



YOUR NEXT 2 WEEKS



FAITH E · CHURCH



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SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION:

Over the next two weeks we'd encourage you to memorize **1 John 5:11-12**, it is a great reminder that through Jesus Christ we have fullness of life now and the assurance of eternal life to come.

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:11-12

FAITH E · CHURCH

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WELCOME TO YOUR NEXT TWO WEEKS!

Whether you've just begun your faith journey or you're looking for a healthy restart, we're glad you've decided to commit a portion of your next two weeks to learn how to follow Jesus.

Over the next two weeks you will learn about who God is, who you are, how to interact with God and be a disciple of Jesus. A 'disciple' is someone who studies under and strives to be like a master teacher. As Christians, we are disciples of Jesus. This guide will help you develop healthy practices for following Jesus. The Holy Spirit will begin to transform your life as you **read the Bible, pray, and journal.**

These core practices will help you establish daily patterns that are essential for your faith journey.

Don't go through these next two weeks alone!

If you don't already have another person to begin this journey with, please let us know. We'd love to arrange a group or mentor who can walk with you during the next two weeks and beyond. **Simply text '2weeks' to 77411 or call Faith E's front desk at 406-656-8747.**

Why are there only five days for each week?

This allows for some flexibility while completing this guide. We want to reinforce that 'doing this perfectly' isn't the goal, the goal is to begin to develop practices and make some solid progress toward becoming a disciple.

We're excited to see how God is going to change your life, and the lives of those around you, over the next two weeks and beyond. **Let's get started!**

DAY 1 : WHO GOD IS

No matter who we are, or where we come from, we each have an idea about God. Maybe in the past you've had thoughts that He doesn't exist, or He just created the world and now sits back and watches it, disinterested. We are often instilled with these images of God early in our lives—from our parents, our culture, or the church.

None of our images or words can capture His holiness, His majesty, and His glory. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways. We simply cannot fathom the depth and breadth of God.

It is only as God reveals Himself to us that we begin to get an accurate picture of who He really is. And that revelation comes to us in three primary ways: through creation, through Jesus Christ, and through the Scriptures. All we know about God comes from what He discloses to us about Himself. Because of this, we can know God and have confidence about what He is like, but at the same time, we will never be able to understand Him completely. We know enough about God to love and worship Him, but most of God will remain beyond our comprehension.

One of the mysterious things about God is that the Bible reveals that in Him there are three persons—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who always have, and always will, live in loving relationship. This mystery is known as the Trinity.

In addition to the relational characteristics of the Triune God, throughout Scripture God reveals many additional attributes about Himself. It's through these attributes that we can begin to understand who God is.

KEY ATTRIBUTES OF GOD:

Love

*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. **1 John 4:16***

Eternal

*Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. **Psalm 90:2***

Holy

*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." **1 Peter 1:15-16***

Creator

*For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **Colossians 1:16***

Wise

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! **Romans 11:33***

Powerful

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. **Hebrews 1:3***

Gracious

*The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. **Psalm 145:8***

Merciful

*For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. **Romans 9:15-16***

Unchanging

*"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." **Malachi 3:6***

DAY 2 : THE WORLD GOD MADE

"In the beginning, God..."

The Bible opens up with the four most powerful words ever written: "In the beginning, God..." The Bible doesn't argue for God's existence, it simply assumes it. Far more than a purely abstract theological textbook, the Bible tells us the story of God and His work in and beyond the world.

We learned yesterday that God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, through Jesus Christ, and through the created order. The first two chapters of the Bible relay the story of God's creation.

We learn in the introductory words to the Bible that God is eternal and existed before His creation, and that He is the initiator of all that happens. As we continue in Genesis 1, we see how the Creator God of the universe brings everything into being, and how He values His work.

Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water. God said, "Let there be light." And there was light! God saw that the light was good, so God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness "night." There was evening, and there was morning, marking the first day. God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters and let it separate water from water. So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. It was so. God called the expanse "sky." There was evening, and there was morning, a second day. God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear." It was so. God called the dry ground "land" and the gathered waters he called "seas." God saw that it was good. God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: plants yielding seeds according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." It was so.

