

GOING
DEEPER

Foreword by Corey Russell

GOING DEEPER

40-Week Discipleship Guide
to Encountering Jesus

PART 1

JEFF MOOTZ



GOING DEEPER

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my friends and leaders at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. I am forever grateful for your zealous commitment to 24/7 ministry to God and equipping myself and others in prayer and the knowledge of God's heart. Your friendship and exemplary discipleship formed my life in God and still inspire me to this day

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ENDORSEMENTS

I remember when I finally confessed that I didn't enjoy praying or the reading the Bible. My "devotions" were nothing more than a religious ritual. Then, a friend helped me realize that a season of discipline could launch me into a relationship with God that was actually enjoyable. It was so effective that I now teach this life-transforming message to thousands of people around the world. Jeff Mootz has now taken this same teaching and made it accessible to everyone. *Going Deeper* is a simple, hands on, and Biblical guide to the kind of enjoyable friendship with Jesus you have always wanted. It's time to turn duty into delight. This is your way forward. Don't delay!

Murray Hiebert
Director - OneEleven Global

Jeff Mootz has a rich history of personally loving Jesus and encountering Jesus' heart that has encouraged and provoked me over our 15 years of friendship. He has taken from that history and written one of the clearest, most inspiring books on encountering Jesus that I've ever read. *Going Deeper* is a clarion call to cultivating a lifestyle of encounter that many desire but few have clarity to intentionally pursue. Jeff does not stay in the theoretical, ethereal realm of vision alone—though does present a high vision of experiential encounters with God—but offers practical tools and discipleship structures to equip believers for breakthrough in their hearts and in their relationship with Jesus. This guided journey is a gift to the body of Christ globally that will play a pivotal role in preparing communities of believers to grow continually in love for Jesus until He returns.

Daniel Grenz
International Missionary – Firestarters Academy

It's hard for me to think of people who enjoy their relationship with God more than Jeff Mootz. Consequently, when he talks about discipleship and how to build a friendship

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with Jesus through disciplines like prayer, fasting and Bible study... I listen. I'm thrilled to have Jeff's book as a companion for my personal growth, but also excited to offer it as a helpful tool to our congregation as well.

David Sinkgraven
Senior Pastor: Life Church - Sioux Falls, South Dakota

As we get closer to the return of Jesus, the earth will experience great shaking and great revival. God is raising up a company of messengers who have invested the time to go deep in their relationship with Jesus to catch His heart, understand His Word, and proclaim His message with great authority. Jeff and Bethany Mootz are two of these messengers. They have invested years of their lives going deep with God and discipling a company of these messengers at the Underground House of Prayer in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I highly recommend his book *Going Deeper* and encourage you to invest the time to gather a few friends and go through this 40-week journey together. The book is laid out in such a way that it will help you to develop lifestyle rhythms of prayer that will help you encounter God deeply, continually grow in your relationship with God, and bear much fruit for His glory!

Jeff Mann
Author of *Relentless Passion: Encounter God and
burn with passion for Jesus and God's Eternal
Plan for People and the Earth*

Jeff Mootz and the *Underground House of Prayer* have been a Godsend for our high school & middle school campus ministry. Jeff's calling to be an intercessor has blessed many people, and it has been a covering for the entire Sioux Falls region. I am personally grateful and know that this book will help people dive deeper into communication and fascination with our Savior. May Jesus fill you and burn a fire in your soul as you spend time praising Him and hearing Him speak to you.

John Glasser
Founder – Collision Ministry

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Thank you to my wife Bethany for non-stop encouragement, affirmation, ideas, editing, and strategy meetings about the content and flow of this curriculum. The substance of your personal life in God and your zeal for discipleship are all over these pages.

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Thank you to my friends at Encounter Church (Jerry Mootz, Brandon and Tammy Smith, Bethany and Francis John, and Aubrey Anderson) who have tested this curriculum, given feedback, and labored to see people experience the beauty and love of Jesus.

Francis John, thank you for your encouragement and labors in setting up the online curriculum.

David Stokes, thank you for pouring over these pages in the editing process and bringing your expertise in writing and pastoring.

Mom and Dad, thank you for your overwhelming support, celebration of victories, and life-long display of what it looks like to love Jesus in every season. Dad, the greatest privilege a son could have is to minister and pray with a fiery dad every day of the week as his full-time occupation. Because of you, I have a long-term vision to be wholehearted, joyful, and to love my family.

FOREWORD

I've read many books on prayer, been to many conferences on prayer, and heard many messages on prayer, yet I've rarely been around many of the same people who actually pray. It's sad to say that there are few people whose very presence carries the fragrance of heaven on their life, whose words release power and conviction, and whose actions point to a living faith in God.

I've recently been struck by Jesus and His discipleship model in Luke 11. After spending 3 1/2 years with the Son of God, the disciples asked Jesus one thing: "Teach us to Pray." They watched Him pray, heard Him pray. They witnessed the countless times when He woke up early and withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. I believe this left the greatest impact on the disciples.

I've given my life to the place of prayer over the past 20 years, and there have only been a handful of people I've consistently witnessed who've stayed true to prayer, fasting, and ministry to God—Jeff Mootz is one of these few. He and his wife, Bethany, graduated from our Bible school at IHOP-KC and ran close with me during their last two years. Their faithfulness, humility, hunger, and purity constantly provoked me and called me higher in God.

Since 2014, Jeff and Bethany have taken the DNA and lifestyle of the house of prayer in Kansas City and established a praying church that hosts city-wide prayer hours a day. This book isn't simply good messages but has been tried and tested in doing it versus talking about it. They have walked through the failures, successes, victories, and setbacks involved in continually calling people to God.

Going Deeper is a prophetic call to the Body of Christ to connect with our original design for intimacy with God through daily prayer with brothers and sisters in community. Friend, you were made by God and for God, and you will never be satisfied until you live

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out of that fellowship with God. God longs for friendship and intimacy with you and He enjoys the process and journey of relating to you. Jeff calls us to push past the barriers of our culture and even our own souls into a deeper place of encounter with God and His heart. He also highlights the barriers that stand in the way and how we can practically get through them.

I wholeheartedly endorse this man and this message, and I am excited to see this material get out and touch this generation. Again, there are few people whose life of prayer is greater than the message they preach. Jeff Mootz is one of these people, and I pray that God multiplies him and this message across the earth.

—Corey Russell
Author and Speaker

INTRODUCTION

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

“It’s the first day of my new life!” This was the declaration I wrote in my Bible on February 25th, 2003 (in college) when my relationship with Jesus was radically changed. For a month leading up to this day, I was sucked into a deep depression with tormenting thoughts that drove me to sleep as much as possible as an escape. I had given my life to Jesus a year prior with minimal follow-through, but during this tormenting month, I committed to following Jesus by obeying His commands and engaging in prayer and the Bible for the first time. Having no idea what to do in my prayer times, I read the Bible and a men’s devotional book and tried my best to talk to God.

