulators,” rejecting being shaped by God. The question that we must ask ourselves, though, is who is doing the forming... really?

Practice: Meditate on the following verses, then honestly ask yourself, who is it that is forming you.

Galatians 4:19: *“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”*

Romans 8:29: *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”*

2 Corinthians 3:16-18: *“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

As Mulholland says, *“In the final analysis, there is nothing we can do to transform ourselves into persons who love and serve as Jesus did except make ourselves available for God to do that work of transforming grace in our lives.”*

Doing vs. Being

As followers of Christ, we are called to live in obedience to him. That does involve doing, but when our doing replaces our need for Christ and our willingness to relinquish control to him, we miss out on the joy, grace, and love that come from “being.” Mulholland says, *“When we operate from the perspective that our doing determines our being, we expect immediate returns on our investment of time and resources—observable results that prove that we have performed well and are therefore persons of value and worth.”*

“Doing” can offer instant feedback. Yet failure to receive instant feedback can be felt as failure to be valued or worthy. As humans, we tend to operate from a place of needing to constantly prove ourselves in order to be valued. When our focus remains on who God has designed us to be, and we see our God-given value as His perfectly created child, we can rest in the understanding that life is a journey of yielding ourselves to His plans rather than a constant battle to gain control. It is a journey of surrendering rather than fighting. It is a journey of trust that you are fully and perfectly loved.

Practice: Honestly ask yourself where you find your value. What makes you feel worthy? Who or what determines your identity?

Control vs. Surrender

The difference between forming ourselves and being formed by God is the issue of control. We try to set our pace and direction by working hard to create limitations in our lives. “Being formed” goes against our do-it-yourself culture. We are used to fighting for what we want and who we want to be. Only surrendering and relinquishing control to God will allow us to receive full freedom and the abundant life for which we were designed.

Practice: Look back over the last week. Consider how you responded when someone or something disrupted your plans. What or who got in your way? Did you see those disruptions as barriers or opportunities? Honestly answering these questions will help you determine how much your need to control is impacting your life.

Formation? Surrendering to God’s Love

It is nearly impossible to see disruptions as opportunities unless we are utterly convinced of God’s unconditional love. David Benner says, *“Only surrender to something or someone bigger than us is sufficiently strong to free us from the prison of our egocentricity.... Christ does not simply want our compliance. He wants our hearts. He wants our love, and he offers us his. He invites us to surrender to his love.... Love invites abandon and intimacy. Love speaks to the depths of our soul, where we yearn for release from our isolation and long for the belonging that will assure us, we are at last home. Love speaks the language of the soul as it awakens our hunger for relationship and connection.”*

Surrender takes the focus off ourselves and frees us to experience the life God has designed for us. Surrendering to God’s love frees us to let go, relinquish control, engage in relationship, and trust the one who is forming us.

Practice: Which areas of your life are you holding on to that are preventing you from fully experiencing God’s love? Choose one to recommit to the Lord. Ask him to give you a tangible way to remember the sweetness that comes from surrendering to God’s design, his perfect plans. (maybe an object, a sticky note that you put on your steering wheel, etc.) Commit this to God afresh and let it be a reminder of your Abba’s unconditional love.

This is being formed.

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Philippians 2:12-18 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- How would you explain Paul’s statement, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” to someone new to faith in Jesus? How do “working out faith” and “trusting Jesus” function together? When it comes to spiritual growth, do you fall more often into over-striving or passivity?
- Paul states that God works in us for His good pleasure. How have you experienced that? How do you know when it’s God working in you, rather than yourself?
- Ryan mentioned a few of the fallacies of formation. Which of them struck you most? Why?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- What are some habits that are part of your daily and weekly rhythm? How do you think they shape you?
- What is Jesus saying to you, and how do you feel about what He’s saying?
- What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER

- We all have areas in our lives that Jesus is still forming. What is one area you sense God at work in your life? What would it look like for you to partner with the Spirit in that work this week? Pray for one another to follow Jesus in community on mission.



Week Four

04 | WHOLENESS

Text: Matthew 26:36-39
Memory Verse: Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)
Song: *Running Back to You* by Steph Schlueter, *Canyon* by Ellie Holcomb, *Say It That Way* by Kristian Stanfill
Key Resource: *Emotional Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero

WEEK 4 | Wholeness

Discipleship isn’t just about learning to live like Jesus in our strengths; it’s also about learning to meet Him in our sorrows. In Gethsemane, Jesus steps fully into His anguish, naming it, feeling it, and bringing it honestly before His Father. Rather than avoiding pain or pretending He’s unaffected, Jesus shows us a different way: the path of honest lament and surrendered trust. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” He says, yet His prayer ends with, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Matt. 26:38-39).

Wholeness doesn’t come by denying our wounds or numbing what hurts. It comes as we learn to open our pain in the presence of God. Unattended wounds don’t disappear; they simply go underground, quietly shaping our reactions, relationships, and spiritual lives. But when we bring those same wounds to Jesus by naming them, feeling them, and entrusting them to Him, they can become places of our most profound transformation. This is the paradox of the kingdom: the very places we want to hide are often the places where God wants to heal.

This work isn’t passive resignation or stoic endurance. It’s courageous surrender. Like Jesus in the garden, we learn to stay present to God even when suffering rises, trusting that the Father meets us in our vulnerability rather than our self-protection. As we practice noticing and naming what’s happening in our souls, the Spirit meets us with compassion, steadies our hearts, and begins to reshape us from the inside out.

Wholeness isn’t about fixing ourselves; it’s about allowing Jesus to form us in the places we’d rather avoid. When we stop running from our pain and start bringing it honestly to God, we discover that surrender in suffering becomes the very soil where healing, freedom, and deep spiritual transformation take root.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Mark 5:25-34

²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” ²⁹ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

³¹ “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ ”

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 4 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Are You Still the One?** | Matthew 11:2–6

Ryan Paulson

I’ve always loved the story of John the Baptist sitting in prison because it gives us one of the most honest pictures in Scripture of what it looks like to wrestle with doubt (Mt. 11:2-6). We typically think of John the Baptist as this unshakable, desert-tough prophet. He burst onto the scene wearing a camel-hair coat, wild honey dripping from his beard, a locust in his teeth, and with his voice echoing like thunder calling Israel to repentance. John had seen things. He’d seen crowds flock into the wilderness just to hear him preach. He’d watched hardened sinners wade into the Jordan, weeping over grace they never expected. He’d baptized Jesus Himself, and witnessed the heavens open, the Spirit descend, and the Father speak: “This is my beloved Son.” If anyone should’ve been rock solid in his faith, it was John. Right?

