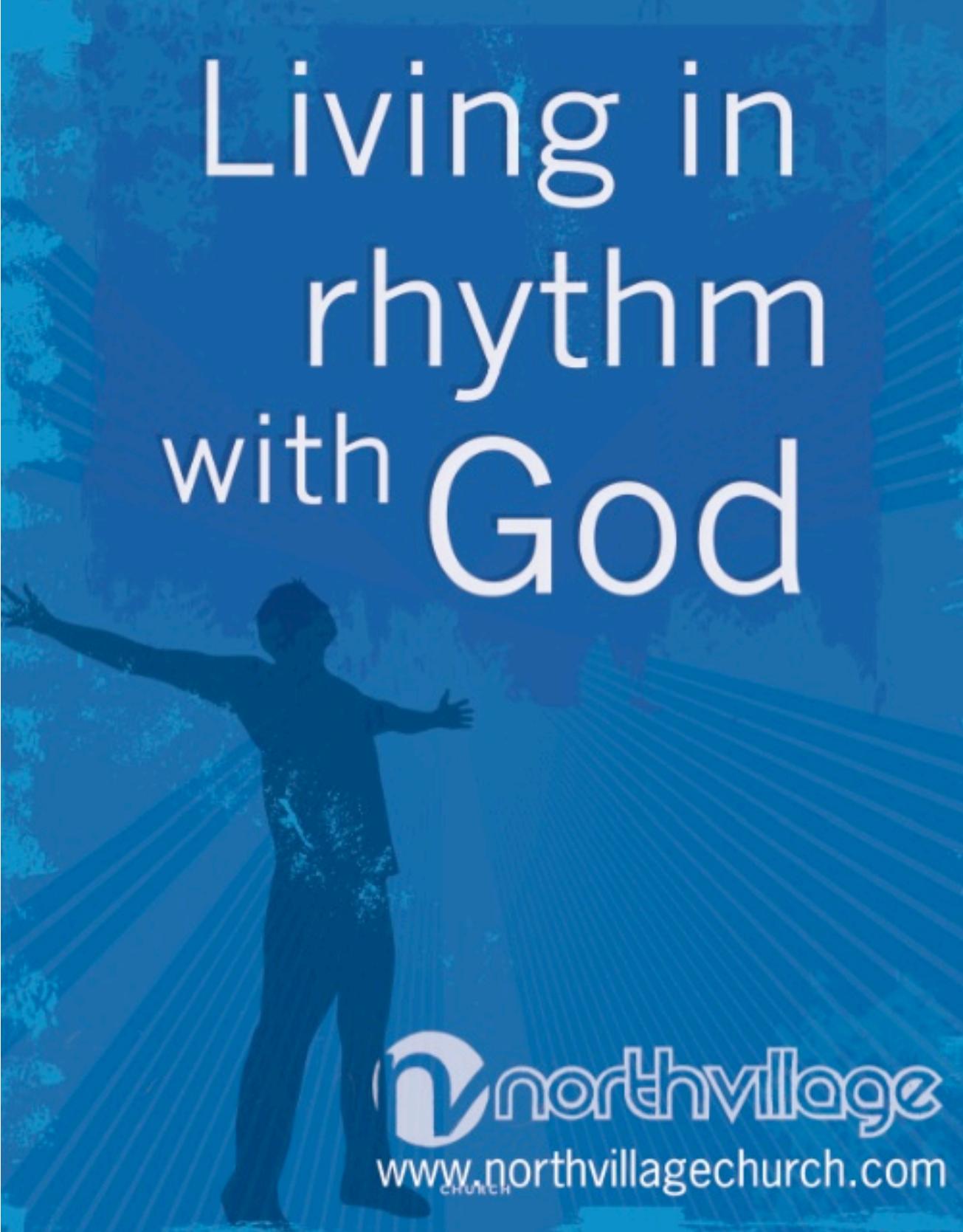


Living in rhythm with God

A silhouette of a person with arms outstretched, standing in a city environment with buildings and trees. Light rays emanate from behind the person, creating a divine or spiritual atmosphere.

 northvillage
CHURCH
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**Rhythms ... How We Live
A Spiritual Journey**

Dear North Village Church,

During the next five weeks, we are going to enter a 35-day spiritual journey, and it is going to be awesome! As a church, we have three overarching goals: connect with Jesus, connect with our community, and connect with others. The purpose of the spiritual journey we are about to begin is to help us with that first goal: connecting with Jesus.

We believe the next 35 days are going to be pivotal for us as a church in our relationship with Jesus. A spiritual journey might be a new experience for some of you, while for others it is something familiar, but my prayer is that Jesus will give all of us a fresh experience over the next 35 days.

We've given a name to our spiritual journey. We're calling it "Rhythms ... How We Live."

We all have rhythms in our lives, and we believe God created us to be in rhythm with Him. We believe God has been unfolding an eternal story, and we believe He created us to participate in that story. Over the next five weeks, we are going to explore those rhythms together as a church, looking at prayer, Scripture, giving, Sabbath, and celebration.

We believe our rhythms shape how we live, and our desire as a church is that our rhythms would shape our lives to intersect with His eternal story on a daily basis. Are you ready? It is going to be a lot of fun!

I pray that over the next 35 days, you will experience Jesus in a new way. I pray that over the next 35 days, He will reveal areas of our lives that are holding us back, as well as give us clarity as to how we can more fully participate in this amazing eternal story!

Will you take a moment right now to look through this guidebook and become familiar with the information and materials in it? In this packet you will find:

- A prayer and devotional guide written by people in North Village Church
- Articles on spiritual disciplines
- A commitment sheet for your spiritual journey

Looking forward to it,

Michael

The Plan

- We will begin on Sunday, February 21, 2010.
- Conclude on Sunday, March 28, 2010.
- By the end of the first week, you should find an accountability partner.
- Make your personal commitment on the “My Spiritual Agreement” and have your accountability partner sign it.
- Spend additional time in prayer during the 35 days, both privately and with other Christ-followers.
- Experience the power of fasting in some form as the Lord leads you. This discipline will help you become more sensitive to the things of God.
- Follow the devotional guide given in this booklet.
- Journal your prayers and thoughts during this time.
- Pray that God will give you opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with your co-workers, friends, classmates, roommates, and neighbors.

Mile Markers

- Make an appointment each day with your Heavenly Father for a time of devotion.
- Objective: Hear His voice. Remove distractions that typically take up time.
- Get focused on Him by learning about His attributes, praising and thanking Him for who He is.
- Speak openly and honestly about where you are in your spiritual relationship.
- Evaluate your life by confessing and removing things that have come between you and Him.
- Spend more time than usual just listening. Just be quiet for a while and let His words soak in.
- Take notes on what you learn over the next 35 days.