Out of sheer desperation, I went from spending no time with God to spending two hours a day with Him. My prayer times weren’t earth-shattering, and the Bible and prayer seemed foreign to me, but I found a momentary peace that I didn’t have at other times of the day. However, on February 25th, everything changed. That day, I turned to a random passage in Ezekiel that was referenced in my devotional book. As I read it, the words became alive to my heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was as if God was speaking the words to me in the most intimate and personal way possible. He felt so real and so close in that moment. My heart melted, and I began weeping uncontrollably as God breathed hope and healing into me. After a while, the weeping turned into an indescribable joy and peace as I sensed darkness lift off of me and felt my emotions restored. I literally felt the broken pieces of my heart brought back together. In this one encounter with the Living God, I became a new person and entered into a new season.

It was the “first day of my new life” because the depression and torment stopped in one encounter. Later that day, friends even said my countenance was different and brighter and said that it was like I had come back from the dead. I entered into a new experience of freedom that day that made me feel like I had a new life. Not only that, but I was joyful and had a desire to experience intimacy with God more often. I entered into a new life of

expecting intimacy with God, and it caused me to begin orienting my daily life around Him. Without that holy moment, I wouldn't have known it was possible to experience freedom or such realms of pleasure in God.

DEVELOPING AN ENCOUNTER LIFESTYLE

My life has been transformed and fueled by encountering God in my daily times and yours can be too! God created you to encounter Him in intimate ways and to overflow in your heart and life. In the place of encounter, He desires to fascinate you, satisfy your longings, heal your thoughts and emotions, and empower you in your calling.

The heartbeat of this discipleship curriculum is to inspire and equip you to encounter Jesus by growing in prayer and spending 1-2 hours a day with Him for 40 weeks. This may sound like a lot of daily time with God, but it's necessary because it gives your heart proper time to dial down and receive from Him, and it will become enjoyable and life-giving. With the testimony I shared, it wasn't a coincidence that I experienced God for the first time ever after spending close to two hours a day with Him for a month. God responded to my hunger in that season, my heart was tenderized by the daily time with Him, both of which led to my climactic encounter and a new season of intimacy. Spiritual hunger and quality time with God are the necessary ingredients to going deeper in God.

When I was a kid, there were workout videos that promised abs and buns of steel in only eight minutes a day. The idea was promising but not realistic. Similarly, I would say Christians promise each other deeper relationships with God through quick and convenient means such as fifteen-minute devotionals and short models of guided prayer. However, I'm not convinced they're leading anyone to a consistent and intimate experience of Jesus' heart and a transformed life. In fact, I think they're leaving Christians disillusioned and frustrated with their lack of true connection to God while thinking they're doing what they're supposed to. The fruit of this quick approach to prayer is a bored, broken, barren, and compromising Church in many countries.

There is no other method to spiritual growth and freedom besides prioritizing encountering Jesus and overflowing from there. In all of my years of discipling, walking people into freedom from addictions and depression, equipping leaders, counseling marriages, and coaching parents, there has never been another option in helping them than first calling them into the supernatural life source of encountering Jesus in prayer.

INTRODUCTION

Without exaggeration, experiential intimacy with Jesus is the foundation for everything in life. He is the power outlet, and daily prayer is the way we plug into Him and receive life. In my life, those that have pursued God in a serious way have encountered Him consistently and have seen ongoing transformation. Those who haven't pursued Him haven't encountered Him as much and have ended up staying in their same broken cycles.

Because of this, I believe it's most helpful to be honest and call you to shift all of your priorities and schedule to spend more time with God. Now is the time to go deep into God's heart at the expense of any life changes and challenges. You need a lifestyle change and a clear focus on spending more time with Jesus. If you say yes, God will set your heart on fire with desire for Him and change your life. Whether you're a high school student, young-adult, stay-at-home parent, working full-time, or in full-time ministry, a fiery heart is your portion. 1-2 hours of daily time with God is possible in your life right now! Don't believe the lie that you're too busy or that you have to wait for another season, because the next season will probably be just as challenging!

Your longings will only be met in Him, and your broken cycles will only be healed by encountering Him. Are you desperate to break out of spiritual boredom? Are you desperate to experience God more often? Are you desperate to break the sin patterns and emotional cycles? Are you desperate for God to overflow in your heart and life with others? In spite of my spiritual dullness, lack of spiritual understanding, and depression, God took my desperation to find Him and brought me into a lifestyle of friendship with Him. In the same way, God will take you in all of your weaknesses and bring you into a deeper friendship!

There is something powerful about the number 40. It's the number of transition in the Bible. Moses was in the wilderness for 40 years before His commissioning to deliver Israel. Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years before she entered into the Promised Land. Jesus fasted for 40 days to gain victory over Satan and come out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit.

I hate exaggerated promises and hype, but if you take this 40-week journey seriously, I'm confident it will help transition you into a lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus that will act as a spiritual foundation for the rest of your life. Intimacy with God and prayer take time to grow in, and this 40-week journey will carve out the necessary time to learn and grow slowly. With the help of others and a clear structure, you will be launched into a strong spiritual rhythm.

Are you ready to step into a transition season with God and others?

WHO THIS IS FOR

In discipling people in prayer in general, and in using this specific curriculum with people for the past few years, I've found that certain heart postures and belief systems to be more fruitful than others. The answer to the question about who will benefit the most from this curriculum is that it's for believers who are spiritually hungry, teachable, and open to the work of the Holy Spirit. It's for people at all stages of spiritual development, and it can be used in various discipleship contexts (church program, small group, 1-on-1, peer accountability groups).

SPIRITUALLY HUNGRY

I'm not a salesman, so I'll be straightforward. This curriculum isn't for everyone. It's not for the Christian who is passive, content, or casual about spiritual growth. It's not for the Christian who's disinterested in a lifestyle change or the idea of daily prayer. This curriculum is for those who know there has to be more intimacy with God available to them. It's for those who are hungry to experience intimacy with God and are willing to pursue daily prayer for 40 weeks. This is for the person who wants to be called into deeper prayer, is moldable, and is searching for a lifestyle that expresses their wholehearted love for God. This is for you if you've been saying, "I want to go deeper!"

OPEN TO STRUCTURE AND DAILY PRAYER

The purpose of these 40 weeks is to inspire and equip you to encounter Jesus through daily prayer. To be able to live this out, you will need a commitment to fighting through all the challenges—practical and spiritual—to spend daily time with God and letting others help you by holding you accountable. To get a strong rhythm and depth in daily prayer through these 40 weeks, you will be asked to design and follow a simple weekly prayer schedule. Your schedule will consist of written down prayer times each day, a basic focus for each day (Bible study or meditation), and short-term direction in the Bible. This

curriculum will not work for you if you are not committed to growing in daily prayer or open to learning how structure can flow with spontaneity in your prayer life. However, if you are open to both of these values, you will be enriched by this course.