But now he’s sitting in a dark prison cell. Confining walls have replaced open skies. The prophet who once roamed free is now chained, seemingly forgotten, and awaiting a death sentence from a petty king. And in that place, where the walls close in, where the storyline no longer makes sense, John begins to doubt. He sends his followers to Jesus with a brutally honest question:

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matthew 11:3)

I love that Scripture preserves that moment. It doesn’t hide it or sanitize it. It reminds us that doubt isn’t always a sign of weak faith; sometimes it’s the byproduct of the convergence of deep belief and deep pain. And notice how Jesus responds. He doesn’t scold. He doesn’t shame. He doesn’t roll His eyes and say, “John, seriously? After everything you’ve seen?”

Instead, Jesus responds with love and evidence:

“Go back and tell John what you hear and see, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” (Matthew 11:4-5)

In other words: “John, I know your circumstances are confusing. I know the prison cell is loud. **But I am still exactly who I said I am.**”

Sometimes Jesus gives us the rescue we pray for. Other times, just like John, we don’t get the ending we would have chosen. But that doesn’t mean Jesus is any less faithful, any less present, or any less God. His identity is not threatened by our questions, and His love isn’t withdrawn because we waver.

If you find yourself doubting today, take heart; you’re in good company. Bring your questions to Jesus. Ask honestly. And listen closely as He reminds you, not always with the outcome you want, but always with the truth you need, that He is still who He says He is.

DAY 2 | **Forgetting What Lies Behind** | Philippians 3:13–14

Deb Hill

This verse has always been a favorite of mine. Philippians 3:13–14 — *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

Have you ever tried to drive forward while looking in the rearview mirror? It doesn’t work well – does it? A quick glance will tell you everything you need to know, but dwelling there is dangerous. That’s why Paul, in his writing from prison to the church in Philippi, told them to forget what is behind and press on toward the goal in heaven.

Paul’s own past included persecuting Christians, imprisoning them, and even being an accessory to the martyrdom of Stephen. Because of his past, he referred to himself as “the least of the apostles.” Paul became a Christian through a dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus, where he was a persecutor of Christians. A blinding light surrounded him, and he heard the voice of Jesus asking why he was persecuting him. Paul was left blind and was led to Damascus, where a disciple named Ananias restored his sight, baptized him, and instructed him to preach about Jesus. (Acts 9)

We know all of our sins are forgiven and forgotten by God the moment Jesus enters our hearts. The enemy of our souls loves to remind us of past sins and failures to try to defeat us. Paul says to forget the past and strain toward what is ahead! Don’t let yourself get stuck, don’t let the sun go down on your anger, forgive your past self and those who’ve hurt you just as you’ve been forgiven. God sees you as perfect and holy as He is holy. You are his cherished child.

You could talk with a godly counselor, trusted friend, or pastor if you’re struggling with shame. Sometimes just releasing the past by talking it out will help you find the freedom in Christ to press on. Freedom doesn’t mean denying the past but refusing to be defined by it. Growth won’t happen if we are hampered by regrets and shame.

We can press on toward the goal of heaven because of God’s love, which empowers us to share that love with others. Amen? Amen.

DAY 3 | **Maintaining Appearances** | 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

Kassie Lowe

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

I find myself always trying to keep the peace, avoid conflict, and pick up slack where I see it. For better or worse, I try to maintain the appearance that I have everything together all the time. This facade of strength means that admitting the areas in my life where I am weak does not come easily to me.

I learned at a young age that if I needed something, I was better off finding a way to get it done on my own rather than asking for help. I had to learn how to be strong enough to figure it out. I knew my weaknesses, but I couldn’t confront them, or worse, share them with anyone else. I believed that weakness was a problem to be fixed rather than an opportunity to invite people into my story. But this is a lie. Weakness is not a problem, and it’s not something that needs fixing. If we didn’t have weaknesses, we would see no need for a Savior. If we can do everything on our own, we become the center of our own lives, and the only thing we depend on is ourselves. Our weaknesses remind us that we are not God, no matter how hard we may try. Jesus shows us in the midst of weakness that we need him every single day.

I find that on my worst days, I am much more attentive to how the Lord is stepping in to speak, provide, and sustain. When it’s impossible to do it all on my own, I’m reminded that I have a Savior who never called me to live life that way, but to live it with Him.

Your weakness isn’t a problem; it’s a promise that our lives were never meant to be lived alone.

DAY 4 | **Search Me** | Psalm 139:23–24

Lynette Fuson

Picture God looking at you – gently gazing into your eyes, full of compassion, love, and delight. He sees and knows every single part of you; your hands, your feet, your facial expressions, your entire body – after all, He created you! And he is rightfully proud of His creation! Does this feel overwhelming? Can you picture your creator knowing and loving you far better than you could know or love yourself?

Now picture God looking far into your soul, searching the deepest recesses that you dare not even consider yourself – your thoughts, motives, fears, worries, hopes, and failures. Do you know that He cares just as much for the inside parts of you as He does the outside? He sees your anger, and he sees the pain, sadness, disappointment, and poor choices from which that anger came. He sees your pride, and he cares deeply for your striving self that desperately searches for approval. He sees your hopes and shattered dreams – the failures that not only brought you to the desperate place you thought you’d never be but have also impacted those you love. He sees your sorrow, and he cries with you, storing your anguish, your tears, in a bottle.

In Psalm 139, David calls himself God’s masterpiece. He praises God, acknowledges God’s thoughts for him as His precious creation, **and** he’s honest about his disdain for his enemies. David doesn’t mask his emotions but cries out in vulnerability. Then in verse 23–24, he says, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

David experiences freedom when he names his deepest feelings in the presence of his trusted God. He knows that something isn’t right within him, and he knows that he needs healing; so, he calls out in vulnerability to the One who already knows and still loves. Author David Benner says, “For love to transform us, not only must we meet in vulnerability, but we must also linger long enough for it to penetrate our woundedness.” The freedom David longs for comes when he goes on to say, “Search me”. Healing has begun as David is being transformed by God’s love.

What within you is crying out for healing? What part of you longs to be known? Your God already knows it all, and He longs to bring healing to your soul. Maybe today, you could start by simply saying, “Search me.”

PRACTICE | Naming Emotions

God feels emotions.

- Jesus experienced grief: *"Jesus wept."*(John 11:35)
- God loves: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*(John 3:16)
- God feels jealousy: *"For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*(Exodus 34:14)
- The Lord experiences joy!: *"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."*(Zephaniah 3:17)

We are created in God's image, and we, too, feel emotions. God would not have given us emotions if he didn't intend for us to feel them. Yet sometimes it is hard to define or understand what is going on inside of us. Here are some steps to understanding your emotions, which will lead to greater wholeness, and your Creator designed for you to experience.

1. Be Curious

Take a look at the emotions wheel on the next page. Most of us can identify one of the center emotions. Where are you at today?