The land produced vegetation – plants yielding seeds according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. God saw that it was good. There was evening, and there was morning, a third day. God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be signs to indicate seasons and days and years, and let them serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” It was so. God made two great lights – the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night. He made the stars also. God placed the lights in the expanse of the sky to shine on the earth, to preside over the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. There was evening, and there was morning, a fourth day. God said, “Let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” God created the great sea creatures and every living and moving thing with which the water swarmed, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” There was evening, and there was morning, a fifth day. God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” It was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the cattle according to their kinds, and all the creatures that creep along the ground according to their kinds. God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:2-25

In the story of creation, we see the power of God in action. For instance, He simply speaks the universe into existence. We see His intelligence, beauty, and order as He creates and fills each day of creation. We not only marvel at the creation, we marvel at the God who created it. “The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1)!” Then finally we get to see God’s evaluation of all He has made: “It is very good.” God delights in what He has made.

DAY 3: WHO WE ARE

The creation of human beings gets an extended focus in the Genesis account.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I now give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the entire earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the animals of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." It was so. God saw all that he had made – and it was very good! There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:26-31

Man and woman were part of God's good creation. They were made **by** Him for unique relationship and interaction **with** Him. The phrase "image of God" means that there are things true of God that are also true of us. While obviously not gods ourselves, we reflect certain characteristics of God's nature.

From this passage, we learn one characteristic we share with God is that we are made for cooperative participation with God in His work. God blesses people and tells them to have children and to fill the earth. He also tells them to subdue the Earth which means ruling over it, and taking care of it.

We see an example of this in **Genesis 2**, when Adam (who was created before Eve) is commanded to care for creation, and to name the animals God had made. Our work was to reflect His work. He is the Creator, and He creates us to be creators. Our stewardship of creation was to mirror His care in creating it.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet...

Psalm 8:3-6

Another major attribute we share with God is personhood. God has will, intelligence, and emotion—and so do we. The most central facet of personhood is the capacity and desire for relationship. God’s personhood (the Trinity, which we talked about on Day 1) is made up of three co-equal, co-eternal, co-existing persons whom the Bible refers to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, God has always existed as a community within Himself. And, out of the overflow of that loving and joyous community, God creates human beings in His image—made for relationship with Himself and with others.

God didn’t create us because He was lonely or bored. He didn’t create us because He needed our help. He is fully complete without us, yet desires relationship with us. It is striking that there is only one thing in the whole creation account that is considered “not good.” *The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him,”* (**Genesis 2:18**). This quote refers to the fact that Adam was created before Eve, and, for a period, had no other person to relate to.

DAY 4 : WHAT WENT WRONG

Many people can agree that something is deeply wrong with our world. We only have to read a newspaper, turn on the TV, or connect to the Internet to know this is so. Our sinful behavior leads to not only hurting each other, it also leads to harming ourselves in destructive ways.

Sin is any feeling or thought or speech or action that comes from a heart that does not treasure God over all other things. Anything that seeks to pull us away from our relationship with God.

It's important to remember the impact of sin is felt not only by us and those around us, but it deeply affects the heart of God. **Sin's greatest impact is in our relationship with God.** Not only do we fail to cherish and enjoy Him, but our rebellion against Him earns us *the wages of sin: death and eternal separation from Him (Romans 6:23)*. The fact that God is holy means that He is perfectly just, and cannot tolerate the destruction of His creation. God hates the sin that damages us, our lives, and our relationship with Him.

Genesis 2 ends with the man and woman in a garden, free to enjoy all of its delights, with only the *"tree of the knowledge of good and evil"* off limits. We don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in this paradise, but the Bible records the rebellion that began to ripple outward throughout all creation.

Now the serpent was more shrewd than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Is it really true that God said, 'You must not eat from any tree of the orchard'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the orchard; but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, 'You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.'"