OPEN TO DISCIPLESHIP

At the core of this curriculum is the strength of having one person pour into another in a discipleship relationship (or peer to peer). In saying that, the blessing of encouragement, prayer, challenge, and correction can only come to the degree that a student is willing to be transparent and teachable. If you are saying yes to this curriculum, you are saying yes to humbling yourself and receiving from another weak and broken person. This is how your spiritual growth will be multiplied and accelerated.

FOR NEW AND MATURE BELIEVERS

As long as there is hunger, a willingness to pursue more daily prayer time, and an embracing of mentorship, this curriculum will benefit believers who are newer or mature, undisciplined or disciplined. It works for newer or undisciplined believers because the structure, content, and mentorship provide the needed strength and step-by-step training to grow. If you're struggling to read the Bible and pray, but hungry to grow, you can use this curriculum and grow. I call it the beginners guide to prayer because it can take you from no prayer life to the beginnings of a deep prayer life in a very clear step-by-step process.

The lifestyle changes might be hard initially, but you can do it, and your heart will be set on fire. This is what you're wanting anyway, and it will be easier than doing it by yourself in another season. If I was able to jump into a lifestyle of prayer in a dark season with no past experience, so can you.

This curriculum will also be fruitful for mature and disciplined believers for five reasons. First, many of the topics will probably be newer or go deeper than they're used to and will stretch them. Second, the assignments will be newer and will help anyone go deeper in the prayer expressions. Third, the curriculum is mostly personalized to the individual's spiritual journey. Students will focus on pursuing truths in the Word that God highlights to them, pursuing healing from sins and lies, and pursuing calling. The components and structure of this curriculum will empower them to pursue each of these with more focus, time, tools, and encouragement.

Fourth, all the assignments can be adjusted in length of time and frequency to grow anyone in their prayer life. For example, if praying one or two hours daily isn't stretching someone, the amount can be increased to any amount they desire. Or if they are really experienced in one of the module prayer topics, they can increase the frequency and amount of time spent in those prayer assignments.

Finally, everyone goes further with a coach. Even the best athletes in the world have coaches and trainers to push them further than they can go by themselves.

No matter the maturity or experience (even pastors and prayer leaders), we all go further in our spiritual lives or in any area of life when someone is there to push, encourage, and process with us in a focused way. Because an emphasis of the program is pursuing freedom from heart issues, mature believers will be greatly helped by someone walking them through to victory.

OPEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

This curriculum is for those who are open to studying the topic of the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers. The modules on praying in the Spirit and deliverance have the most emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit (praying in tongues, hearing God's voice, casting out demons). But all the modules will emphasize the role of the Spirit in revealing the deep things of God's heart, experiencing God's manifest presence, and hearing His voice. There is time, space, discussion, and freedom within the curriculum to study the Holy Spirit topics to see what the Bible says, so if you are open to learning more (not necessarily agreeing with everything), this curriculum will work for you, and you will be blessed.

GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL USE

The structure and content of this curriculum allows it to be used in almost any ministry context. It can be used as an annual discipleship program within a ministry. Our church uses this and is building the ministry around it. Small groups could walk through it one time with the option of using the focus and structure of the curriculum (daily prayer, Bible pursuits, lies to pursue freedom from) as an accountability piece in the group moving forward. Mentors could use this whenever they disciple someone one-on-one. It can also be used by individuals to walk through on their own.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

CURRICULUM PURPOSE

Going Deeper is a comprehensive, personalized curriculum that will inspire and equip believers to encounter Jesus by establishing a lifestyle of deep daily prayer (1-2 hours or more). Students will practice different foundational prayer expressions each month and add them to their weekly spiritual rhythm as each module progresses. By the end of the 40 weeks, students will have:

1. *A higher vision for experiencing Jesus*
2. *Personal testimonies of intimacy with God*
3. *Increased spiritual hunger*
4. *Clarity on how to make weekly prayer schedules with clear direction in the Bible and prayer*
5. *Depth and rhythm in core prayer expressions*
6. *Biblical clarity on how to receive freedom from heart issues (sins, lies, and negative emotional patterns)*
7. *Clear pathways and empowerment to pursue giftings and calling*
8. *The ability to confidently disciple others into an encounter lifestyle*
9. *A life-giving vision and structure to use with future accountability groups*

ENCOUNTER LIFESTYLE

This curriculum is built on the perspective that our greatest eternal calling is to know and tangibly experience God's heart. From this place alone, God has designed us to receive from Him and overflow in our lives. In essence, God is the electrical outlet, we are the machine needing power, and we need to plug into Him to work properly.

This encounter lifestyle of experiencing God's presence, thoughts, and emotions overflows into many areas. It satisfies our God-given longings for intimacy, beauty, purpose, and fascination. It heals and fuels our thoughts and emotions. Lastly, an encounter lifestyle fills us with life and love in our relationships, and it gives us clarity and empowerment to function in our callings.

DAILY PRAYER: THE PATHWAY TO ENCOUNTER

The way you grow in friendship with God and experience Him more isn't a mystery. All you have to do is spend quality daily time with Him and let His presence awaken and tenderize your heart. As you do this, you will experience His heart in tangible ways in your thoughts and emotions.

This curriculum is built on spending one to two focused hours a day with God. This amount of time might seem like a lot, but it's doable and it quickly becomes enjoyable because God is beautiful and joyful. I believe it's a necessary amount of daily time to experience God in satisfying ways. Time with God doesn't earn intimacy with Him; it is a relational principle that time is required in any friendship. Practically, one to two hours allows you to enter into a deeper and more focused place of prayer, meditation, and study than fifteen or thirty minutes allows.

EQUIPPING FOR DAILY PRAYER

The natural question after being called to daily prayer is, "What do I do during this time?" This curriculum answers that question by equipping you with what to do in your daily prayer times. Each module covers prayer expressions that are foundational to daily prayer times. The chapters give biblical understanding and practical instruction to help you grow. The weekly assignments help implement the prayer expressions in your daily prayer times. The modules are four-eight weeks long to allow you to practice the prayer expressions, get a rhythm in them, and hopefully experience God in them before moving on.

OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

The goal of the discipleship curriculum is to help people form prayer lifestyles that lead to encounters with Jesus. Every part of the 40 weeks is set up to slowly and methodically

establish that encounter lifestyle, at least to a foundational level. There are many practical and spiritual challenges to growing in prayer, so 40 weeks with a mentor, community, and a clear prayer pursuit is a gift to spiritual growth.

I liken this slow and methodical approach to the process of pouring concrete and allowing it to solidify. When cement is poured for a sidewalk, it's runny and needs wooden forms to keep it in place until it can harden. The prayer topics, assignments, other components, and the community aspect are like the wooden forms, and your daily prayer times are like the cement. Given time with training and community, your daily prayer rhythm and experience of intimacy with God will have time to form and become more solidified.