Happy – Sad – Disgusted – Angry – Fearful – Bad – Surprised

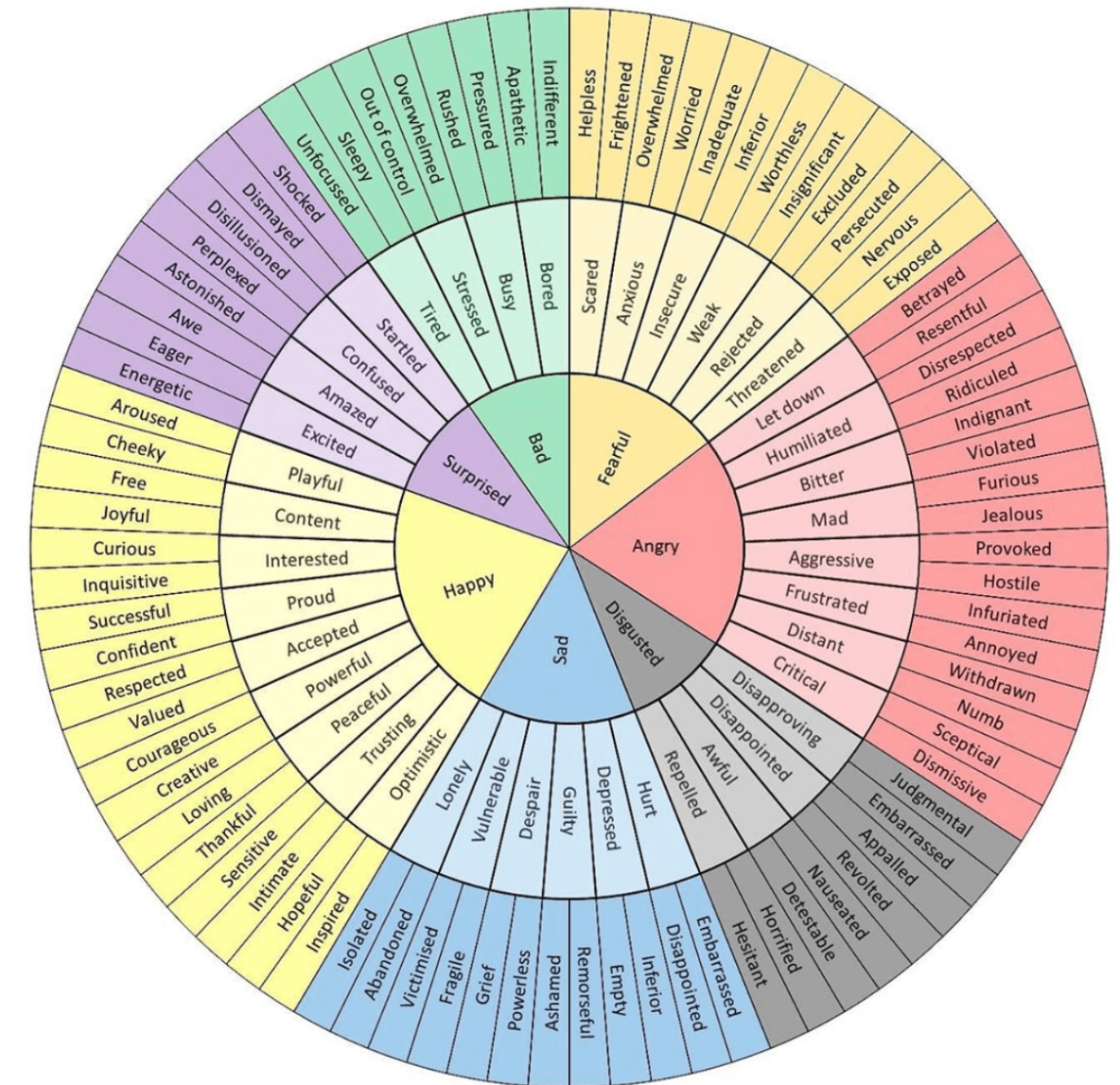
Now this is where it gets challenging. Based on the center emotion that you chose, take a step out to the next circle. Which of the following in the same basic category are you feeling right now? You'll notice the next ring gets a bit more descriptive!

Finally, move out to the last ring. Which of the two final words in the darker ring reflects where you are at today? There is no right or wrong – you are just naming your current emotions.

2. Show yourself **Compassion**

What emotions did you land on? Do you need to focus on some calming techniques now? What would it look like to approach these emotions with creativity? Does knowing that you are feeling this emotion bring about any clarity?

Step out in **Courage**. You did it! You named your emotions! You may not feel like it, but just naming your emotion can give you the confidence to take the next step, to seek connection with a safe person.



GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Matthew 26:36-39 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- How do you make sense of Jesus asking His Father to let the cup pass from Him? He knew the plan from the beginning of time, and yet He still asks for another way. Why?
- Why do you think it was so hard for the disciples to stay awake? Why do you think it was so important to Jesus that they remained awake with Him?
- Share one story of a painful experience you’ve been through. How do you typically respond to pain in your life? Do you tend to deny it, minimize it, push through it, or try to escape it?
- As a group, come up with your own definition of spiritual bypassing. Why is it dangerous to spiritual growth? How do you see Jesus leading us in another direction? How can you follow his example?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- What is Jesus saying to you?
- How do you feel about what Jesus is saying?
- What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER

- Pray for one another to follow Jesus in community on mission.





Week Five

05 | COMMUNITY

Text: Acts 4:32-35
Memory Verse: ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)
Song: *By Our Love* by Christy Nockels
Additional Resource: *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and *Soul of Desire* by Curt Thompson

WEEK 5 | Community

Spiritual maturity is never a solo project. From the very beginning, God designed growth to happen together, within a community where every part matters, every gift contributes, and every person helps others become more like Jesus. We don’t grow around one another; we grow through our connection to one another.

When the Spirit filled the early church, something beautiful took root. In Acts 4, we see believers living with one heart and mind: sharing freely, giving generously, and caring deeply. Selfishness gave way to self-giving, isolation to belonging, and scarcity to abundance. The grace of Jesus didn’t just reconcile people to God; it reconciled them to each other. What was fractured in Eden began to be restored in the shared life of God’s family.

But authentic community isn’t easy. Every group journeys through stages of excitement, disillusionment, adjustment, and then real growth. Community takes courage, humility, and grace. Yet when we stay at the table, when we choose connection over comfort, something holy happens: we experience the love Jesus described when He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

This week invites you to see community not as an optional add-on to faith, but as the very context where formation happens. Together, we learn what it means to be the body of Christ, a people who belong, believe, and become together.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 5 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Growing Up Together** | Ephesians 4:11-16

Ryan Paulson

One of the great joys of my life is being part of the church. And if I'm honest, one of the great pains of my life... is also the church. My guess is you've felt that tension too. Being part of a spiritual family can fill your heart one moment and frustrate it the next. You celebrate people's greatest joys, and you walk with them through their deepest sorrows. But sometimes, we fall short, we let people down, we don't show up well. It's a reality of being a part of a community of people who are still in process.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts language to this tension better than almost anyone. In *Life Together*, he writes, "Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community... God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious." Then he adds that the one "who has become disillusioned with his community... begins to be what he should be in God's sight." In other words, the death of our idealized "wish-dream" of church isn't a crisis, it's the beginning of real community. When we stop demanding perfection, we can start learning how to love actual people.