The serpent said to the woman, "Surely you will not die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the orchard at the breezy time of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the orchard. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" The man replied, "I heard you moving about in the orchard, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." And the Lord God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it." So the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman replied, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the wild beasts and all the living creatures of the field! On your belly you will crawl and dust you will eat all the days of your life. And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your labor pains; with pain you will give birth to children. You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you." But to Adam he said, "Because you obeyed your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' cursed is the ground thanks to you; in painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, but you will eat the grain of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return." **Genesis 3:1-19**

For Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented a choice— whether to humbly trust God and submit themselves to His gracious rule, or to turn from Him and go their own way. We know which choice they made, and the consequences have been passed down to us.

After their disobedience, the harmony and intimacy that existed between the man and woman quickly turns to blame and shame - the man blames the woman and then the woman blames the serpent. Their intimacy with God is ruptured, and the shalom that characterized God's good world evaporates.

There is not one aspect of human life that has not been affected by the entrance of sin and death into the world. Every relationship we were made for was fractured. Instead of intimacy with God, there is fear and hiding. Instead of intimacy between man and woman, there is shame, hurt, and a struggle for power. Even creation itself groans under the weight of human disobedience.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Romans 8:20-22

Instead of humble obedience to God and joyful delight in His creation, humanity became enslaved to the power of sin. Our inner natures have become bent towards evil. The Scriptures teach that the end result of our sin is death. The Bible also tells us that unless our sin problem is addressed, we will experience spiritual death, which means being separated from God both now and into eternity.

Sometimes this death is the by-product of our own sinful choices. Sometimes it is the result of someone else's choice, or just living in a marred world. Often it is a combination of all three. What is certain, is that we all experience the deadly consequences of sin. And, if that's not bad enough, the Bible says that unless our sin problem is addressed, we will experience spiritual death, which means being separated from God both now and into eternity.



DAILY RESPONSE

- In what ways have you experienced the destructive force of sin in your life?
- Knowing God loves you and wants to restore you, talk to Him about the pain you've encountered or caused due to your sin.

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

DAY 5 : THE BEST NEWS EVER

As we learned yesterday, none of us are able, on our own, to avoid sin and be reunited with God. The good news is, in spite of our sin and rebellion, God does not remain distant from our world, but enters this world to restore us to Himself, and set the world back to the way He designed it to be. God chose to save us through his son, Jesus Christ.

What is so amazing about Jesus Christ is He is God in human form. God, Himself comes to the world as Jesus Christ and begins to reverse the curses of sin and death that have ravaged humanity since the time of Adam and Eve. He comes to the center of our damaged souls and deals directly with the disease the Bible calls sin. We are redeemed and restored by Jesus, who took sin and its consequences upon Himself.

The Bible tells us the “wages of sin is death”—we have earned it—so Jesus died to take the “wages” of sin upon Himself. He dies the death we were already dying because of sin, to give us the life we could n ever attain on our own. When He died on the cross, our old selves died with Him; and when Jesus rose from the dead, our new selves rose with Him. He restored our relationship with God by providing a means of forgiveness of the debt we owed. He broke the power of sin over us, so that through Him we may overcome the evil in ourselves and in our world.

Jesus’ death on the cross was the necessary means by which the root of sin and death could be overcome. Our sin and rebellion from God actually made us His enemy. This makes Jesus’ sacrifice for us even more incredible.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (For rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person perhaps someone might possibly dare to die.)

But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, because we have now been declared righteous by his blood, we will be saved through him from God's wrath. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, since we have been reconciled, will we be saved by his life? Not only this, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

Romans 5:6-11

At just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Jesus made it clear that this path back to God was opened to everyone regardless of their gender, heritage, religious dedication, guilt, accomplishments, or any other human measurement. Salvation through Jesus is a gift of grace offered to you by God. But, it is a gift you must individually receive. Being raised by Christian parents, going to church, living in America, or being a good person is no substitute for the faith we must live out each day. Now the great and epic story of God's salvation of the world can be your story too.

How do you accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf?
Just think of your **A.B.C.'s**.

A. Admit you're a sinner. Through thought and action, you are separated from God. You are not able to bridge the gap between you and God through your own effort. "Trying harder" is not the answer, but rather acknowledging that you can't save yourself. Authentically admit this to God, and allow Him to build the bridge to a relationship with you.