FOUR LIFESTYLE PURSUITS

The 40 weeks are structured around learning, practicing, and finding a rhythm in foundational prayer expressions, hearing the Holy Spirit for direction, pursuing freedom, and pursuing calling. Long-term, the goal is for students to make these pursuits the foundation of their spiritual lifestyle with prayer partners and as they disciple others.

1. ***Foundational prayer expressions*** - Students will pursue growth in one prayer expression at a time and add them to their prayer lifestyle with each new module. These prayer expressions will help them connect with God daily.
2. ***Hearing the Holy Spirit*** - Students will ask the Holy Spirit for direction in their spiritual life. This includes discerning one heart issue (sin, lie, negative emotional pattern) that God is highlighting and discerning direction for Bible reading and meditation.
3. ***Pursuing freedom*** - Students will intentionally pursue freedom from one heart issue at a time by studying and meditating on Bible verses that speak into their issue, praying for freedom weekly, processing and being accountable with their Discipleship Mentor, and receiving deliverance prayer at different times. By the end, students will feel more confident in God's power to transform their lives and have more clarity on what tools they can use in partnering with Him.
4. ***Pursuing growth*** - Students will intentionally pursue growth in one area of gifting or calling at a time by acknowledging what they want to grow in and making a simple action plan to walk it out. Depending on the student's needs in the

curriculum, this pursuit may be minimal until they feel like they can do more than their prayer schedule.

The purpose of centering conversations and plans around what God is highlighting is to train believers in a lifestyle of asking God for direction and transformation. These are questions we believe are valuable for every believer to be asking throughout their lives. This Holy Spirit-centered approach allows God to create a strategic plan for each person, which is a more effective and relational form of discipleship.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Below is a list of components that make up this Going Deeper discipleship curriculum. The first four items will apply to any discipleship context, but the last four will be unique to those using the curriculum in a group setting.

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits Document*** - At the beginning of each module, students will fill out a document that helps guide their spiritual life. The questions on the document will help students pray and think through what God is highlighting to pursue in Bible reading, meditation, heart issues, and gifting/calling for a month or longer. Working through the questions will give clarity for each month's pursuits, but it will also exercise the muscle of hearing God and living intentionally as a long-term lifestyle.
2. ***Prayer Schedule*** - The first module is focused on establishing a basic prayer schedule, which includes when to engage with God in a focused way in prayer and the Bible. Since the focus of the curriculum is encountering Jesus through daily prayer, the prayer schedule will be a discussion point in *every* discipleship meeting.
3. ***Module Structure*** - The curriculum focuses on one prayer topic for four- eight weeks at a time, which is called a module. There are a total of eight modules. Within each module, there are weekly chapter readings and prayer assignments focused on developing the one prayer expression. The benefit of this structure is that there is more time to learn about a topic and to practice it enough to experience God in it—getting a rhythm in it before moving on to another module.
4. ***Assignments*** - Every week, there will be an assignment based on the chapter reading. A few of the assignments are journal responses about the chapter content, while most are practical assignments that apply the content to the prayer life of the

student. The majority of assignments are not meant to be on top of the student's prayer life. Their purpose is to guide what the student would already be doing in their prayer times.

5. ***Bi-Weekly Discipleship Meetings (1 hour – 1 ½ hours)*** - If the mentorship component is utilized, students will meet with their Discipleship Mentor every two weeks. The meetings will consist of processing chapter content and assignments, reviewing prayer schedules, hearing how prayer times are going, and praying through heart issues. Module One (Spiritual Planning) and Five (Deliverance) are different and require meeting every week. These meetings and this discipleship relationship are an important part of the “form” used to keep the “wet cement” of the student's prayer life in place until it solidifies.

We have you meeting with a Discipleship Mentor to encourage you in your life in God and to establish you in a lifestyle of accountability. Accountability relationships are a part of walking out freedom because they bring you out of secrecy, shame, and levels of passivity while pursuing God. Secrecy is the soil in which demons plant their seeds of accusation and sin, but, in contrast, transparency and honesty bring things to light to expose and uproot those seeds.

There is something powerful about confessing sins and lies out loud and being forgiven and sharing godly personal dreams and plans with another person and receiving affirmation. When done before God alone, you can dismiss or belittle them, but they feel tangible before another person. Accountability relationships are also helpful because they help you feel known by others for who you really are when it comes to your strengths, weaknesses, and heart-felt dreams.

6. ***Discipleship Meeting Guides*** - There are discussion guide documents for Discipleship Mentors to use for every scheduled discipleship meeting. These guides have intentionally crafted discussion questions to process the heart of each chapter. Each discussion has three parts: prayer schedule review, book questions, and praying through heart issues.
7. ***Group Gatherings (1-2 hours)*** - At the beginning of each module, there should be a group time for students and Discipleship Mentors to gather. During these times, everyone can share what God did in them during the previous module, and then a leader can present the topics and assignments for the next module. These group meetings build unity and help everyone feel like they're running with each other in

the prayer topics. Corporate sharing times add unique strength and focus to those growing in prayer. *For those who have extra time, consider adding one-two hours of group prayer time before some of the gatherings.*

8. ***Corporate Prayer Room Times*** - Students and Discipleship Mentors are asked to spend at least one prayer time a week in a corporate prayer room. This time can be spent reading and meditating with a personal focus, or it can be used to worship, meditate, or intercede for something together.
9. ***Extended Group Prayer Days*** - There are three group prayer days scheduled (Module Three, Six, and Eight). I suggest scheduling two to four hours of prayer for these days. Some people may want to pray even longer, and that's great. The purpose of these extended prayer days is to allow individuals to taste and see the benefits of longer times in prayer, which can act as a catalyst launching them into more prayer moving forward. Longer times in prayer give ample time for hearts to quiet down and receive greater intimacy with God. This sense of intimacy is what drives people to spend more time in prayer. Sometimes people even experience a breakthrough with their heart issue during these times. People will be shocked at how quickly the time passes and how much they enjoy God's presence.
10. ***Deliverance Prayer*** - To aid in pursuing freedom from sins and lies, students will learn about deliverance in Module Five and experience deliverance prayer each week. The principles of the deliverance module and prayer guide will be encouraged in Modules Six through Eight to continue the pursuit of freedom.

PERSONALIZED TO EACH INDIVIDUAL

The combination of the four *Lifestyle Pursuits* and *Structural Components* creates a curriculum that is both structured and tailored to fit each individual, which is why it is effective for people in all stages of their walk with Jesus. Every pursuit and every part of the structure is personalized to where individuals are in their understanding and rhythm in the prayer expressions. Most of the assignments will be in line with what God is doing in an individual's life and can be increased in time and intensity based on each person's capacity. Examples of this include: Bible study and meditation direction, lie and character issue from

which to pursue freedom, and the intensity and duration of daily prayer times and prayer assignments.