My Spiritual Agreement

I, _____, agree to participate in our 35-DAY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY as I seek a deeper walk with God. As the Lord leads me, I will do my best to spend consistent private time with the Lord each day. I will endeavor to pray regularly both privately and with other Christ-followers. I will also participate in an active accountability relationship, as noted below, in order to enjoy the maximum benefit of this time of spiritual focus. With God’s help and encouragement from my accountability partner, I will do it.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____ (accountability partner)

MY PARTICIPATION PLAN

(Check all that apply.)

- Spend regular daily time with God at _____ (time of day).
- Keep a spiritual journal, as a record of my journey.
- Engage in fasting by abstaining from:

- Practice the following disciplines (see discipline articles):

- Commit to corporate Sunday morning meetings.

35-DAY JOURNEY | The schedule

Week 1 (Feb 22-26): Prayer / Fasting

- Day 1- Why go through a spiritual journey?
- Day 2- Why should I fast?
- Day 3- How do I pray?
- Day 4- What if I mess up?
- Day 5- No condemnation in Jesus Christ

Week 2 (Mar 1-5): Scripture

- Day 1- Where did the Bible come from?
- Day 2- Is it reliable?
- Day 3- Translations?
- Day 4- How to study the Bible (Part 1)
- Day 5- How to study the Bible (Part 2)

Week 3 (Mar 8-12): Giving

- Day 1- Tapping into the supernatural
- Day 2- Rich in Jesus Christ
- Day 3- Walking in the Spirit
- Day 4- Avoiding our own strength
- Day 5- Giving out of our weaknesses

Week 4 (Mar 15-19): Sabbath

- Day 1- Where does the Sabbath come from?
- Day 2- What about the Sabbath today?
- Day 3- Finding supernatural rest
- Day 4- Hearing from God
- Day 5- Results of the Sabbath

Week 5 (Mar 22-26): Celebration

- Day 1- Celebrating our salvation
- Day 2- Celebrating our relationships
- Day 3- Celebrating our marriage
- Day 4- Celebrating our children
- Day 5- Celebrating our gifts

Week 1: Prayer & Fasting

Day 1: Prayer (Part 1)

As we read through the Bible, we are confronted with the concept of prayer time and time again. Prayers offered up with sacrifices, for suffering, in moments of joy and at times of seeking deep insight. Prayer ties us into the Creator of the universe. The key with prayer is to view it in the larger context. It is a connection with God and with the community of believers. It has been referred to as a “service of the heart.”

In it we address ourselves to God. We turn to Him in petition, addressing our needs to Him. We may turn to God in thankful acknowledgment. We express our gratitude not only for whatever we have but also for the very fact of life itself. Often we turn to God in praise. Speaking to Him directly, we call Him ‘the great, mighty, and awesome God, the Most High God.’ There are also times when the purpose of our words is not to communicate with God but to sensitize ourselves so that we can better speak to Him.

Listening is a key component of prayer. See the verse below, which describes the type of mind-set listening produces.

Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

With the business of life, we can often go through the week without taking the time to “be still” in front of our Father in Heaven. To listen for and to His leading, we don’t “receive” very often because we don’t ask and then listen for the answer. Prayer is the calm in the storm, it is that moment of quiet that attunes our hearts to the world around us. It allows us to see the world as God intended it to be. Is prayer an important part of your life right now? How do these ideas affect your understanding and motivation to pray?

Day 2: Prayer (Part 2)

We ultimately want to hear what Jesus has to say about the topic. Praise Him that He did not leave us in the dark! In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount where He speaks about many areas of spiritual life. During that sermon, Jesus gives clear instructions about how to pray.

Matthew 6:5-13

“⁵When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to

your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. ⁷ And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. ⁹ Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'"

Jesus' words are powerful, aren't they? He is sure to tell us not to do this to impress others. It was common in His day and is not so uncommon today. Then, Jesus says something curious: not to pray like Gentiles with meaningless repetition. What does that mean? "Meaningless repetition" literally translates as "bata speech." Confused? Well, that would be speaking in a manner that sounded like "bata-bata-bata-bata-bata." These are not words but sounds with no meaning to anyone present, i.e. meaningless repetition. So to be clear, Jesus commands us to pray in a way that is understandable to you and any others who are there. Prayer is about expressing ideas and requests by words to God, not merely uttering rhythmic sounds or pleasing tones.

Last in verses 9-13 is what is widely called the Lord's Prayer. Within it are key ingredients that Jesus wants us to include in our prayers. It is a prayer spoken in realization of community. It includes praising God according to His amazing attributes. To pray as Jesus instructs involves desiring His will to be accomplished, not just reading a list of things we want or problems to be solved. At the same time, there is the recognition that God wants to hear about and provide for our needs, both physical and spiritual. How many elements to prayer can you find in verses 9-13? How can you include them in your prayers?

Day 3: Introduction to fasting

Fasting is defined as abstaining from certain foods and/or activities in order to draw closer to God. Here is an observation about fasting from Mark Buchanan's book *Your God Is Too Safe*.

"You can't read the Bible very far in any direction without realizing that fasting was simply a part of the natural rhythm of life for the people of God. To them, fasting was woven into the rhythm of life, like day and night, summer and winter, sowing and reaping, waking and sleeping."

He goes on to remind us that Jesus prepared to start His ministry by undergoing a fast.

"Jesus began His ministry with an intense and prolonged fast: forty days without food or

companionship. It was a Spirit-led experience. In the gospel of Mark, it says the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, where He fasted. And at the end of those forty days, the devil came to tempt Him.” Was Jesus at His lowest point? Or was He in peak fighting condition? Fasting is training, preparation for the battle that is to be fought on so many fronts.

Ephesians 6:12

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Jesus’ actions point us to the fact that fasting is an important ingredient for the spiritual battle described in Ephesians 6:12. Just like we train our bodies for physical contests through exercise, an important factor in training the soul/spirit is fasting. Have you included fasting into your spiritual training regimen? What have you learned today about fasting?

Day 4: What we learn from fasting

We will continue to look at the subject of fasting today. Fasting is not a legalistic requirement. It is not a weight-loss technique. It is not a hunger strike. It is a God-led, Spirit-driven activity. Fasting is born of an appetite for more of God’s presence, wanting God to lead, wanting the Spirit to drive. Deuteronomy 8 indicates that there are three main purposes behind a God-led and Spirit-driven experience of hunger. God orchestrates and engineers hunger to humble His people, to test them, and to teach them.

Fasting humbles us because it quickly shows us our limits and our frailty. It shows our utter dependency — ultimately upon God but also upon one another. Hunger humbles us. It opens our eyes to our own stark-naked neediness, our own daily dependence: Unless God in His mercy provides manna for this day, we’re in trouble. Look at us. We start coming apart after only twelve hours of not eating. We get depressed, cranky, and weary.