This is exactly the kind of community Paul described in Ephesians 4. He reminded us that spiritual maturity is never something we achieve alone; it's something we grow into **together**. Christ gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, not to perform the ministry for us, but to equip **everyone** for works of service. And when each member serves, encourages, forgives, speaks truth in love, and uses their God-given gifts, the whole body grows stronger and more like Jesus.

I love the picture of people being formed together. Not a collection of autonomous individuals, but a family learning how to grow up side-by-side. In a culture obsessed with individuality and independence, the gospel calls us into togetherness and interdependence. Jesus doesn't just save individuals; He forms a people. And people grow by showing up for one another, by confessing sin, bearing burdens, sharpening each other, and reminding one another of grace.

And because we are all people still in process, the church can be a painful place. But it's the very place God intends to grow us. Community really is the classroom of transformation. It's where we learn to encourage, forgive, share our pain, enter into vulnerability, and have hard conversations seasoned with truth and grace. It's all part of the Spirit's shaping work in us.

The goal isn't a perfect church. In fact, if you find one, don't join it because you'll probably mess it up! No, the goal is a maturing church, a people increasingly shaped into the likeness of Christ, together. Today's invitation is simple: show up again. Offer your gifts. Receive someone else's. Forgive. Encourage. Lean in. Because this is how we grow up, **not alone, but together**.

DAY 2 | **Go-Ahead** | Philippians 2:3-4

Josh Rose

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." - Philippians 2:3-4

We've all been there... standing in the checkout line, scanning the lanes like a seasoned race car driver, calculating who has fewer items, which cashier looks quicker, which bagger is moving faster, and whether that guy in front of you has coupons (you know he does). It's funny how something as ordinary as grocery shopping reveals something deeply human about us... we all want to get ahead, to be first! We want a shorter wait, a smoother path, a little advantage.

And honestly? Most of the time we don't even realize we're doing it.

The words above from Paul's letter to the Philippians hits right at that instinct. He isn't calling us to think less of ourselves. He's calling us to think of ourselves less! It's the quiet shift from "How can I get ahead?" to "How can I bless someone else today (even if it means that I may have to slow down to do it)?"

Back in the checkout line, something beautiful happens when someone turns around and says, "Hey, you've only got a couple things, go ahead of me." Have you ever been the recipient of that beautiful act of selflessness? That tiny little act of kindness has the power to disrupt the culture of competition that is engrained in us.

That's what humility does. It interrupts the natural pull of self-interest and creates space for community to flourish.

Paul says to "look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Notice he doesn't say your interests don't matter. He knows that you have to look to your own interests for a lot of life, but he encourages us to avoid an "only me" mentality and reminds us that other people have interests too. If we are going to be people who are of the same mind and same love of Jesus, then we must take our eyes off of ourselves.

Jesus lived this way. He consistently moved toward the forgotten, lifted up the overlooked, and put himself last so others could be brought near. His path leads us away from competition and toward compassion. Away from grasping for position and toward giving up our place in line.

So maybe the invitation today is simple: What if you lived a "go-ahead" type of life? What if you entered your meetings, friendships, family dynamics, or church spaces asking, "Who can I let go ahead of me?"

DAY 3 | **Mind the Mess** | Galatians 6:2

Kassie Lowe

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

I would consider myself generally organized, but I definitely did not start that way. Growing up, my bedroom was always a complete disaster, and I misplaced things all the time. Trying to decide on an outfit would always result in a pile of clothes on the floor that wouldn’t move for days on end. My disorganized tendencies always made me too embarrassed to have people over at my house, and if I did, my bedroom door would always be closed.

I like to think of a messy bedroom as a good metaphor for our inner world. The thoughts that feel too vulnerable to share, the memories that you think should’ve healed by now, and the emotions that are too overwhelming. This inner room is a place where secrets are kept, pain is stored, and shame lingers for far too long. In the same way that I felt overly exposed by opening my bedroom door, sharing the details of what we store inside can also feel incredibly vulnerable.

The truth is that no matter how closely we guard that door, our Father still knows what mess is locked away in there. He’s not afraid of it. God meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be. We can keep that door locked for everyone else, but the God of the universe intimately knows our inner world. The love of Christ is demonstrated in being completely known and still completely loved.

As the community of Christ, we have the honor of bearing with one another in their suffering and allowing others to do the same for us. The beauty is that within the risk of opening that door, there’s the possibility of feeling the love of Christ through another person. We experience the fullness of life when we invite others into our mess. We can only know healing from our community if we choose to open the door for them.

Invite your people into the mess and have comfort in the truth that you are already fully known and fully loved.

DAY 4 | **At His Service** | Romans 12:4–6

Christina Chaiban

As followers of Jesus, we are called to emulate His attributes. One of these attributes is serving others. His earthly ministry overflows with service—from feeding the crowds (Matthew 14:13–21) to healing strangers (John 9:1–12). He even proclaimed His purpose in coming: “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).

Because God made each of us unique—in our skills, experiences, opportunities, and many other areas of life—the ways we serve vary from person to person (1 Peter 4:10). One person may thrive in Kids or Student Ministries, while another may not work well with children but excels in customer service, making them a great fit for a Hospitality Team. Yet both roles are equally important for the Church to function, just as Paul describes in Romans 12:4–6: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”

Our differences work together because our service shares the same godly purpose, united by the Holy Spirit: to further God’s kingdom by showing love to God and to others (Matthew 22:37–39). However, serving others can flourish only when we are faithful to it, as Jesus was throughout His ministry. That is why we need God’s wisdom to discern where to serve and His strength to continue serving Him faithfully.

Let’s seek God’s wisdom and strength for the next couple of minutes. First, find a quiet place and close your eyes. If you are not currently serving in your community, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where He wants you to serve. If you feel excited, nervous, or even hesitant, bring those feelings to God. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you explore and sign up for opportunities.

If you are already serving at your church or in your community, ask God for His strength and wisdom to continue in your ministry. Offer Him both your praises and your concerns (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). Let His love for you renew your love and service for the people around you.

PRACTICE | **Identifying Spiritual Gifts**

God has created us each – special, unique, *and* specifically gifted to serve Him. Romans 12:6 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.” If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are gifted by the Holy Spirit! Those gifts are wired into who God has made you to be, so that you can serve him and help others know about the saving grace of Jesus.

Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Have you ever considered that you are gifted by the Holy Spirit – ready and able to serve God according to how He has uniquely gifted you.