WEEKLY TIME COMMITMENT

In summary, the weekly time commitment consists of a *chapter reading* (30- 60 minutes), a *prayer assignment* (15-30 minutes), and a *discipleship meeting* (every other week for 1-1 ½ hours). As a side note, many of the *prayer assignments* simply involve applying the chapter ideas in your daily prayer times. On a *discipleship meeting* week, this would average out to be a two and a half-hour time commitment. These commitments are on top of the daily time commitment to prayer.

CORPORATE PRAYER ROOM VALUE

In considering how you want to use this curriculum, I highly recommend creating a corporate prayer room at your church or participating at a local prayer room. My prayer life was formed and strengthened in a prayer room in my early days and helped me stay consistent and pray longer than I could have alone at my house. I'm so convinced of the power of corporate prayer rooms that I spend much of my time with God at my local prayer room each week and plan to do so throughout my life.

In whom the whole building; being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.—Ephesians 2:21-22

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house.—1 Peter 2:5

I believe God wants to revive and reclaim corporate rooms across this nation where each person's incense and offerings are mingled together as one before Him. Individually, we are temples of the Holy Spirit, but God is calling forth corporate dwelling places for His Spirit where individuals are "being fitted and built together" into a holy temple in the Lord.

ATMOSPHERE FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Spending time with God in the same room with others is the ideal place to be disciplined and to disciple others in prayer. Prayer is learned and encouraged by doing it with seasoned leaders, not just being taught about it. Prayer rooms facilitate this natural discipleship process, and this is why the local prayer room is a major part of my method of discipling others. I help others grow in prayer by cultivating an atmosphere of prayer in a room where people can spend time with God together, be encouraged by one another, and see prayer modeled.

PRAYER ROOM BENEFITS

Corporate prayer rooms have anointed atmospheres. When a group of people consecrate themselves and pursue the Lord together, rooms and buildings can be filled with more of God's presence.¹ These atmospheres are primed and make it easier for other people to engage with the Lord in a sustained and enjoyable way. I've seen many people pray for long periods of time and encounter God in our prayer room, while before they struggled to pray at all. This sacred atmosphere is available to you at your local church as you pursue God as peers and alongside a Discipleship Mentor in intentional relationships.

When people pray together, individuals can get momentary breakthroughs in God's presence that then ushers in a corporate breakthrough for others in the room. When somebody touches God in a prayer room, it releases God's presence to others in the room at the same time. We can easily pursue more in God together and spiritual atmospheres can shift when two or three are gathered. People can pray for each other, or with each other, at different times, and life is imparted in those times to keep engaging with the Lord.

On a practical level, when I see others pursuing the Lord on a given day when I feel tired or bored, it inspires me because they are physical reminders that continuing in prayer is worth it. In our houses, we have many distractions to attend to during our prayer times, and we have our beds as options when we get tired. But in a prayer room with others, we have a grace-filled atmosphere with fewer distractions and no bed to go to in moments of weakness. We utilize the inspiring power of doing things with others when we work

¹ Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:4.

at coffee shops, collaborate in offices, or work out at gyms—so why not utilize it for our prayer lives?

Lastly, praying in the same room together is part of God’s process of growing us in friendship with one another. When we engage with God together, it naturally brings us into His heart. I truly believe that the unity of the Spirit we’re called to pursue only happens if we engage the Holy Spirit together.² There are many intangible benefits to praying in the same room, but the two I’ll highlight are having consistent shared spiritual experiences with others and experiencing a deep sense of camaraderie in prayer.

STARTING A PRAYER ROOM

Starting a prayer room at your church can be as easy as opening the sanctuary for scheduled times each week that work for those going through the curriculum. Ask everyone to commit to coming or hosting at least one of the prayer room times. During the scheduled times, have worship recordings playing (www.ihopkc.org has live worship 24/7, or turn on various *YouTube* worship sets), or have one or more people play live worship. As a group you can decide what times are meant for personal prayer in the room and which times, if any, are meant to intentionally worship, meditate, or intercede together.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

The optimal way to use this curriculum is to incorporate the bi-weekly one-on-one discipleship meetings and corporate prayer room requirement. Having said that, the curriculum can be used for each of the options below with adaptations. If you’re willing to be creative with your approach and your schedule, I believe you can utilize most of the *Structural Components* and see much fruit after the 40 weeks.

DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM (ANNUAL PROGRAM OR ONE-TIME USE)

At our church, we use this curriculum every year beginning in the fall. A new round of people goes through it every year with the goal of having most of them becoming equipped Discipleship Mentors for someone else the following year. Using this curriculum annually helps Discipleship Mentors continue their own journey in prayer as they lead others, and it

² Ephesians 4:3.

creates a shared experience and shared value for deep prayer for all those going through it. We're building our church by making Discipleship Mentors with this curriculum—and by having a corporate prayer room.

To implement a yearly program (similar for one-time use), either disciple your leaders through it for a year before bringing others into it or prepare the leaders well beforehand and have them disciple others the first time through the curriculum. Once you have decided your number of Discipleship Mentors, you can invite people into a 40-week journey into prayer with the goal of having them leading others in the future. Establish your start date, end date, and when each *Group Gathering* would begin (beginning of each module), and what *Structural Components* you are going to utilize. When inviting people into the curriculum, make sure they know what the expectations are because they will have to be wholehearted in their decision (1-2 hours of daily prayer, having a prayer schedule, meetings, etc.). Communicating the expectations can be done by sharing the details of the program and by having people fill out an application that clearly states what they'll be asked to do during the 40 weeks.

Also, decide and communicate what your standard is for someone to pass the curriculum. For example, for someone to pass at our church, they must read every chapter and fulfill every assignment and be very consistent in their daily prayer times by the middle of module three. Also, decide and communicate what your standard is for people to become Discipleship Mentors after the program. For example, we require people to pass the curriculum, to have some rhythm and personal conviction about each module topic, and to allow the leadership team to pray about if they're ready.

SMALL GROUPS

For small group use, there are two clear ways to implement the curriculum. Option number one is to utilize all the Structural Components but to group people in pairs that meet up in place of the Discipleship Meetings. One other adaptation could be to discuss the chapter content and assignments in every small group and to save the heart issue and weekly prayer schedule questions for the one-on-one meetings. Option number two is to not have one-on-one meetings and to only meet as a small group every week. You could discuss the chapter readings and assignments every week but only have half the group share about their heart issue and personal prayer schedule every other week, rotating which

half shares each week. If there is a small group leader, they could meet up with individuals outside of group times on a rotation.

ONE-ON-ONE MENTORING (NO GROUP)

To disciple one person with this curriculum, utilize all the Structural Components except the group gatherings. The curriculum is set up for bi-weekly Discipleship meetings, but you could meet weekly to go deeper into the prayer topics and heart issues. If you're the one wanting to be discipled, find someone at your church to walk you through this curriculum.