B. Believe in Jesus and what He has done. To believe in Jesus is to agree with what the Bible says about Him, and what He says about Himself. Jesus was 100% human and 100% God. He died on the cross as a sacrifice to make payment for your sins, and then rose from the dead conquering death for all who believe in Him.

C. Commit to follow Jesus. Commitment is more than a sentimental prayer or intellectual assent. It is wholeheartedly believing that Jesus alone saves you, and then living in light of that truth. It means making Jesus your personal friend, leader, confidant, and object of worship.

It is not enough for Jesus to offer you salvation. It is not enough for you to just understand it. You must decide to take Jesus up on His offer and begin to follow him daily.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Have you acknowledged Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If yes, how has that changed you? If you haven't, what is keeping you from doing it now?
- If you are ready to accept Jesus as your Savior, write a prayer accepting His gift of forgiveness and asking Him to be the Lord of your life. If you have already asked Jesus into your life, write a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of grace and forgiveness in your life and what it has meant to you.

Example of a new believer's prayer:

"Dear God, I know I'm a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

IF YOU'VE DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS...

share it with someone who will celebrate it with you and encourage you in your faith. If you don't have anyone like that in your life, **we would love to connect and celebrate with you! Reach one of our pastors by calling our front office at 406-656-8747 or emailing us at info@faithe.org**

DAY 6: GOD SPEAKS THROUGH SCRIPTURE

God has a variety of ways to communicate with us, but there is none more foundational than through the Bible. The Bible is also called God's Word because it is authored by God. In other words, it is not a book that originates from human minds, but from God—it is God-breathed.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

How could the Bible claim to have been written by humans and also by God?

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20-21

The Bible is relevant today and God uses it to instruct and bless us.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

This notion of the Bible being composed by both God and humans is called "dual authorship." The message originates from God, but He implants His thoughts into the human author. The writer, in turn, uses his style and personality to communicate the message. It is clear that the final product, in its original form, was without error and exactly what God wanted to communicate.

It's this unique writing process that makes the Bible different from any other book ever written. Calling the Bible "a book" is a bit of a misnomer. It is really more of a small library. It's a collection of 66 books written by 40 different authors in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) over a period of about 1,500 years. Amazingly, even with so many different authors (most of whom never knew each other) from completely different cultures and writing from three different continents, the Bible has a consistent theme. It is the story of how God relates to humans. More specifically, every book points to the main character: Jesus Christ. The Old Testament (written before Jesus) points to the need for a Savior to come, and the New Testament communicates how Jesus filled that need.

There are many proofs to verify that the Bible is true, including a substantial, and growing, number of historical and archeological discoveries that verify what the Bible teaches. A noted archeologist, Dr. Nelson Glueck, was quoted in a book review for The New York Times as saying, "No discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements of Scripture."

There are also a number of prophecies (predictions) written in the Old Testament that come to pass in the New Testament. For instance, dozens of prophecies about the coming Messiah were made hundreds of years before Jesus Christ came fulfilling every one of them, including where He would be born, what His ministry would be like, and how He would die (even describing death on a cross centuries before that form of torture was invented—see Psalm 22). The fulfillment of prophecies has always been one of the primary proofs for biblical divine authorship.

How are we sure what was originally written by authors like Moses, David, and Paul is the same as what the Bible says today? For centuries manuscripts were hand-copied down through the ages, and the accuracy of what we have today is based on how well they were preserved. We have good reason to be confident in their authenticity.

Because of the great reverence the Jewish scribes held toward the Scriptures, they exercised extreme care in making new copies of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The entire copying process was specified in meticulous detail to minimize the possibility of even the slightest error. The number of letters, words, and lines were counted. If a single mistake was discovered, the entire manuscript would be destroyed. The church scribes of the New Testament had similar thorough guidelines as to how they made copies.

When we pick up our Bibles, we can be confident we are reading what God intends for us to read. But knowing we have God's Word is only half the battle.

God's intention for us is to read His Word on a regular basis so it changes the way we think, speak, and act. The Bible gives us a godly worldview we can never gain from any other source.