Fasting tests us to see what is in our hearts. Fasting brings to the surface that which is deep down, that which we mask from ourselves and others with large doses of corn chips and soda. Food can be a crutch, a mask that we use to bring temporary comfort to an issue that needs resolution. Too often in our culture we are food gluttons and biblically anorexic. The fast God chooses teaches us to have His heart for the hungry, the oppressed, the naked, the homeless. It is God’s intent that we would feel the pangs of hunger, the gnawing emptiness, the dizziness and weariness. That’s how a third of the world lives. And if we never live that way even briefly, how will we learn to care for the least of these? Have you ever imagined a fast could give you a first-person perspective of someone in serious poverty? Has the Holy Spirit ever worked in your heart in order to prepare you for a fast? Is He doing that now?

Day 5: The effect of fasting

To put it bluntly, fasting causes hunger, either hunger for food or for some other luxury we have become accustomed to. Without that hunger, our consumption can lead us deeper and deeper into acts of oblivious or intentional neglect, abuse, or exploitation of those who are hungry. Fasting gives us a small taste of what their world is like, a taste we will never get if we do not for a time forsake those things we desire.

I have a friend who organized a dinner at his church to raise money for famine relief in Sudan. About eighty people signed up to come. There were tables set for various sized groups — as small as six, as large as fifteen. People came in and took seats at random. Then the servers came out. The smallest tables were served first. They received an abundance of rich, sauce-laden food, hot, tender, and tasty. The servers were polite, attentive, quick to bring more food at the slightest indication that it was running low. They were quick to do the guests' bidding and anticipated needs before they were spoken.

Next, some of the larger tables were served. Theirs was a sparse, messy, bland meal. The few dishes were brought out in no particular order. The servers were curt and hurried. There were no second helpings. Two of the largest tables were served second to last — after the few guests at the first tables had already had all they could eat, and their dinner plates, piled with uneaten food, were whisked away and replaced with rich desserts and coffee. At the large tables, the servers plunked down, with rude haste, one bowl of rice in the middle of the table. No one got a plate or bowl. There were no utensils for serving or eating. The waiters never came back.

Guests at the very largest table were served last of all. They got a bucket of water. There was barely enough to go around. The water was brown and lukewarm. If you wanted some, you had to drink it from a wooden ladle, passed along with the bucket. Most people didn't bother.

At first the people at the largest tables, the last ones served, complained. Several people got up and spoke to the servers. The servers ignored them. Some went to my friend, the organizer. He ignored them. He and the servers paid attention only to the guests who sat at the smallest tables and who had received the most. The servers would come around often to those tables, ask if everything was pleasing and agreeable, and if they needed anything else. There was much laughter, banter, politeness.

After a while, it became obvious to everyone what was happening. The church was being given a taste of how the world works — its lopsidedness, its patches of abundance and emptiness, of affluence and desolation. Some got to experience, and all got to witness, the hunger of the hungry.

The offering for famine relief was good that night.

God has chosen to teach us to care in a practical way for the oppressed, the homeless, the ones with empty bellies. We are to allow the gnawing in our own guts to break our hearts, and the breaking of our hearts to lead us to break others' yokes and repair walls.

Excerpts from: *Your God Is Too Safe* by Mark Buchanan

Week 2: Scripture

Day 1: Where did the Bible come from?

So, what is the Bible? What sets it apart from other works? Basically, the answer to those questions revolves around the process of inspiration. Saying the Bible is inspired refers to the process by which God superintended the prophets and apostles who wrote the particular books of the Bible. That does not mean that men were merely passive puppets, as though sleep-writing, but rather that God sovereignly dictated His message through the individual personalities, intellects, experiences and styles of those whom He chose to involve in the process. Both the apostles Paul and Peter wrote about inspiration in the verses below.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2 Peter 1:20-21

“²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Bible has two major sections — the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament begins with God's process of creation and then tells the story of the Jewish people until the time of Jesus Christ. It comprises 39 individual books, written by 28 different writers over a period of 2000 years. The New Testament covers Jesus' birth, His ministry among people, and the disciples and their ministry after Jesus. The New Testament contains 27 books written by 9 different people, and it covers a short time period of fewer than 100 years. If you're keeping score at home, that adds up to a total of 66 books in the entire Bible. What should it mean for us to know that God inspired the very words and meaning of the Bible? How will that change your life today?

Reference: *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* by Max Anders

Day 2: Is the Bible reliable?

How can we be sure that a collection of documents written many centuries ago has been correctly given to us today? This is a good and valid question. Fortunately, we don't need to rely on 'blind faith' to answer it. We apply the same tests to biblical documents as we would to any other ancient writing. In his book, *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*, C. Sanders, a professor of military history, explains three tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism.

The tests are:

1. Bibliographical (i.e. the textual tradition from the original document to the copies and

manuscripts of that document we possess today)

2. Internal evidence (what the document claims about itself)
3. External evidence (how the document aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from the time period).

The Bible holds up extremely well to these tests. The bottom line is that the Old and New Testaments both hold up to academic scrutiny far better than any other writings from their respective time periods. It would take more space than we have here to show all the intricacies of matching documents from meticulous scribes, the Masoretic text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, and on down the line. There are more than 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or portions of the New Testament that have survived to our time on different materials. Let's conclude with some quotes from people who have spent their lives studying such things.

In his book, *Can I Trust My Bible*, R. Laird Harris concluded, "We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. ... indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the word of the Lord to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity."

In his book, *The Bible and Archaeology*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director of the British Museum, stated about the New Testament, "The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

From the last two days, we have seen the origin of the Bible and how it is been preserved for generation after generation. The Bible we have today is the same as it was when pen was first put to paper. The apostle Peter in his second letter described it as "more sure" than even what he had seen with his eyes. Do you believe the Bible is a reliable basis for your life?

Reference: "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?" by Jimmy Williams and *The Origin of the Bible*, edited by Philip W. Comfort

Day 3: Why are there different translations?

There are dozens of English translations of the Bible in print today. These versions are based upon the underlying philosophies and guiding principles of the translators of the work. Some translations adopt a "word-for-word" approach while others follow a "thought-for-thought" approach to translation.

For example, the New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), and King James Version (KJV) are based on a "word for word" approach. The "word for word" process attempts to render a literal reading of the original languages (Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic), relying on

interpretation only when the text demands clarification. There is an attempt to keep sentence structure and word order the same as the original language where possible. Sometimes when using a “word for word” approach, older or less understood words may be used by translators in order to get the closest agreement in definitions. This sometimes decreases the level of readability of the document. Those who are in favor of the more literal approach prefer to learn the more archaic words so that the text is less affected by the translation.