INDIVIDUALS

Using this curriculum by yourself is going to be a challenge, but you can still grow a lot by using it! The challenge is that you won't have a Discipleship Mentor encouraging and challenging you to go farther than you can by yourself (in prayer and in your heart issues), and you won't have the camaraderie of a group that is pursuing prayer together. To use this curriculum well, you must commit to following the 40-week flow of chapter readings, assignments, and somehow finding ways to process what you're learning and ways to pursue freedom from your heart issues. If possible, try to find a prayer room in your community, or start a prayer room at your church.

DISCIPLESHIP MENTORS

The role of the Discipleship Mentor is critical. I firmly believe everyone benefits from having another person in their life to encourage, challenge, and keep them in focus. For those preparing to use this curriculum as Discipleship Mentors, the important things to be aware of are the following:

1. ***Curriculum overview and structure*** – Review the curriculum so you understand it well enough to help your student navigate through it and own the purpose of each module topic and assignment. You will sense more purpose in the details if you see how everything fits together—and this will transfer to your student.
2. ***Module assignments*** – At the beginning of each new module, review every assignment for the month. At the end of each one-on-one meeting, you will review the next two weeks of assignments that need to be completed before your next meeting.

3. ***Discipleship Meeting Guides*** – The meeting guides are thought through to bring out the most relevant discussions for each chapter reading and assignment. They are also planned with the 40-weeks in mind so that things are addressed at certain points. For example, some weeks are more focused on the *Spiritual Pursuits Document*, others on the chapter reading, and later weeks on talking through heart issues. The discussion guide is laid out in the order of importance, which can change on some weeks. The way to work within the structure of the meeting guide document is to decide on which questions to spend the most time and add in your own follow-up questions beforehand or during the meeting.
4. ***Preparing and facilitating meetings*** – Prepare for your meetings by praying and reviewing the *Discipleship Meeting Guide* for fifteen to thirty minutes. During this time, circle the topics you want to highlight, and write down your own questions to ask, follow-up questions based on your ongoing conversations, or encouragements to bless them. Facilitating meetings is mostly about asking good questions that help them process, being a good listener, challenging them to walk out prayer, and encouraging them abundantly.
5. ***Prayer room involvement*** – If possible, try to arrange your schedule so that you can be in the prayer room at the same time as your student. If this isn't possible, be consistent to pray together in your meetings, and briefly practice the prayer expression of the current module.
6. ***Pray for them*** – Spend time praying for your student according to the things that they are pursuing.³ Your prayers will release God's power on their hearts, and God will fill you with His thoughts, emotions, and plans for the student.

TRANSITIONING OUT

After students complete the curriculum, the goal is for them to continue living out the rhythms and approaches they learned and practiced during the 40 weeks. The topic of the final week will be how to transition out of the program while still maintaining and growing in this rhythm and value system with others. Practical options will be to do the

³ Colossians 4:12.

curriculum again, lead someone else through it, or form a group of prayer partners who meet to strengthen each other's prayer lives around the *Spiritual Pursuits* structure.

■ VIDEO COURSE OPTION

As a supplemental resource, you can purchase access to the Going Deeper Video Course on my website (www.prayerdiscipleship.com). The book is set up to be substantial enough to use by itself, but the videos are helpful for those wanting extra guidance and encouragement, or for those who prefer visual learning. There are resources for leaders, such as how to set up and implement the curriculum, and how to pastor people who are growing in prayer. For students, the resources include introduction videos for each module, teaching videos for each chapter, and videos or documents about extra topics within the focus of each module.

MODULE 1

SPIRITUAL PLANNING

MODULE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first module of this discipleship program. You are on the first leg of a journey towards a deeper relationship with Jesus. If I may be so bold, you will not regret the lifestyle changes you are about to make over the next weeks and months.

Within this first module, you will wrestle with what it looks like to live with clear direction in your spiritual life. Just to warn you, you will probably both love and hate this topic because it challenges personalities, belief systems, and lifestyles. Because of these challenges, and because this topic is critical to building a foundation of prayer, this first month is entirely focused on praying and processing through every *hindrance* to building a prayer schedule.

You must work through the hindrances—otherwise, the rest of the program will be frustrating and won't impact you as much. Freely process with your Discipleship Mentor and take your prayer times seriously so you can get a foundation of clarity that will benefit you for the rest of your life. Those who are intentional in their relationship with God grow so much more quickly than those who aren't.

The tangible goals of this module are to develop a weekly prayer schedule, create a prayer list, and decide your direction in Bible study and meditation. You will also identify lies and sin issues God wants to heal during this season. The clarity and the basic plan you develop during this month will become the foundation for your long-term prayer life.

Are you ready to jump in?

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

MODULE 1 - SPIRITUAL PLANNING

Week One Assignments:

(To be completed before your first Discipleship meeting)

- Read Chapter 1 – “***Called to Go Deeper.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Come prepared to share your life story and *why* you want to grow in God in this season.
- Complete the Consecration Assignment and discuss at your discipleship meeting.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

Week Two Assignments:

- Read Chapter 2 – “***Intentional Spiritual Living.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Fill out the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* with rough draft answers (direction, simple plans, and a prayer schedule).
- Write down your three main questions from Chapter two for this week’s discipleship meeting.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

Week Three Assignments:

- Read Chapter 3 – “***Challenges with Intentionality.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- After reading the chapter, identify and write down challenges you have with completing or having a prayer schedule. Take time to process these challenges with God this week.
- Continue working on the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* as needed.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

Week Four Assignments:

- Read Chapter 4 – “***Prayer List.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Bring your completed prayer list to this week’s discipleship meeting.
- Finalize the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* if you haven’t already.
- Continue following your weekly prayer schedule.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

DATE: _____

1. **Bible reading direction and plan**

(Write down what you will read and when you will read it):

2. **Meditation verse** (Choose a verse that speaks truth into your heart issue):

3. **Sin/character issue from which to get freedom:**

4. **Lie from which to pursue deliverance:**

5. **Gifts to pursue** (Include simple ways you can pursue it):

SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

6. **Weekly Prayer Schedule**—Write down your plan for the *specific times* you are committed to spending with God each day, and *what specifically you plan to do during those times*. Include what your study or meditation focus will be. Refer to the example schedule in Chapter Two. (e.g., Monday 6-6:30 am—Tongues, 6:30-7:30 am—Meditation on Song of Solomon 1:2)

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

1

CALLED TO GO DEEPER

■ NO SETTLING

As you begin this 40-week journey with God, I want to call you to go deeper in an intentional and committed way without looking back to your old life rhythms and experience of God. Your decision to go after God is holy and precious, and you will never be disappointed by the results. It may not seem practical or wise to those around you to give more time, energy, and focus to God, but in the end, pursuing Him is the only thing that makes sense. He is why you exist, and He created you to have a deep friendship with Him. You can't function right without having a deep friendship with the One who fashioned you.