At the end of "Your Next Two Weeks" study, we will continue to encourage you to read your Bible and we will give practical advice on how to understand God's Word and apply it to your daily life.



DAILY RESPONSE

- From today's reading, what did you learn about the Bible? Is the idea that God's Word speaks to us today a new idea for you?
- How does knowing that truth impact or encourage you to read the Bible?

If you are not already reading your Bible, then today is a good time to start. If you don't have a Bible, we would love to give you one! Please call the church office at 406-656-8747 and we'll get one to you.

DAY 7 : COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

Throughout history, God has demonstrated His desire to communicate to us. In yesterday's reading, we discussed how God gave us His Word, the Bible, to reveal to us His eternal plan for salvation through His Son Jesus. God also sent His Spirit to communicate with us. The night before He died, Jesus had this to say about the Holy Spirit to His disciples:

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:26

Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you.

John 14:16-17

God sent the Holy Spirit to help us and be with us forever. The Bible teaches that all believers receive the Holy Spirit when they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is given as a gift to all who believe in Christ and follow Him.

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13

Salvation in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit allow us to have a personal and intimate relationship with God. Saying yes to Jesus means we now stand rightly connected to God, and are able to grow in that relationship. One of the most awe-inspiring parts of this new relationship is that God—the Creator of the universe—wants to speak with us. Because God is personal, He desires to connect with us, and lead us into a greater relationship with Him.

It's clear that central to a relationship is communication and a big part of that communication is prayer.

Many people assume that the primary purpose of prayer is for us to speak to God. While it's true that prayer is a way for us to speak to God, it actually has a much more profound purpose.

When you pray in earnest, you come face-to-face with the God of the universe, the God who shows you grace, the God who adopts you, the God who guides and strengthens you. When you pray, you step into God's kingdom, His world—the place where God rules without pushback.

The most amazing thing about prayer is we are communicating directly to the Lord Almighty, who is the final authority over everything. We don't need to memorize a chant or follow any tradition or ritual. We just need to talk and listen. We don't even have to talk out loud because God is omniscient, or all-knowing. He knows our thoughts. He has allowed us to walk into His presence whenever we want. This was made possible through the death of Jesus, when we were reconciled back to God and can now enjoy an intimate relationship with Him.

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:16

Listening to God can be a bit mysterious. God doesn't need to speak out loud to get through to us. By slowing down and praying, God can communicate directly to us by His Spirit through thoughts and ideas. Sometimes the Holy Spirit speaks to us in the midst of activity—walking, jogging, gardening, hiking, etc. Regardless of what we are doing, if we sift out the noise of our lives, we can make room for His voice. **We can also know that it's His voice because it will always match up with His revealed Word and the principles of the Bible.**

DAY 8 : SURRENDERING TO HIM

Being a Christ follower doesn't mean we won't face difficult times. And during those times we should cry out to God in prayer. Sometimes we see God answer prayers by rescuing people in times of trouble, healing those with afflictions, and comforting those in despair. It is clear that God is willing and able to heal and restore. However, God doesn't always answer our prayers in the ways we hope or expect during those times of difficulty. This is evident throughout the Bible as well. Hebrews chapter 11 talks about men and women of great faith —some were delivered from hardship but many were not.

So why does He choose to rescue some and allow hardship for others?

The fact is, we just don't know. At the risk of oversimplifying the issue, we cannot know the mind of God. It is impossible for us to know His plan for our lives in its entirety or understand why He does the things He does. The last paragraph of the passage from Hebrews 11 is important to remember: *"...none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."*

The fullness of the promise of God's Kingdom has yet to come. We see in the Bible that Jesus is coming back and when He returns, we will experience God's perfection in this world. Until then, we have faith in the sovereignty of our loving Father who provides for us exactly what we need in His perfect time. And what does that kind of faith look like?

We see that kind of faith displayed in the book of Daniel. There we find Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - boldly standing firm in their faith even when they are thrown into a furnace for not bowing down and worshiping King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. **Read Daniel 3:14-18.**

These three brave men are standing before the most powerful man on earth with bold defiance. With one clenched fist they say, "God can rescue us and we believe He will." In essence they are saying, "King, you think you control this situation? You think our lives are in your hands? You think you hold our ultimate fate? You couldn't be further off. We serve a God who created the earth, who holds the stars in His hands, who set you on your throne, and who will rule long after you and your empire are gone. God has this situation well in hand and is more than able to save us from your furnace."