“The Message” is a translation based on the “thought for thought” method. The New International Version (NIV) and New Living Translation (NLT) are translated “thought for thought” as well but fall between “The Message” and the NASB on the translation spectrum. The “thought for thought” process follows a more interpretive translation process, driven by a philosophy of textual simplicity. Many times sentences will be shortened, lengthened, or simplified. This is done for the benefit of the reader because one of the main priorities of this method is to produce a text which is easily understandable by people of today. Sometimes the accuracy of the translation suffers a little in order to achieve readability.

Both methods aim to provide a Bible which is trustworthy for the believer. There are many aspects which go into translating a text well. That is why there can seem to be so many different versions of the Bible. Each translator emphasizes one of those aspects over the others, but all do so for the purpose of having a Bible we can all trust. Has this helped resolve any confusion you had? Does the existence of so many versions show you how blessed we are to be English speaking believers? So much thought and work has been done to make sure you have a Bible which you can trust and understand.

Reference: “Bible Translations” by Geoff Ashley and *Choosing a Bible: Understanding Bible Translation Differences* by Leland Ryken

Day 4: How to study the Bible (Part 1)

People may find it hard to study the Bible for many different reasons. I would venture to guess that “I don’t know how” is high up on the list of reasons that people may give. We’ll look at one particular method of study. A three-step process that is widely used in studying the Bible is: 1) observation, 2) interpretation, and 3) application. In part one, we’ll look at how to use observation in studying the Bible and follow up with interpretation and application in part two.

During observation we answer the question, “What do I see?” When you first read a passage of Scripture or a verse, take the time to really answer the question, “What do I see?” There are actually all kinds of questions you can ask the text, and it is a great way to interact with the Bible as a living document. You can create your own questions by using the 5 Ws and an H (who?, where?, when?, why?, what?, and how?). Also, making notes of details and facts that you see helps to slow down our natural tendency to gloss over a passage quickly and thereby turn “reading” into “study.” It also may help to mark recurring words in that book in your Bible. Use colors or simple pictures which call them to attention when looking at the page.

To help figure out what you see, you can look for four different things:

- Terms – a keyword that is crucial to what the author is trying to convey. Recognizing key terms can help uncover key themes in a book or passage.
- Structure – on a micro level there is sentence structure that is exactly what is written and how it is written. On a macro level there is literary structure within a book or passage: There could be questions/answers, cause/effect, problems/solutions, contrasts, comparisons, time phrases, and lists.
- Form – there are different literary forms used in Scripture that can inform our reading and understanding of the passage. The Bible is filled with a variety of literary forms: poetry, history, biography, and letters both public and private.
- Setting – understanding the setting can inform our understanding of the passage. The setting includes things like the author, the recipients, the place written or written about, the time written, and the stated purpose of the writing.

As you can see, to really make proper observation of the Bible, we can't just skim or quickly pass through a passage. Here are some guidelines that may help improve our observation skills:

- Read with thought
- Read repeatedly
- Read with patience
- Read prayerfully

The observation step is very important because the next two will proceed from it. Without correct and thorough observation, you are most likely to misinterpret and misapply what you read. Does this help your confidence to face the Bible? Which of the tools above will be most easy for you to use? What about the most difficult? Don't worry. It is the Holy Spirit's job to teach you. Just pray and turn over the specifics to Him.

Day 5: How to study the Bible (Part 2)

After observation comes interpretation. Here we ask the question, "What does it mean?" Figuring out exactly what a passage of Scripture means is a central reason why we're even studying the Bible. In order to determine the meaning of the Bible, we must think through the following issues:

- Content – Content comes from the work we've already done in observation.
- Context
 - Literary context: We can study a verse based on the other verses before and after it.
 - Historical context: When is this taking place?
 - Cultural context: Understanding the culture that is being written about or written to.
 - Geographical context: Understanding the places and things mentioned in the text.
 - Theological context: What was known about God at the time. What scriptures did they have access to? What other religions were competing for attention?
- Comparison – Comparing Scripture to other parts of Scripture.

- Culture – What factors led to the writing of the passage and what influence did they have? What happened as a result of the passage being written?
- Consultation – What other sources can help me understand this passage? Concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, atlases, etc.
- Original languages – An understanding of the languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) in which the Bible was written.

After interpretation comes application. Here we answer the question, “How does it work?” One, how does it work for me? And two, how does it work for others? There are four steps you can use to apply the Bible’s teaching to your life.

1. Know
 - a. Know the text – Application is based on your interpretation of the text. A correct interpretation of the scripture helps aid reliable applications.
 - b. Know yourself – Insight into yourself, your abilities and liabilities.
2. Relate – Relating the Scriptures to our own experience.
3. Meditate – Reflecting on and memorizing Scripture can help you apply Scripture to your life by bringing it to mind at the time of need.
4. Practice – Asking yourself if there, some area of your life where you can apply the truth of the passage.

Studying the Bible can be intimidating at times. Hopefully, using observation, interpretation, and application will break it down into smaller, easier tasks for you. Now try it out. Pick a verse, or a paragraph, or a book. Pray that God will teach you and transform you into the image of Christ.

Week 3: Giving

Day 1: Tapping into the supernatural

“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in Thanksgiving to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

We are called by God to be givers of time, talents, money, prayers, and sometimes even our belongings. During one such “giving opportunity,” I was going through my closet and choosing clothes to give away. Actually, the reality was that I was cleaning out my closet to give what I no longer wanted to someone else. Some gift! The Lord spoke to my heart, reminding me that I was giving for Him and He had provided it all anyway. What had been a routine activity of obedience became a joy. As I selected items that were harder to part with, I imagined the pleasure women would receive as they were provided new boots, purses, and beautiful sweaters to keep them warm this winter. I gave freely, knowing that my God has always fulfilled my needs and was now asking me to help Him meet someone else’s needs.

Obedience to God’s call is a way of demonstrating our love for Him. When we share even the little that we may have been given, God can take our expression of love and supernaturally multiply it. “His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Think about the meager offering of a young boy’s five barley loaves and two fish that were miraculously transformed into enough to feed five thousand! (John 6:1-14) Nothing is too small to be used by the Lord.

When we allow ourselves the opportunity to be used by God and give to His kingdom through time, talents, or treasure, we receive much more than we could possibly comprehend. Consider this Scripture, which describes the powerful effect of giving. “Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity and sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you” (2 Corinthians 9:13-14). That is a supernatural transaction indeed!

Day 2: Rich in Jesus Christ

“And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

One resounding effect of starvation is the tendency to hoard when food is plentiful. I know of one 4-year-old boy who was adopted from another country. Although his new family provided him with food in abundance, he still snuck items from the pantry to hide in his room. He did not fully grasp that his situation had changed forever. Even though his stomach was now full, he lived each day as if he were still starving.