Do you know what spiritual gifts have been given to you? Chances are that you do – but you may not have the confidence or know the steps necessary to be able to use those gifts. Following is a Spiritual Gifts assessment that will help you discern how God has specifically gifted you: <https://gifts.churchgrowth.org/spiritual-gifts-survey>.

Take some time to take one, or both of these assessments. After you have completed the assessment, take the following steps:

1. Write down your three primary gifts.
2. Thank God for these gifts and ask Him to show you how you could use these gifts to serve Him.
3. Share your gifts with a friend, family member, or your Connect Group.

Reach out to efcc.org/teams/ to join a team at EFCC!

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Acts 4:32-35 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- How would you describe the early church to someone who’d never heard of it before? What part of their life together is hardest for you to imagine being lived out today? Why?
- What was the result of the people of God living the way they did? Identify and talk about the things Luke pointed out in the passage.
- It’s easy to idealize the early church. If you’re familiar with the New Testament, share some of the not so successful realities of the early church. If you need a starting place, just read the next chapter in Acts.
- What has your experience with church community been like? What have been some of your greatest joys? Has there been any hurt or sorrow?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- Acts 4 shows a community where everyone contributes to the life of the whole. What role do you sense God inviting you to play in this community, and what gifts or experiences has He given you that He might be asking you to bring? If you’ve completed the Gifts Assessment listed above, share what your top gift(s) is.
- What is Jesus saying to you?
- How do you feel about what Jesus is saying?
- What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?



Week Six

06 | SENT

Text: Matthew 28:16-20
Memory Verse: ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)
Song: *Send Me* by Church of the City (featuring Chris McClarney)
Additional Resource: *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman

WEEK 6 | Sent

Discipleship always leads to mission. The same Jesus who calls us to follow also sends us to go. In Matthew 28:18–20, the risen Christ declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” With that authority, He commissions His followers to make disciples of all nations, teaching people to obey everything He commanded and baptizing them into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is not a side project for a few; **it’s the central calling of every believer**. Mission isn’t reserved for the super-gifted or the bold; it’s simply the overflow of a life transformed by Jesus. We are sent as everyday missionaries into the places we already live, learn, work, and play. Attending church is not the finish line; making disciples is the goal.

To live sent is to see our ordinary lives as sacred opportunities; classrooms, neighborhoods, offices, coffee shops, and dinner tables become places where the love and truth of Jesus take root. The same Spirit who empowered the first disciples empowers us today, turning our presence into witness and our words into invitation.

This week invites you to recover your identity as a sent one; to see yourself as part of God’s redemptive story in the world. Jesus doesn’t just send us out; He sends us with His authority, in His Spirit, and for His glory.

SCRIPTURE STUDY | **Luke 10:1-12**

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

⁵ “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ ⁶ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

⁸ “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 6 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **The Harvest Is Plentiful** | Luke 10:1–2

Luke B.

Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples “two by two” into every town and place He intended to visit. This detail is not incidental—it reveals something central to the heart of God’s mission. Jesus could have scattered them individually, multiplying the number of places reached. Instead, he chose partnership over efficiency, community over independence, and shared courage over solo effort.

Jesus knew the road ahead would be challenging. There would be rejection, spiritual warfare, and moments of discouragement. So he sent disciples in pairs—so that when one felt weak, the other could speak courage; when one became tired, the other could carry a moment’s load; when one felt uncertain, the other could remind them of the truth.

Few people are willing to go alone—but many find boldness when they go together. Even Paul, one of the boldest missionaries in Scripture, never traveled alone for long. He had companions, partners, and encouragers (Barnabas!). We too, grow stronger, braver, and more faithful when we **follow Jesus in community on mission.**

Companionship is not merely comforting—it is strategic. God multiplies effectiveness when His people serve side by side. It takes more than one person to model what Christian relationships and community looks like. Together we witness in a way one person cannot.

In a culture that idolizes independence, Jesus calls us back to God’s design for loving interdependence best modeled by the “eternal, loving, reciprocal communion” of the Trinity.

As you start today, reflect on who God has placed beside you—friends, mentors, family, church members, coworkers, neighbors. These people are not accidents in your story; they are God-given partners in His mission. Pray for them. Encourage them. Invite them to join you on mission today. And remember: God does not send you alone into the harvest field. He sends you with others, and He goes with you Himself.

DAY 2 | **As the Father Has Sent Me** | John 20:21–22

Ryan Paulson

This is one of my favorite scenes in Scripture. Jesus has just been resurrected from the dead, but his disciples don’t know that it’s happened. The disciples were huddled in a locked room, afraid and unsure of what came next. Their hopes had been shattered. Their confidence was zeroed out. And into that locked and fear-filled room, Jesus walked through the wall and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

Notice that before Jesus sends them, He settles them. Before He gives them a mission, He gives them His presence. “Peace be with you,” He says, **because mission never begins with our strength; it begins with His peace.** We don’t go *for* Jesus. We go *with* Jesus.

Then comes the mission: “As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you.” That little word *as* carries with it an enormous amount of weight. It means our mission mirrors His. We are sent in the same way Jesus was sent. We are sent in His way, and with His heart.

So, the question becomes, *How did the Father send Jesus?* Not with coercive power, but with cruciform love. Not from a distance, but with embodied presence. Jesus entered people’s stories, sat at their tables, listened to their questions, and carried their burdens. He came not to be served, but to serve. That’s what sentness looks like. It’s not flashy. It’s faithful. It’s showing up with love in the places God has already placed us.

When Jesus says, “I am sending you,” He’s not asking you to become someone you’re not. He’s asking you to surrender who you already are, your story, your personality, your gifts, your everyday life, to the work of His kingdom. You don’t need a passport to live sent; you just need eyes to see the opportunities already in front of you in the places you live, work, play, and learn. Those places are not accidental; they’re assignments.

However, we aren’t sent in our own power. Jesus followed his sending with a promise: “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). See, Jesus never sends without empowering. He doesn’t push us out the door; He fills us with His Spirit and walks with us into every moment.

Today, hear His words over you: Peace. Sent. Empowered. As the Father sent Jesus, with love, humility, courage, and compassion, so He sends you. And He goes with you every step of the way.

DAY 3 | **You Will Be My Witnesses** | Acts 1:8

Anna Nielsen

The most credible witnesses are those who have **firsthand experience**, not secondhand knowledge. That’s true in a courtroom, and it’s true in the life of faith. Christianity spread across the world because ordinary men and women encountered the living God for themselves, and their lives became the evidence.

We sometimes imagine that only the first disciples were “credible witnesses” because they walked and talked with Jesus. But the story of Scripture tells us something far more astonishing: **God has always been moving toward His people**, making His presence known in every generation, including our own.

From the garden, to the prophets, to the incarnation, the Bible is one long narrative of God drawing near. And just when the story seems to reach its natural conclusion: Jesus risen, evil defeated, eternity secured, there’s a twist. Instead of staying, Jesus returns to the Father, the disciples are left waiting, unsure how they could possibly carry on the mission without Him.