Then the second fist comes up and they say with equal confidence, "Even if He doesn't save us, we will not serve your gods." Essentially they are saying, "So great, so awesome, so worthy is our God, that even if He chooses not to save us and our bodies burn in the flame, our God is still the one we will follow. We will trust Him in life, and we will trust Him in death."

When we have this kind of double-fisted faith, we are saying to God, "Whether you choose to act or not, I will cling to you and hold on with both hands." This is the kind of faith God deserves, and the kind His Holy Spirit empowers us to have no matter what our circumstances. And that kind of faith allows us to completely **surrender** to His Will for our lives.

Surrender is an important aspect of our relationship with the Lord. It goes beyond recognizing that we belong to God. When we surrender, we let go, and put the focus where it belongs: on Him. But, it isn't "giving up" in the way we normally define it. The action is more like "giving over" much like we see in the lives of the three young men facing a fiery furnace.

Surrender isn't easy. Oftentimes it isn't until we reach those moments when our soul is crushed and we are in agony of spirit that we finally surrender. Have you ever been there? Where you find yourself so desperately in need that you have no where left to go. Are you there now?

Sometimes, God brings us to a place where we cry out to Him, "I'm exhausted and I can't carry this any more. I just can't try to fix this any longer. Here, God, take it. Please carry it for me."

The Bible says in **I Peter 5:7** that you can "*Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.*" We can cast all of our cares onto God. We don't need to worry about filtering our cares before we bring them to Him. There is no care we have that is beneath bringing to Him. There is also no care that is too big for Him. Here, we are invited to bring everything we have to Him. Why? Because He cares for you. God will lift us up, but He will do it in His timing. Our speed and God's speed are almost always different. We want things to get resolved immediately, but God is patient. God is working alongside us in every situation at just the right pace. Part of trusting God is not only believing He will lift us up, but that He will lift us up in the right time.

Give Him your burden. Surrender. Rest in His peace.



DAILY RESPONSE

- What impacted you the most as you thought about having a "double-fisted faith?"
- What is a care in your life you need to give over to God right now?
- Write a prayer of surrender. Ask God to help you release to Him what you've been holding tightly.

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DAY 9 : CHARACTER LIKE CHRIST

The specifics of His plan for each one of us will unfold as we continue to surrender to God daily. We can be sure of this: God wants to develop us so we become more like Jesus in our character.

But how does this change happen? How do we become more like Jesus in our character? Look at this passage in Romans chapter five that talks about the process of being transformed to look more like Him:

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:2-5

The verses here tell us what produces Christ-like character. This change of character starts when we believe, to our very core, that we are loved by God. When we believe this truth, we realize problems and trials aren't experienced for nothing. Instead, they produce endurance which produces strength of character. Strength of character produces joyful, confident hope. This isn't the same as a life of comfort, but your comfort isn't God's goal for your life. Changing you into a person of great character—someone who is spiritually like His Son—is His plan for your life.

Difficult times come to us all, the key is in how we respond during these difficult times and to the circumstances in which He has placed us. This character transformation process hinges on our obedience. **Obedience can be defined as courageous dependence moving into action.** It is seeking His will through praying, reading the Bible and receiving wise counsel of believing friends, then moving forward in the direction God is leading.

It is important to note, you cannot do this in your own power. We have been given the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with His strength. He helps us move through the valleys of our lives in obedience to God, which transforms our character to be more like Christ.

As we obey God in this way, we begin to not only see His power at work in our circumstances; we also begin to desire His will for our lives. Our minds are being constantly transformed and we are more easily able to recognize God's will for us.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

Being transformed to be like Christ is a life-long process. Day by day, as we surrender ourselves to Christ, we will overcome obstacles and become more mature in our faith and our character. Undoubtedly, new trials will surface, but we will face them better prepared because of our dependence on Jesus. As we obey, we can have confidence we are in the center of His will for us—in the palm of His hand.