Too many Christians are settling for the status quo when it comes to their relationship with God. All the while, they're struggling to find purpose and true satisfaction in life. They're experiencing depression, boredom, confusion, and anxiety, and wasting life pursuing entertainment. They also wrestle with a multitude of small addictions. In reality, having an unsatisfied and spiritually bored heart is the thing that isn't practical. The failure to solve the heart's most significant needs can lead to a thousand other life issues that will only fester until dealt with.

Demons lie to us and say that if we pursue God and live counter to the world or status quo Christianity we're going to miss out on life. Friend, this is such a lie. Life is only lived

if we experience God because He is the source of all life. Jesus promised to satisfy and give abundant life.¹

Pursuing more of God will cause you to live differently and, as a result, change your current relationships and experiences. But the greater perspective is that what you're trading in for more of God is nothing compared to what you will get with God. Giving Him more isn't a sacrifice; it's laying down momentary and inferior pleasures for endless and superior pleasures. Every other pleasure and source of life that we have ever known pales in comparison to experiencing the daily closeness of God.

God is the highest spiritual, emotional, and physical pleasure we can possibly experience. In experiencing Him, we are filled with His life and receive supernatural transformation. Over time, His presence heals, satisfies, fascinates, gives us purpose and empowerment in our callings, and causes us to walk in wholeness towards those around us.

NOURISHED VS. MALNOURISHED

Ironically, many people are afraid of missing out on a life with which they're not even happy. A good analogy compares people's needs for food and water with their spiritual need for God. It would be foolish for them to see that they're thirsty for water, starving for food, and malnourished, yet at the same time be unwilling to change their lifestyle to get the nutrition they so desperately need. In the same way, it would be foolish for us to partake of little to no spiritual food, live spiritually malnourished, yet be unwilling to leave empty lifestyles to satisfy our God-given spiritual needs. Many people live like this—unhappy and spiritually malnourished—but are unwilling to come to God to receive His life.

People hold on to little pleasures and comforts as if they were crumbs in their hands while Jesus has a banqueting table of encounters behind them. If they'll drop the crumbs and turn around, they can partake of what He's laid out for them. I have a question for you. What crumbs are you holding that are so amazing you won't let go of them to experience more of God?

Is it food, comfort, entertainment, video games, social media, immorality, shopping, or shallow friendships? Is the Tempter getting you to believe that what you're holding will satisfy more than God? If so, confess it to God right now and declare that it is nothing

¹ John 7:37, 10:10.

compared to experiencing Him. Lay it down at Jesus' feet so He can fill you up with something eternal.

■ A HIGH VISION FOR ENCOUNTERING GOD

Encountering God is the ultimate source of life and the greatest pleasure God can offer the human heart. God is beautiful, joyful, and filled with life, and His priority for you is that you would encounter Him. He wants you to discover Him, be fascinated and captivated, and then overflow in love back to Him. There is no greater pleasure in this life or in eternity that will compare to experiencing God. In fact, Jesus defined eternal life as intimately knowing the Father and the Son, which means we can step into our eternal calling and experience the life of God now by pursuing the revelation of God.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.—John 17:3

HE DESIRES TO ENCOUNTER

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me.—John 17:24

Not only has God made intimacy with Him available to us, but He goes further and pursues us to encounter us. God wants to encounter us more than we want to be encountered. Jesus' prayer before the cross was that we would see His glory, which means His heart is burning with desire to reveal Himself to you. God so desired to reveal Himself to humanity that He sent His exact image to the earth to declare the knowledge of God.² He is not distant, and He is not hiding.

Because of a lack of experience, it's easy to resist the truth that God is zealous to reveal Himself. But He isn't silent or distant; He is singing and shouting over us all the time. The

² John 1:14, 17:26; Hebrews 1:3.

issue is that many people's hearts are dull, and ears are full of other things. Because of this, they aren't hearing or perceiving Him, yet. But they will if they give Him time.

PRESS PAST UNBELIEF

God made your heart to experience deep friendship with Him. Don't settle for your current experience or the level of expectation you see in Christians around you. God has more for you in this season if you'll position yourself before Him by giving Him more time. Take this year to ask God for a higher vision for encounters. Can you believe for more than your current experience of God in prayer? Can you press through the levels of spiritual boredom that you may be experiencing in your life until truth strikes your heart?

DEFINING ENCOUNTER

You were made to encounter God in life-giving ways, so what does encounter mean? *I define encounter as supernaturally perceiving a truth of God in our thoughts and emotions by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Encounter is when an idea becomes a living reality on the inside of us. It's when an idea becomes a tangible experience, a living interaction with God as a Person for a moment of time. Encountering God is supernatural, experiential, and happens in different measures.

SUPERNATURAL

Encounters are supernatural in the sense that it takes the Holy Spirit to reveal something to us. There is nothing normal or natural about this process. It's a supernatural work for the Holy Spirit to reveal God, who is uncreated, immortal, and infinite, to human beings who are created, mortal, and finite. Our natural minds cannot receive from God by themselves—they must receive understanding from the Holy Spirit.³

The Spirit must awaken the eyes and ears of our hearts in the same way as the men on the road to Emmaus had theirs opened.⁴ They walked and talked with Jesus for a few miles, but the eyes of their hearts were blind until Jesus opened them supernaturally. In the end, God opened their eyes to see Jesus. They recognized that their hearts were burning with the Spirit's revelation during their time with Jesus.

³ 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; 1 John 2:27.

⁴ Luke 24:16, 31.

EXPERIENTIAL

Encountering God is experiential, meaning our thoughts, emotions, and bodies feel something tangible from God. Our minds can experience God as a person. Our emotions can feel God's emotions towards us, and our bodies can feel His physical presence. In the same way that we can experience love and other powerful emotions from and towards our friends and family, we can experience God.

Reading about meals on a menu and eating the food are two completely different things. One is just an idea or a theory, while the other one is an experience that involves all the senses. When reading the menu, you only have ideas and pictures of the food, but it's not yet experienced. But when the food comes, you see it, smell it, touch it, taste it, and savor it in real time. Encountering God's heart is a tangible experience in contrast to just knowing about God as an abstract idea.

Biblical knowledge is supernaturally understood in the mind and experienced in the heart. In many of Paul's prayers, he used the specific phrase "the knowledge of God" and other words that communicate an intimate experience with God. Many times, the Greek word for "knowledge" means an intimate first-hand knowledge that comes through relationship.⁵ Paul's prayers should give us confidence that we can ask for and expect to experience God.

Attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.—Colossians 2:2-3

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ.—2 Peter 1:2

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.—Ephesians 1:17

In Ephesians 1, Paul asked the Father to give the spirit of wisdom and revelation to believers to open their spiritual eyes to the knowledge of Jesus. This was a prayer for believers to experience God's personality and heart by revelation—not just for them to have head

⁵ Strong's Greek #1922 - Romans 10:2; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9, 3:10. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1922.htm>

knowledge. In Ephesians 3, he asked for the hearts of believers to know the fullness of the love of Jesus in a way that surpassed knowledge. Surpassing knowledge means His love is so vast that our minds can't fully comprehend it, and it means our mental study alone can't achieve the knowledge of His love.