But Jesus had already told them the truth: *“Those who believe in me will do the works I have been doing—and even greater things—because I am going to the Father”* (John 14:12). Who could have imagined that promise would be fulfilled through what happens next?

In Acts 1, the disciples gather in Jerusalem as Jesus instructed. And then comes the greatest surprise yet: **God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell inside His people**. Not beside them. Not occasionally moving among them. *In them*. The presence that empowered Jesus now fills His followers. His nearness is no longer limited to one place or one body – it is poured out on all who believe.

This is why Jesus can say, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...and you will be my witnesses.”* The power to live out our faith doesn’t come from trying harder but from **God’s own presence** living within us. Through the Spirit, we move from secondhand information about God to firsthand encounter with Him. Through the Spirit, we become credible witnesses, people who don’t just know about Jesus, but people who know Him. And through the Spirit, we are sent into our Jerusalems, our Judeas, and to the ends of the earth.

A friend once told me, “Someone with an experience is never at the mercy of someone with an argument.”

So let me ask: **Are you experiencing the presence of God in your life?** He desires that for you, and through the Holy Spirit, He has made it possible.

DAY 4 | **Not Mission Impossible** | Colossians 4:5-6

Francie Overstreet

The movie series *Mission Impossible* began with a television show by the same name in the 60s and 70s. Many of you may not have been around then, but I remember it well. The story followed a fictional American covert agency called the IMF—the Impossible Mission Force. Each week, the team received a seemingly impossible assignment vital to national security. The mission always came through a small tape recorder that warned the team their work could never be acknowledged and would “self-destruct in three seconds.” The team leader then gathered people with different skills—electronics, disguises, physical strength, and more—to accomplish the task. Every episode held surprising twists, clever strategies, and, of course, a successful outcome.

I was reminded of this series when I began thinking about the mission God has given us. At first it may seem impossible, but it is not.

It can be intimidating to realize that we have a real, ongoing mission from God—to be His vessels in growing His kingdom. Yet Jesus gently reassures us in Matthew 11:30: *“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Our mission is not simply something we “go” on; it is something we live out day by day. It isn’t only about rare moments of courage, but about an ongoing lifestyle shaped by grace, wisdom, and attentiveness to the people God places in our path. God’s mission thrives through simple, steady faithfulness.

Scripture gives us a clear picture of what this looks like:

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt...” Colossians 4:5–6

Sometimes this looks ordinary: encouraging a weary mom with a crying child, offering a helping hand, speaking a hopeful word, or starting a simple conversation that opens the door to truth. It’s remembering that everyone is made in God’s image. When the Holy Spirit nudges you to pay for someone’s coffee, do it. A few dollars may become God’s tool in drawing someone toward Him. Sometimes it’s saying thank you, offering an apology, or being honest about your own imperfections. Someone once went out of their way to bring me to Christ.

I see this mission lived out in my husband. When we moved into a senior mobile home park last April, he immediately began helping neighbors—pulling heavy trash cans (at 80!), joining neighborhood watch, and listening for needs. As conversations end, he often asks, “May I pray for you?” No one has ever refused. God placed us here on purpose, and where He has placed *you* is your mission field. It is not an impossible task.

PRACTICE | **Prayer Card**

What if the place you live, the job you have, and even your favorite hobbies aren’t random - but a part of God’s strategy? What if God has placed you exactly where you are because He wants to partner with you to bring renewal to every corner of the world you touch? A one-of-a-kind mission assignment that requires your exact gifts and personality, and cannot be done by anyone else.

Everywhere you go is a new opportunity to see Him at work. Every day conversations take on eternal significance. Every neighbor you greet, every coworker you engage, every friend you laugh with is an opportunity to reflect the love and hope of Jesus.

Who are the people that God has placed in your life - where you live, work, and play? Where are they in their relationship with Jesus? How can you help them take their next step?

It starts with prayer..

PRAYER LIST

Who is God asking you to pray for?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

NEXT STEPS

Bold Prayer

When will you pray?

Intentionally Connect

How will you grow your relationship?

Genuine Love

What will you do to show God’s love?

In Community

Who will you invite to do this with you?

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN (10 min)

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection (45 min)

- Read Matthew 28:16-20 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- How do you hold together the pain and brokenness we see in the world with Jesus’ claim that He holds all authority?
- Jesus tells his disciples to “go and make disciples.” He mentions a few different aspects of what “making disciples” entails. Discuss each aspect, and as a group, talk about how the first disciples did those things.
- Imagine yourself in the disciple-maker seat. What goals would you have for someone if you wanted to help them become a disciples of Jesus? What would you want them to believe, become, and do?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support (15 min)

- What does it look like to make disciples when your schedule already feels full? Talk about what your day typically looks like (work, school, home, etc.) and think about ways as a group you could make disciples within the rhythm of your life.
- What is Jesus saying to you?
- How do you feel about what Jesus is saying?
- What’s one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION (10 min)

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. Prayer (10 min)

- Look at the “Prayer Card” tool. Talk with your group about the people God has placed on your heart and how you hope He will use you in their lives. Fill out your prayer card and pray for one another to follow Jesus in community on mission.



Week Seven

07 | RENEWAL

Text: Jeremiah 29:1-14
Memory Verse: ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)
Song: *Beautiful Things* by Gungor
Additional Resource: *Center Church* by Timothy Keller

WEEK 7 | Renewal

God’s story has always been bigger than escape, it’s about renewal. In Jeremiah 29, God speaks to His people living in exile and gives a surprising command: “Build houses, plant gardens, seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you.” Rather than waiting for rescue or retreating from a broken world, God invites His people to participate in its restoration.

Renewal begins with presence; choosing to be fully where God has placed us. Even in hard or unfamiliar places, we believe He has a purpose. And renewal grows through participation and joining God in bringing beauty, justice, and hope into the ordinary spaces of life. Exile becomes the crucible of faith, and renewal the fruit of faithfulness.

When God’s people move from critics to contributors, neighborhoods start to flourish, workplaces become more just, and cities reflect glimpses of God’s kingdom. The grace of Jesus doesn’t just save us from the world; it sends us into the world as agents of healing.

This final week is a reminder that we are not here to withdraw, but to engage. Renewal begins with prayer and presence, with hearts tuned to God and hands ready to serve. As we live the way of Jesus together, we become a living preview of His promise: “Behold, I am making all things new.”

SCRIPTURE STUDY | Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS:

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What is Jesus saying to you? How do you feel about it?
- What are you going to do in response?

Teaching Notes

WEEK 7 DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1 | **Let Your Light Shine** | Matthew 5:14-16

Donielle Winter

Are you familiar with the words communicable and incommunicable? Communicable means shared, contagious, and transferable. Incommunicable means not shared, not contagious, not transferable.