As someone who has been “adopted” into the kingdom of God, I often do the same thing as this young

boy. Forgetting the treasures that are mine in Christ, I struggle to hold onto the worldly things that I think I need. Thankfully, the Bible reminds me of what I have been given. I can relax my hold on foolish things and delight in my new life in Christ.

Romans 8:32 assures us that “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Recognizing that God generously gives His children all that we need helps us to follow his example:

We can love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

We can give to others because He provides for us. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

We can forgive because He has forgiven us. (Colossians 3:13)

We can comfort others because He has comforted us. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

These are just a few of the provisions that He has for us! Let our hearts praise “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Once we understand that we have every spiritual blessing, won’t giving to others be much easier?

Day 3: Giving your whole self to God

There is a wonderful story of a young daughter who had a fake pearl necklace that she loved with all of her heart. Her father, as he tucked her in at night, would ask if she loved him. She would say, “Of course I do!” The father would then ask for her necklace. After many nights of his asking, she tearfully held the fake pearls out for him and cried, “I do love you! Here, daddy.” The father lovingly took the fake pearls and laid a genuine pearl necklace in her hands. What a beautiful illustration of our Heavenly Father. He waits for us to give him the pursuits and desires that have no lasting value, in order that he may bless us with that which has eternal benefit. Jonah 2:8 says it this way: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”

What are you holding back from God? What are you fearful to give him? Your creator knows your deepest needs, and He “is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Ask him to show you what you are clinging to and for the strength and wisdom to release it into his hands. And remember the words of the missionary Jim Elliott, which are made more poignant by the fact that his life was taken as he shared the gospel message: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Day 4: Avoiding our own strength

Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

There are some Scriptures that famously stand “on their own.” They are written on T-shirts. They have their own plaques, their own line of coffee mugs. This is one of those scriptures. Why is it so well-quoted? I believe it is because the writer Paul knew what we know: It can be exhausting to continually try to do good! To persevere, we need some hope that doing good will in fact make a difference.

At one time or another, all of us have experienced coming to the end of our own strength. It is at once frustrating and humbling to recognize that our own inner resources fail us. This is actually a wonderful thing, for we are then able to realize what was true all along: that we are, indeed, human. It is at these moments that God’s word brings us hope. Isaiah 40:29-31 states “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 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 be faint.” When we allow God to renew our strength, we are recognizing that “His grace is sufficient for us, that his power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Relying on God’s strength as we serve others allows the acclaim to go to Him rather than us. The apostle Peter sums it up like this: “If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11). When you are weary, ask God for his strength, then persevere with faithfulness as He provided for you.

Day 5: Giving out of our weaknesses

I like to read inspirational memoirs. One memoir I read recently was particularly effective but quite short. That it had any pages at all was remarkable, since it was written by a man in full paralysis (*Locked-In Syndrome*). The only thing he could move was his left eye. So he did. A lot. He blinked each time a series of letters were read to him, in this manner making words, then paragraphs and at long last, chapters. When a man like this writes an entire book by virtue of blinking, I realize that I am capable of giving to God in the midst of my own weaknesses.

Giving out of our weaknesses is not comfortable for us. Our pride wants us to give from a position of security and strength. How mightily we guard our weakness and tend to avoid those whose weaknesses are readily apparent. Yet when our strength is in God alone, and we no longer have acceptable “worldly fortresses” to hide behind, he can powerfully display His spirit.

God provided a well of water for Hagar when she was suffering in the desert with her son Ishmael (Genesis 21:19). He gave the hope of living water and forgiveness to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). He rescued Joseph from prison to let him rule from the heights of Egypt (Genesis 40:1). What has he provided for you in your weakness? How are you going to give back to him? Will you obey him

and submit to His desire for your life like Hagar? Will you tell others about Him like the Samaritan woman? Perhaps you will use your position in life to bless others, as Joseph did, in both the confines of prison and the freedom of the palace. What will your story be? “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory!” (Ephesians 3:20).

Week 4: Sabbath

Day 1: Where does the Sabbath come from?

When we hear the word "Sabbath," most simply think of attending church on a Sunday, but the Sabbath really means much more than that. The concept of Sabbath originates from the very beginning of the Bible in two passages in the Old Testament, Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:8-11.

Genesis 2:2-3

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

Exodus 20:8-11

⁸Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

In the Genesis passage, we see this concept of "rest" as God rests on the seventh day after working to create the heavens and the earth. This concept of "rest" is brought up again in Exodus 20 as part of the Ten Commandments. This time it is referred to specifically as "Sabbath." The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word "shavat," which means to rest or cease from work. Notice this rest is not just any kind of rest, but it is holy rest. It is a Sabbath "to the Lord your God," as it says in Exodus 20:9. So, as we begin to look at the idea of the Sabbath, we must understand first that it's not something to do because work is hard and we need some rest, but rather it is something God created because he wants us to regularly rest and reflect on His goodness. This is why we have a Sabbath, to rest from our busyness and reflect on a good God who created us and wants us to know Him in a personal way.

Day 2: What does the Sabbath look like today?

Many people approach the Sabbath today simply as "Sunday when you go to church." But actually, the Sabbath did not even start out on a Sunday: The "seventh day," which was Saturday in the Jewish culture. Now, some scholars will point to a shift from Saturday to Sunday in Acts 20:7 when the apostles gathered together to break bread on the first day of the week, which would be Sunday. This shift continued in the early church as religious practices were moved primarily to Sundays. You might be thinking, "This is way too confusing." And you would be right! The focus of Sabbath is not on a day, but on the concept of rest, reflection, and worship. Jesus himself makes that clear in Matthew 12 when he is criticized by the Pharisees for his actions on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:1-8

¹At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on a Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they

began to pick heads of wheat and eat them. ²But when the Pharisees saw this they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is against the law to do on the Sabbath.' ³He said to them, 'Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry – ⁴how he entered the house of God and they ate the sacred bread, which was against the law for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests? ⁵Or have you not read in the law that the priests in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are not guilty? ⁶I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷If you had known what this means: "***I want mercy and not sacrifice,***" you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.'"

Jesus responds to his critics by making a case for a broader motivation in regard to the Sabbath that consists of goodness, mercy, and love. Jesus wanted them and us to know that the Sabbath was meant as a blessing rather than a burden. It was never intended to be a checklist or a rigid schedule that we should follow. It was intended to be a time where we rest, remember, and reflect on who God is and all that He has done.