DAILY RESPONSE

- What challenges are you facing now that are helping transform your character to be more like Christ's?
- Where do you see God's hand working in your circumstances?
- Thank God for the opportunities He gives to become more like his Son. Ask Him to show you His plan as you move through difficult times.

DAY 10 : YOUR NEXT STEPS

Great job completing this guide! If you've come this far and you still don't have another person to encourage you on your faith journey, please let us know. We'd love to arrange a group or mentor who can walk with you during the next two weeks and beyond. **Simply text '2weeks' to 77411 or call Faith E's front desk at 406-656-8747.** Here are some ways for you to continue on your discipleship pathway.

KEEP READING YOUR BIBLE

Allow the rhythm of reading God's Word to continue to transform your life. We would encourage you to read about the life of Christ by reading the Gospel of John. John is found in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, then John) and is 21 chapters long. So, read a chapter of John a day for the next 21 days.

Don't just read your Bible to check it off some 'Christian to-do list'. Read it slowly and thoughtfully as you look for ways to apply it to your daily life. It's too easy to read with our minds on cruise control and then when we reach the end of the chapter, we realize that we didn't catch anything that we just read. **To help you read actively, we encourage you to journal as you read.**

If you don't already have a journal, we would love to give you one, just stop by the Connection Center at Faith E before or after the services and we'll give you one!

SUGGESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

- write the book/chapter/verse at the top of the page
- summarize what you read using your own words
- write down words or phrases that stand out to you
- write a few ways this passage changes today for you

You certainly don't have to write volumes under each area, but you might be surprised at how much you get out of your Bible reading by doing this simple exercise.

KEEP PRAYING

In this guide, we discussed how important communicating and listening to God is each and every day of our lives.

Prayer is so personal that it's impossible to dictate a one-size-fits-all technique, but some guidance might be helpful. **We learn from Jesus' prayer life three important things: He prayed privately, He prayed regularly, He prayed genuinely.**

God wants to hear prayers that come from our hearts. He wants us to be genuine. In fact, God would much rather have you pray authentically even if you are angry with Him (and maybe don't use courteous language) than hear flowery prayers that aren't a true expression of how you feel. Finally, a way to connect with God during your private sessions of prayer is journaling while praying. It might help you slow down and avoid getting off track. There are different acrostics people have used through the years to help walk them through their prayers. Here is one that might be helpful: **P.R.A.Y.**

Praise: We're to *enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (see Psalm 100:4)*. Sit quietly and thank God for who He is and what He has done.

Repent: A sober reminder comes from **Psalm 66:18**: *"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."* A spiritual cleansing is needed in order to come nearer to the throne of God.

Ask: We're not telling God anything new — *"All my longings lie open before you, O Lord: my sighing is not hidden from you" (Psalm 38:9)*. Even so, He gives us access to ask Him about our needs and frustrations.

Yield: The fact that we have brought our prayer list before God indicates our trust that He will, in His time and in His way, show us the way we should go **(see Psalm 143:8)**.

ARE YOU READY TO BE BAPTIZED?

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality. It symbolizes your inner cleansing from sin, your new birth in Christ Jesus, and it's a mark of Christian discipleship that has been practiced by the Church from its very beginning.

If you understand and agree with these three questions, you're likely ready to be baptized:

1. Do you acknowledge and profess the Christian faith as taught in the Holy Scriptures?
2. Do you repent from sin and do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?
3. Are you determined by the grace of God to live the Christian life?

Register for baptism at www.faithe.org/baptism

JOIN A GROUP

If you're not in a group already, we would encourage you to join one because this journey should be experienced in the context of community. Our home groups are a place for you to wrestle with your questions, develop spiritual practices, pray for one another, and support each other.

Join a group at www.faithe.org/groups



DAILY RESPONSE

- How has God used these last couple of weeks to impact you?
- With whom do you need to share your story of what God's been doing in your life?
- Pray that God gives you the opportunity to share your story with that person and that His Spirit gives you the strength and wisdom to do it.



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