These words might sound familiar if you’ve heard of a contagious sickness, a virus that’s communicable or not. But today, we’re talking instead about the attributes of God and the ways you and I are called to be like Him, as well as ways we can never be like Him.

God is God, and I’m **not** like him in profound ways. He is infinite. My life is vapor; I might get to 100 years if I’m extremely lucky. He knows everything. I surely don’t. He’s all-powerful. I’m weak, I bleed, and I break and bruise. He can be present everywhere and throughout time. I can’t even begin to fathom that. These are incommunicable ways I’m not like Him.

But surprisingly, there are many ways he calls me to be **just** like Him! And by the power of his Spirit alive within me, his ways are contagious to me. I can share in his likeness; His righteousness is transferred onto me! Ephesians 5:1-2 says, *“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us.”* He calls me to love as He loves—and in so doing, *“all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* God calls us to live pure and holy lives, for He is pure and holy. He calls us to be gentle, kind and to do good, for He is gentle, kind, and good. He calls us to show mercy and forgive, for He has shown mercy and has forgiven us. He calls us to live like Him for an important purpose—**that the world sees Him!!**

In John 8:12, Jesus said something that sounds incommunicable: “I am the light of the world.” As the Son of God, I guess you can say that—You are holiness in bodily form. You shine righteousness brighter than anyone who’s ever lived. But in Matthew 5:14-16, He calls His followers the same thing! — *“YOU are the light of the world!”* This light of the world-ness is communicable, contagious, transferred from the perfect Son of God to his disciples, his imitators, his children – you and me.

God, may I live my life shining brightly. May the way I live today make the world see You!

DAY 2 | **Riots and Renewal** | Acts 19:8-41

Ryan Paulson

A few years ago, we had our kitchen remodeled. If you’ve ever had that done, you know that it’s not for the faint of heart. It turns out, we use our kitchen a lot... like multiple times every day! I remember walking in during the middle of the project and seeing no cabinets on the walls, appliances pushed into the living room, and dust covering everything. It looked worse, way worse, before it looked better. And even though I knew the end goal was something good, the process was not easy. It was loud, inconvenient, and messy. There were moments when I wondered, *Is this really worth it?*

That’s the nature of renewal. Whether it’s a kitchen, a soul, or an entire city, transformation almost always looks chaotic in the middle. Things are being uprooted, old structures are being torn down, and the systems that benefited from the old setup push back hard.

That’s exactly what happened in Acts 19. God was moving powerfully in Ephesus. People were turning from old patterns, idols were being abandoned, and the gospel was reshaping the culture. Luke described it as “extraordinary” (v. 11) and said the word of the Lord was “prevailing mightily” (v. 20). But as revival spread, resistance also rose. The craftsmen who made their living selling idols to Artemis suddenly realize their profits are disappearing. The city’s economy starts to shift, and those who benefited from the old ways feel threatened.

So what do they do? They start a riot. This shouldn’t surprise us. Renewal always disrupts something. When the kingdom advances, darkness always pushes back. When God works in people’s lives, spiritual forces of evil don’t quietly pack their bags. They resist. Sometimes loudly.

And yet, here’s the hope embedded in the passage: the resistance can’t stop the renewal. The chaos doesn’t derail God’s plans. The uproar becomes one more backdrop where the power of Jesus shines. “The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” The remodel may look messy, but the Divine Contractor is unfazed.

Where do you see this dynamic in your own life? Are there places where God is reshaping something, and the pushback feels real? Don’t lose heart. **Resistance isn’t the sign that God has left; it’s often the sign that He’s deeply at work.** The Spirit who moved in Ephesus is still moving today, right in the middle of the noise, the mess, and the renovation of your life.

DAY 3 | **The Aroma of Christ** | 2 Corinthians 2:14–15

John Riley

My dad worked just south of downtown San Diego. I remember riding in the car with my mom to bring him something at work. When we got out of the car to see him, I was overwhelmed by an amazing scent. Fresh bread was baking at the nearby Wonder Bread factory, and the aroma filled the air. The neighborhood wasn't the nicest or the safest, but the smell of fresh bread was incredible.

Years later, as a young adult, I was driving North from my then-home in Denver, CO, to visit the Black Hills of South Dakota. On Interstate Highway 25 between Loveland and Greeley, there was a different kind of smell: cattle. For several miles and too many minutes, even with the windows rolled up, the stink of cow manure overwhelmed. I couldn't imagine how people lived in those towns.

The sense of smell might be the least used or appreciated human sense, but it makes strong impressions and contrasts the pleasant with the unpleasant. The Apostle Paul describes the contrast of the aroma of Christ.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. – 2 Cor 2:14-17.

Believers have a smell in the world. They spread "the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere." It is fascinating that the aroma of Christ doesn't change; it is not two smells, like fresh bread and cow manure. It is one smell, but people receive it differently. Like someone smelling fresh bread and saying, "I hate that", or someone smelling cow manure and saying, "I love it!"

How can believers carry the fragrant aroma of Christ everywhere they go? According to Paul's words, the fragrance comes from the knowledge of Christ. Believers, commissioned by God, speak in Christ. The fresh air of renewal spreads through faithful presence in the lives of the people God put around us. Wherever followers of Jesus go, they carry His fragrance—the beauty of grace in a world that often smells like decay. Renewal happens as the scent of Jesus' love lingers in ordinary places: offices, schools, homes, and neighborhoods.

DAY 4 | **All Things New** | Revelation 21:5

Deb Hill

He who was seated on the throne said, *"I am making everything new! Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* Revelation 21:5

Each year in March or April, everything wakes up after a quiet winter. The birds are singing, the bulbs planted in the fall are starting to bloom, new things are being planted, the grass is greener, and we want only to be outside enjoying it all. After a winter pause, the earth seems to be renewed and growing again. It is bursting with life!

Revelation 21 describes the future establishment of a new heaven and a new earth, where the holy city of New Jerusalem descends from God to dwell with humanity. It signifies the end of the old world after final judgment, a new beginning for believers, where God directly resides with his people, and a fulfillment of the promises made throughout the Bible.

Isaiah 40:31 speaks to restoration through a promise of renewed strength for those who trust in the Lord.

"... but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint."

By waiting on God, believers can exchange their exhaustion (weariness) for supernatural strength, allowing them to "mount up with wings like eagles," a metaphor for overcoming challenges with resilience and endurance. This divine gift of renewal is rooted in hope and faith, not in our own power, leading to restored energy and a sense of purpose.

I'm a work in progress, how about you? My spiritual progress started the day I gave up control of my own life and asked Jesus to take the wheel. The process of renewal began—restoring my soul and drawing me into the presence of God through the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Son.

There are bumps, setbacks, and challenges along the way, but God never stops stretching and growing us. When we stay rooted in His presence and continue learning new things from Scripture, our spirits are renewed. His promise to *"never leave or forsake us"* reminds us that we always have a friend who loves us unconditionally. He grows His kingdom through us as we share his love, joy, peace, and comfort with others. We can be someone's safe place, like Jesus is for us.