So what does this look like for us today? Well, it is clear from Scripture that the Sabbath should not include work. We know that just from the definition. That means cutting out the emails, the phone calls, the spreadsheets, and the to-do lists. That means cutting out all work and having a day set aside completely for rest and reflection. Whatever day that is for you, whatever day works best for you, you need to intentionally rest and engage in activity that breathes life back into you and points you outside of yourself to God. It's a time where you reorient your heart to God. This can take place in various forms like walks outside, going for a hike, silence and solitude, a good meal, prayer, reading Scripture, journaling, gazing at creation, or hanging out with family and friends all with the intent of stepping outside of the busyness of our schedules and reflecting on what God is doing and what he is teaching us. This is the heart of Sabbath, and it is where we must begin as we practice this day of rest.

Day 3: Finding supernatural rest

Some of you will immediately respond to the idea of Sabbath with, "Well, this sounds nice in an ideal world, but you just don't know my schedule. You don't know the pressures of my job or my responsibilities. I don't have time to rest." And without a doubt, I am sure all of us to some extent feel that way. Life *is* busy. There *are* tons of responsibilities. No one is going to deny that. But, think about it for a minute. How much more effective would you be with your responsibilities if you had one day where you rested? How much more healthy would you be in terms of your physical health, relational health, and spiritual health? Rest in regard to the Sabbath is not just like the rest you experience when you take a 20-minute power nap, watch a game, or read a magazine. You see, the Sabbath involves supernatural rest.

Supernatural rest is the kind of rest that is found only in Jesus. It is the kind of rest Jesus talked about when he said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" This rest is about connecting with your Creator in a deep and meaningful way. It is about recognizing that we are dependent on him for all we have in the world, for our rescue from sin, shame, and guilt, for our desire for acceptance and unconditional love, for our yearning to be known. And as we connect with God in

this way and remember him, we are reminded of these truths and we can find true rest, rest that will restore, rejuvenate, and renew us to live and work with greater purpose the rest of the week. This type of rest is no doubt worth taking time for, no matter how busy we are.

Day 4: Hearing from God

Sabbath is a day of rest, but not just any kind of rest. It's not a free pass to ignore your spouse or your kids and do what you want to do. It is a day of rest with the intent of reflecting on God. That is why it says in Exodus 20:10 that it is a "Sabbath to the Lord your God." The focus is on Him. We want to hear from Him in a powerful way about who we are, who He is, and how He wants us to live. So how does that happen? How do we hear from God?

- Scripture: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Reading, meditating, and memorizing Scripture as we experience the Sabbath will give us insight into the character and nature of God and how we can relate to Him and others around us.
- Prayer: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15). Talking to and listening to God in prayer enables us to align our hearts and minds with God and his way of seeing all of life.
- Godly counsel: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14). Engaging in deep, authentic discussion about our lives with our spouse or a close friend during our Sabbath can often be a way in which God will give you direction and leading in your life.

There are more, but these are just a few simple things we can do to hear from God in a powerful way as we practice the Sabbath.

Day 5: Results of the Sabbath

Infusion of hope

As we begin to rest and remember the goodness and mercy of God, we can't help but be infused with hope, a hope that is firmly grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have a hope that our worth, our identity, is not in our ability or achievement, but rather it is in the perfect work of Jesus. And because of that, we are completely accepted by our Heavenly Father and will enjoy eternal

rest with Him.

Obedience to God

It's funny when you think about it, but we are actually commanded to rest and keep the Sabbath. It is a gracious gift, but also a firm instruction by God in the Ten Commandments. When we practice the Sabbath, we are responding to God's call and living in complete obedience to Him.

Worship

As we practice the Sabbath, we come face to face with who God is and what He has done and our only response can be worship and adoration. We get to tell God how much we appreciate His goodness, faithfulness, and holiness in our lives.

Restoration and Renewal

Lastly, as we practice the Sabbath, we find that immeasurable peace is available outside our circumstances, and that this produces restoration and renewal. As we spend intentional time resting and reflecting upon God, we are moved to a sweet time of confession and repentance, restoring our fellowship with God and renewing our passion for Him and His plan for our lives. We get a glimpse of the big picture, why we are here, and how to make the most of every day and opportunity we are given.

Week 5: Celebration

Day 1: Celebrating marriage

Genesis 1:26-28

[“]²⁶Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. ²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Two people get the honor of bearing the image of the invisible God. Two people created for the same purposes: 1) to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and 2) to subdue the earth and rule over it. Two people are given to one another for a greater purpose than just themselves. God gave man and woman in the covenant of marriage a purpose that actually unifies them and brings them together. This is entirely contrary to the world, which teaches that marriage is for *me*, it’s for *my* fulfillment and happiness, and if I am not happy then I deserve to get out. Scripture teaches that marriage was created by God and is for His purposes!

Take heart, brothers and sisters, because when we follow after His purposes in our marriages, there is great joy! He has provided purposes in marriage that allow two people who are completely different to walk through life together, unified, as a team, running after God’s perfect purpose for their lives. You get to go on an adventure *together*! You don’t have to do it alone. He has made it to where you get to follow Him through trials, and pain, and adventure, and on a huge mission, alongside someone else. There is great joy in this!

Take some time to examine your heart concerning marriage. Are you looking to marriage to fulfill you, or are you anticipating how your marriage will fulfill His plans? Do you trust God’s choice for you?

Day 2: Celebrating children

Psalm 127:3-5

[“]³Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. ⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. ⁵How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.”

The moment a child is born into the world, there is great celebration. The serious pain the mother has just endured in giving birth becomes a passing thought in comparison to the immediate overflow of joy that takes place. However, somewhere along the way, if we are honest with ourselves, the burden of raising children can dominate the thoughts and leave us feeling exhausted, on edge, and confused. Where did the joy go? How is this a gift?

But scripture describes children as being like *arrows* in the hand of a *warrior* and says that the man whose quiver is full is *blessed*. Children, when properly crafted, are described as weapons in battle, a defense against the enemy. Children also bless their parents spiritually by forcing them to see, often daily, that it is God who fights our battles, it is God who labors, guards, and provides for our families. It is God who has victory. God provided children as both a defense and offense against the enemy. When children are crafted into a straightened arrow, you can direct where they go, and if they are shown the Lord and receive Him, they can be shot straight into the heart of the enemy! In this there is great joy! He has given children to you, as a gift and reward, and you are entrusted to mold and teach them about Him. And *that* is what must be the daily motivator.

Reflect on how you view your children: Do you consider them a gift and a reward? Do you feel as though their presence pushes you toward the Lord and better equips you against the enemy? Do you see the impact raising your children will have for the kingdom of God?

Day 3: Celebrating relationships

James 5:14-16, 19-20

[“]¹³Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ... ¹⁹My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

We were designed to live in deep, authentic community with others. Scripture describes relationships where people are walking with each other in life in the mission laid out by God. These relationships are provided so that people can be real with one another and be known in a community of other like-minded believers. These are relationships wherein we can share our joys, our fears, our sin, our doubt, and the places that we would prefer to keep hidden for fear of judgment. The passage in James is just a glimpse of what the effects of these relationships will bring. Authentic relationships bring about restoration, powerful displays of God answering prayers, a right relationship with God, healing, salvation, and grace. There may be pain in the process, but there is great joy when this kind of real community exists among the people of God.