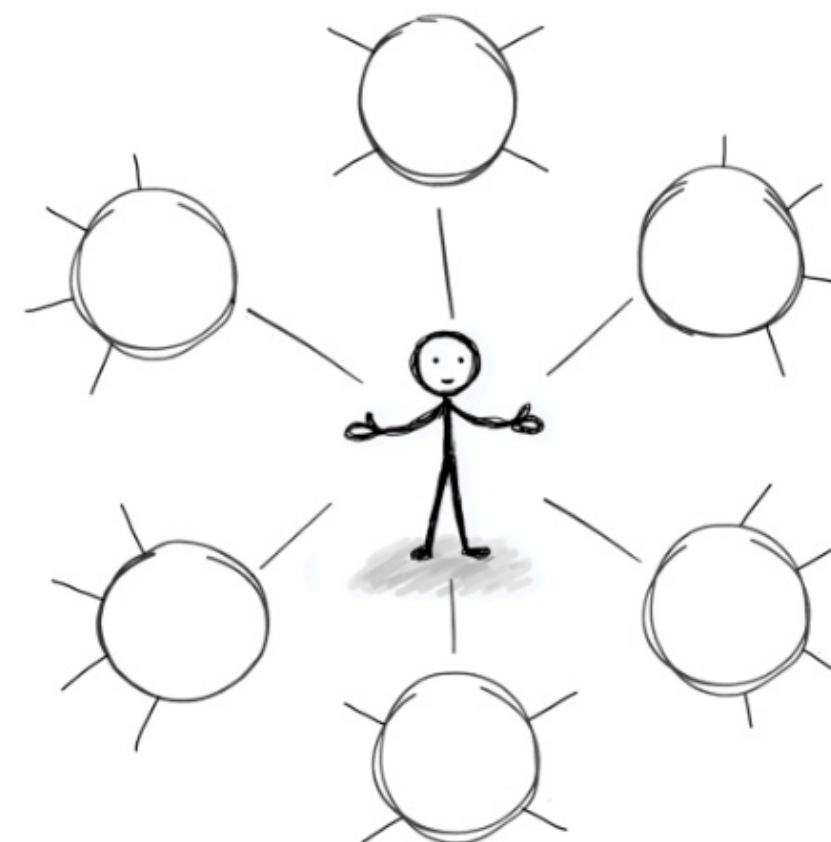
PRACTICE | **Spheres of Influence**

Every disciple of Jesus is sent, not someday, but today. One of the simplest ways to step into that identity is to reflect on the places and people already woven into your everyday life. You don't have to add more activity to make disciples; you begin by paying attention to where God has already placed you.

The Spheres of Influence practice helps you name those relational spaces. These are the people you regularly interact with: family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, classmates, teammates, baristas, gym partners, and anyone else who consistently crosses your path. These relationships aren't random; they're part of God's intentional design for how the kingdom spreads. As Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." Light shines most naturally in the places it already lives.

This practice invites you to prayerfully map out these spheres. As you map your spheres, ask the Spirit to show you where He is already at work and how you might join Him. This isn't about forcing conversations or creating pressure; it's about becoming attentive, prayerful, and available. Influence grows through presence, compassion, and small acts of faithfulness over time.

The goal isn't to "do more," but to see differently; to recognize your everyday life as your mission field and to step into the quiet, steady work of loving people like Jesus.



GROUP QUESTIONS

1. WELCOME & CHECK-IN

- Where did you see God at work in your life since we last met?
- Choose an icebreaker question from the appendix.

2. FOLLOWING JESUS: Scripture & Reflection

- Read Jeremiah 29:1-14 out loud. What words or phrases stand out? What questions do you have?
- How do God's commands to the Israelites in exile (vv. 4-7) challenge your assumptions about how God calls us to live in hard or unwanted situations? Note how long it will take to do each of the things God calls His people to do... and how long they will be in exile (v. 10).
- Reread verses 8-9. What do you think the "prophets" and "diviners" might have been saying that God claims is not from Him? Why would the people have been tempted to believe them? Are there any modern-day correlations you can think of?
- How do you reconcile the fact that if the Israelites do what God asks them to do, it will be a blessing to Babylon? Does God want Babylon to be blessed?

3. IN COMMUNITY: Sharing & Support

- God's people aren't called to escape the city, but to bless it. Look at the "Spheres of Influence" tool. What are some of the areas God has divinely placed you in? How do you sense Him calling you to make a difference there?
- What is Jesus saying to you, and how do you feel about what He's saying?
- What's one way your group can support you as you follow Jesus?

4. ON MISSION

- What are you going to do in response?
- Who will you share this with?

5. PRAYER

- Share one area in your life where you are asking God for renewal.
- Pray a blessing over each person in your group.

REFLECTION

Take some time and prayerfully consider what Jesus has done in your life over the last seven weeks. How has He grown you? Where are you still being stretched? What are you thankful for? What do you sense your next step might be?



Appendix

APPENDIX | Icebreaker Questions

LIGHT & FUN

- 1. What’s your go-to comfort food after a long day?
- 2. If you could instantly become fluent in any language, which would you choose and why?
- 3. What’s a hobby you’ve always wanted to try but haven’t yet?
- 4. What’s your favorite place you’ve ever visited?
- 5. Coffee, tea, or neither, and how do you take it?
- 6. What’s a movie you can quote by heart?
- 7. What’s the best meal you’ve had in the last year?
- 8. What’s one thing that made you laugh this week?
- 9. If you could teleport anywhere for 24 hours, where would you go?
- 10. What’s one item you always have in your car?

NOSTALGIC & PERSONAL

- 1. What was your favorite toy or game growing up?
- 2. Who was your childhood hero?
- 3. What’s a memorable family tradition you had as a kid?
- 4. What’s the first concert you ever attended?
- 5. What’s a book that shaped you when you were younger?

LIFE & PERSONALITY

- 1. Are you more of a planner or a go-with-the-flow person?
- 2. What’s one thing that energizes you?
- 3. What’s one thing that drains you quickly?
- 4. What’s a small habit that’s made a big difference in your life?
- 5. What’s your ideal day off?

FAITH & FORMATION

- 1. Who first introduced you to Jesus or made faith real to you?
- 2. What’s one verse or story in Scripture that has stuck with you lately?

- 3. What spiritual practice has been most meaningful in this season?
- 4. What’s something God has been teaching you recently?
- 5. Where do you feel most aware of God’s presence?

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

- 1. What’s one thing you appreciate about this group?
- 2. What’s a recent moment when you felt encouraged or supported?
- 3. What kind of people help you feel safe and known?
- 4. What’s one area of life where you’d love to grow this year?
- 5. What’s something you hope to experience or learn through this group?