You might fall into a couple of categories here. You may be so far removed from real relationships that you actually go out of your way to avoid them altogether. Or you may be surrounded by the people of God but stay guarded and put limits on the amount you share and on the number of real relationships you have. Having real relationships is hard; it takes time and effort, and the joy is not always immediate. But living in authentic relationships with the people of God is well worth it. Reflect on where you are at. Maybe the first step is just to ask God to remove fear and insecurity. Or maybe, it's just taking the risk of telling one person what's really going on in your heart. Pray for the faith and the

opportunity to take a step toward that today.

Day 4: Celebrating salvation

Ezekiel 36:25-28

“²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.”

What an abundance of grace that has washed us clean! Sin reigned in us: It ruled, and we were mastered. As a result we were full of filthiness, quick to worship idols, and our hearts saw no need for God. There was no righteousness in us. But God, in His great mercy and in the abundance of His grace, made a way for all of humanity to be clean. He made a way for all of humanity to know Him. He gave His Son Jesus. And through Him, we were given a new heart — a heart that is pliable, that can be molded by the hands of His Spirit. And now, we are ruled by His grace. We have been moved from death to Life.

Take a moment to reflect on your spiritual life to know for certain that you have received this free gift. It is a gift! It is given by God, and it is for our benefit and His pleasure. It is also free. We do nothing to deserve it, we do nothing to earn it, and we can't do anything to lose it. It is freely given to us through our faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. For some, we know of this gift at a distance: We know what is inside it, but until we have taken it, opened it, and recognized it as ours, we have not truly received it.

What is stopping us from receiving it? What is stopping us from enjoying it? When we receive it, we will experience the greatest joy! We simply need to receive this gift one time, through faith, and we will be moved from death to Life, and we will be given a new heart. Once we have experienced this transformation, then we can daily, moment by moment, continue to celebrate the gift of salvation. Each day we get to come before God, with a new heart, and He will continue to unfold this gift before our eyes. We can personally experience Psalm 51:12 when it reads "restore to me the joy of Your salvation."

Day 5: Celebrating gifts

Exodus 35:30-31, 34-35; 36:2

³⁰Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³¹And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship. ... ³⁴He also has put in his heart to teach. ... ³⁵He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple and in scarlet material, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs. ... ²Then Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person in whom the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him, to come to the work to perform it.”

How incredible is this? God had a specific purpose for His glory on the earth at that specific time. So He filled certain men, whom He called by name, with gifts that were both spiritual and practical (both empowered by the filling of the Spirit). We need to know that in our time, God also has a specific purpose for His glory to be revealed on this earth. And He has crafted each of us, uniquely, and given us specific gifts that are empowered by His Spirit, that when tapped into, will reveal who God is! This is so cool! God has given us general purposes with our lives, and He also has a specific purpose for each of us that is maximized when our entire selves are given over to Him to be used in full. Praise the LORD for including us! And when we walk in our gifts and His purposes, there is no greater joy! Promise.

Begin asking God to reveal to you what your gifts are. Read Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12 to see a list of spiritual gifts, at least one of which is given to each person who has entered into a relationship with Jesus. Begin examining what you are skilled in, the desires God has put in your heart, and what kinds of things stir your heart to action. Prayerfully ask God what to do next, and watch Him open doors of opportunity!

Appendix

Spiritual Disciplines

PRAYER

Use these 35 days to consciously make time for more prayer in your life. Here is the model prayer Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:9-15. There are six areas of prayer we can ascertain.

1. **Praise** "*Hallowed be Thy name.*" This includes adoration, which is acknowledging God for who He is and His character. The second part of praise is thanksgiving, which is expressing gratefulness to God for what He has done in your life.
2. **Purpose** "*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" This is praying in a spirit of submission to His will. It is praying in an attitude demonstrated by the words you use in giving your requests to God – words with His will in mind. It is sincerely submitting your prayers to what He wants as the final outcome.
3. **Provision** "*Give us today our daily bread.*" God invites you to bring your request for daily provision to Him. He knows your needs; now He wants you to acknowledge them and place them before Him. Why? So that you will build a dependence on Him and develop the relationship He longs to have with you.
4. **Pardon** "*Forgive us our debts.*" This is confession of our sins to Him. Again, He already knows them but longs to have you walk in agreement with and dependence on Him. He desires for you to come clean before Him and to be free from the guilt that sin brings. In prayer we regularly acknowledge sin to Him.
5. **People** "... *as we also forgive our debtors.*" We should pray for the needs of others, our relationships with others, our forgiveness of others. We should love others as ourselves. Prayer for others is one of the best ways to develop a love for others.
6. **Protection** "*And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*" We ask God to help us with the battles of life – temptation, Satan's strategy, the need for physical protection.

During the 35-day spiritual journey, increase your prayer time by fasting from things like meals, TV, Internet, hobbies. Try to pray more often with other Christ-followers. If married, increase or begin regular prayer time with your mate.

BIBLE STUDY

Studying God's word is a lifelong pursuit. One will never fully understand and know the entire Bible. It is so deep that those who have studied it for a lifetime still find new thoughts and insights.

We suggest that as you begin your spiritual journey, you follow the daily devotion passages included in this guide. Then as time permits, dig deeper. Bible knowledge is the beginning of growth. It is the food you need to begin your growth.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:9&11).

Included in this guide are verses we suggest you memorize for the next 35 days. Take a look at the verses and look at them often. Read the verses out loud five times a day and you will be able to memorize them. God's word hidden in our hearts is a powerful discipline to help us "keep our minds stayed on Him."

JOURNALING

The book of Psalms is essentially a journal written by David and others. It is their record of prayers, songs, and emotions expressed to God. Through God's inspiration and direction, the Psalms give us wonderful insights that reveal an understanding of God and how He works in our life and in the lives of others.

Journaling may not be for everyone. Some do not enjoy writing. However, keeping a journal of your prayers and thoughts is an excellent way to add confidence, depth, and growth to your prayer and devotional life.

There are a variety of ways to journal. You may summarize verbal prayers you are making during your time alone with God. You may choose to write entire prayers. Either is okay; it's your choice. The main exercise is the recording of what is going on in your life and your prayers to God. Purchase a notebook of your choice and merely record your thoughts. Date each day. Possibly write down the scripture location you studied that day.

MEDITATION

Scripture uses two different words for meditation. Together these words are used a total of 58 times in the Bible. For many, that may come as a surprise. Meditation in recent times has been associated with Eastern religions such as Buddhism and even the New Age movement. Christian meditation, however, is distinctly different from other forms. While most other forms of meditation center on emptying one's mind, Christian meditation attempts to fill the mind with the things of God. So how do we do it?

The best word picture would be that of rumination: a re-chewing. Meditation is taking a thought from scripture into our minds, dwelling on it for a time, and then repeating that process again. It's the idea Paul was using when he wrote, "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (Colossians 3:16).

The most common form of meditation is memorization. This can be done through simple verbal repetition, putting the scripture to song, or writing scripture repeatedly. There are many other ways to meditate, and none are superior to the others. The key is finding the method that works best for you.

In order to have the mind of Christ, you must fill your mind with the things of Christ. Through the ages, Christians have practiced meditation to do just that.

SHARING

"Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me" (Psalm 66:15).

Throughout the 35-day spiritual journey, we will ask you to share with other believers what God is doing in your life. Sharing verbally or in written form reaffirms the work of God in your life. It will give you greater confidence in what He is doing. Sharing what God is teaching you also provides a greatly encourages to other people.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

Financial stewardship is a discipline that we see throughout Scripture. The easiest way to understand it is the principle from Matthew 6 mentioned above: Your treasure is where your heart is. Where is your heart? Where does it find security? In Matthew 6, Jesus compares storing up heavenly treasures that are eternal to accumulating earthly treasures that will rot, rust, and be destroyed. Are we finding our security in things that are perishable and fading? Is our heart dedicated to things that are temporary? Where is your heart?

Financial stewardship teaches us that everything we have is ultimately from God and that we have a responsibility to "steward" those possessions. When we participate in this spiritual discipline, we are investing those possessions in heaven, in the eternal, instead of on earth where they will rot, rust, and be destroyed. When we invest in the eternal, we are trusting God to continue to meet our needs. Below are a few examples of how to invest our finances into the eternal:

- Giving to causes of social justice around the world
- Praying about how we spend the money we have been given
- Growing in our generosity
- Being more connected with our local church
- Giving to meet tangible needs of the people around us
- Decreasing greed, consumerism, and self-gratification in our lives
- Giving to meet social and benevolence needs in our community
- Obeying God and watching Him provide

Financial stewardship means more than simply giving a certain dollar amount. It is more about praying about how we could make the biggest eternal splash with the financial gifts that have been given to us by God.

FASTING

Fasting is not a way to influence, impress, or manipulate God. Fasting does not prove anything to God. He knows your heart better than you do (John 2:25; Hebrews 4:13; Psalms 33:15). It is not a hunger strike designed to convince God to release a special blessing or revelation. Instead fasting is a way to let go of that which binds us to this physical world in order to receive all our sustenance from the spiritual world.

When we fast, we can fast from food or from things that occupy our time (Internet, Facebook, movies, TV). When you fast, you determine that for a period of time you will deny your physical cravings to focus on your spiritual cravings. Fasting is not a last-ditch effort to get through to God. Instead, it sharpens our spiritual senses so that God can get through to us. The objective is to seek God.

Fasting is a classic spiritual discipline that has largely been neglected in our modern age. Yet, it was a vital discipline in the lives of the saints in biblical times. Fasting allowed early believers to gain increased spiritual sensitivity and to hear from God in fresh new ways. We even see instances where fasts were transpersonal – i.e., had an impact on another person. Historically, when a church would fast and pray corporately, God would manifest Himself in their midst with repentance, a display of His

power, and revival. That is our hope and prayer for North Village Church during this period of 35 days of spiritual journey.

Here are a few suggestions to help you in your fast:

1. Determine the objective. We should fast for results. Some of the results you could consider might be...

- To overcome an addiction (i.e. chocolate, coffee, soda, TV, computer, etc.)
- To overcome a particular besetting sin.
- To overcome in spiritual warfare against the evil one.
- To seek solution to complex problems.
- To seek revival in our lives and in our church.
- To seek greater personal impact evangelistically.
- To cry out to God for emotional and spiritual healing.
- To seek physical healing for yourself and others.
- To seek understanding and connection with the starvation and deprivation that exists in two-thirds of the world.
- To seek God's will for your life.

2. Determine the type of fast you will employ.

- A. WARNING: If you are diabetic, hypoglycemic, pregnant or on prescription drugs, please seek your medical doctor's advice before fasting. If you are not experienced in fasting or have questions or concerns, speak to your doctor.
- B. Before undertaking a normal fast (water and/or juice only), start slowly with a reasonable goal. Only an experienced faster should consider a 35-day fast. If you are just starting out, pray about fasting for one day a week during the 35 days. Another idea is to fast for a particular meal, say lunch, for the next 35 days. A progressive approach could also be taken in which you fast one day for the first week, two days the next week, three days the third week and so forth. Another variation is to insert a week of rest (wherein you eat normally) into the fasting progression.
- C. Fasting is simply a tool to enable you to hear from God, to glorify Him, and to experience deeper dimensions of His grace and love for you. An essential component for your fast, especially in the beginning, will be renewing your personal commitment to holiness. This usually requires extended times of life review and repentance. Plan on allowing for this.
- D. There are several other components that are needed for an effective fast. They are a journal to record your thoughts and note what God is saying to you in your fast, and an accountability partner who will pray for the success of your fast during your time of prayer and fasting. Isaiah 58:6-8 says, *"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard."*

3. Here are several biblical reference points for your fast.

Fasting is...

- Accompanied by prayer. (Daniel 9:3)
- Observed on the occasion of afflictions. (Psalms 35:13; Daniel 6:18)
- Observed in private afflictions. (II Samuel 12:16)
- Observed on occasions of approaching danger. (Esther 4:16)

- Accompanied by worship and seeking God's will. (Acts 13:1-2)
- Observed on occasions of ordination of ministers. (Acts 14:23)
- Accompanied by confession of sin. (I Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2)
- Accompanied by humiliation. (Deuteronomy 9:18)
- Accompanied by reading of scripture. (Jeremiah 36:6)
- Habitually practiced by John's and Paul's disciples. (Matthew 9:14; II Corinthians 6:5; 11:27)
- Prolonged practice, three weeks by Daniel (Daniel 10:2-3) and for 40 days by Moses (Exodus 24:18; Deuteronomy 9:9,18), Elijah (I Kings 19:8), and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2).

4. Tips on fasting from food (water vs. juice fasting)

- Physical benefit of fasting is detoxification.
- Water is most beneficial; yet this kind of fasting is not for everyone.
- Juice fasting supplies calories and nutrition, thus protects you against the stresses of work and activity.
- Juice from fresh fruit and vegetables is best.
- Coming off three-day or longer fasts, do not go back to eating your normal diet for the first three days. Eat a bland diet of rice, pasta, fruit, fresh or steamed vegetables, and beans. Avoid meat for those first three days.