Paul prayed for their minds to perceive God's vast affections supernaturally and for their emotions to experience and feel them. He experienced God relationally and intimately, and he prayed for his churches to experience the same thing. The main point is that God is more than an idea to be understood—He is a person to be known and experienced.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
—Ephesians 3:17-19

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.—Philippians 4:6-7

MEASURES

Finally, encounters come in different measures. There are faint impression- level experiences that last for a few minutes, longer-lasting experiences, emotional experiences, and experiences everywhere in the middle. Every level of encounter is an authentic encounter with God. We don't want to neglect or minimize the impression level encounters, but at the same time, we don't want to lose vision for the more intense emotional encounters.

Whether an experience is faint or strong, short or long, it's a supernatural encounter with God. It's something we were all created for and should rightly desire. Many sincere Christians love God and long for more of Him but only have the vision to glean biblical principles from the Word and be inspired by a Sunday sermon. Encountering Him is more than reading a devotional on the love of Jesus or having good ideas and

language about Him. It's about having tangible experiences with the love of Jesus in our emotions and having a current reality of feeling near Him.

■ **WHOLEHEARTED PURSUIT OF JESUS**

If God is the greatest thing you can experience and the only answer for your deepest questions and needs, why wouldn't you give Him everything? Don't hold anything back in your relationship with God. If you know you're compromising with a specific sin, confess it to God, and repent of it right now. If you know there are specific things or relationships in your life that are causing you to be dull or putting out your spiritual fire, get rid of them.

Get around people who are seriously going after God and spend time with Him in prayer and the Word as your highest priority. Give Him the best part of your day and carve out as much time for Him in your schedule as you can. Pursue Him as you would seek a great treasure, and you will experience an incredible source of life.

This book will inspire and equip you to experience a greater friendship with God, but you have to choose to be wholehearted. Every Christian must fight against the spiritual currents of busyness, apathy, lethargy, boredom, and accusation until they experience a spiritual breakthrough. A wholehearted approach to God will cause you to get those breakthroughs more quickly, and it will allow you to maintain them long-term as you build upon them with even greater breakthroughs. God is looking for a fully-given response that says, "I'm going to sit before You and believe Your Word until I feel You and get awakened at another level. I'm going to wage a spiritual war against everything that's getting in the way."

■ **JESUS IS PULLING YOU CLOSER**

NEW NORMAL

I believe Jesus is strategically drawing you away into a season of encounter that's going to reorient your heart and life around the vision of experiencing Him more. You're saying, "I want to go deeper," because God is putting that cry in your heart right now. There are seasons in our lives when Jesus takes the initiative to draw us into a deeper experience

of Him to give us a “new normal” in our lives from which we then live. As we experience more of Him, we end up changing our lives accordingly. Before we know it, we have a “new normal” way of living to meet our “new normal” expectations for encounters.

God prepares us for these encounter seasons by stirring us with hunger so that we pursue Him more intentionally. Then He meets our hunger with encounter. This is His process. Hunger escorts us into the deeper things of His heart. Your hunger is proof that He is pursuing a greater relationship with you because He’s taking the initiative in the relationship and stirring you. You’re simply responding to His wooing.

HE DESIRES YOU

God wants you to know that He longs for more of you. We always say that we want more of God, but God also wants more of us. There is something in Him that moves when He thinks about you. He is strategizing ways to win your heart at deeper levels, and He is planning the days when He is going to encounter you. God is knocking on the door of your heart because He wants to love on you. But He is also knocking because He wants to enter into a more intimate experience of your heart.

You may be feeling a lack of satisfaction with the things in your life. The things that once brought you life don’t anymore, and you feel unsettled on the inside. Maybe it’s certain relationships, sources of entertainment, jobs, or ministry opportunities that make you feel valued and important. Perhaps it’s just an overall unsettledness. Either way, all these unsettled feelings are God’s gift to awaken you to a more fervent pursuit of His heart. He is making you unsatisfied with your current life experience so that you’ll pursue the greater pleasure and satisfaction that is within Him.

I believe God is saying this to you right now, *“Come closer to Me! I want all your heart, and I want you to experience all My heart. I want you to experience a deeper friendship with Me. I’m drawing near you this season, and I’m breathing on the little fire in your heart to make it a bonfire of love for Me. Keep responding to what I’m stirring in you. I have so much more for you if you’ll come closer. I want to be your greatest pleasure, your daydream, and your source of life.”*

REVELATION IS THE FOUNDATION

Encountering God and growing in friendship with Him is the end goal of being a Christian, and it's the starting point of transformation. The foundation of every heart issue is the lack of experiential knowledge of God's heart. Without learning how to plug into Jesus as the power source, you will continue to be dominated by sins, lies, and spiritual boredom. But in the place of experiencing the knowledge of God, your thoughts, emotions, and desires will be healed, and the building blocks for darkness will be dismantled. The famous preacher A.W. Tozer said it this way:

“The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems.”⁶

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week, take time in prayer to talk to God about your Consecration assignment. These consecration questions will help you get God's vision for the 40 weeks and lay down any hindrances. They will help you set your heart to walk in a new lifestyle from the outset. I encourage you to take these questions and your prayer time seriously, because they will set you on a new trajectory in your walk with God. This week you will have your first discipleship meeting, in which you will spend time sharing and praying together over these consecrations.

⁶ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 2.

CONSECRATION ASSIGNMENT

The purpose of this first assignment is for you to intentionally consecrate yourself to the Lord for the next 40 weeks. To consecrate means to set your heart and life apart from the world and from the normal standards in the church and to be devoted to seeking God in a unique way. It's a posture of dedication and commitment to God alone, as well as a commitment to hearing and responding to His words in this season.

Set aside a specific prayer time (one to two hours is suggested) before your first meeting with your Discipleship Mentor to pray about and write down a paragraph response to each of the questions that follow. After writing down each paragraph, take time to respond to God in prayer based on what you wrote. This could be repentance, asking for grace, giving thanks, or expressing commitment in your heart to what He revealed, or what you're desiring.

As you write down your thoughts and prayers, remember this document is primarily between you and God as a consecration, not for you to turn in for a grade. You will only be asked to share the main points of each answer with your Discipleship Mentor. Feel free to write your answers in your journal instead of here.

1. *In your relationship with God, what are you wanting to grow in concerning your heart connection with Him over the course of this program?*

2. *Write down the overarching reasons why you want to go through this program and what you want to be like afterward, spiritually and practically.*

CONSECRATION ASSIGNMENT

3. *Ask God these questions and write down His answers. “What do You want to do in me during the next 40 weeks? How do You feel about my desire to do this program, and what are You thinking about me right now?”*

4. *Write down ways you’ve been sensing God stirring you with desire for Him recently and ask Him why He has been stirring you (reference “Jesus Is Pulling You Closer” section in Chapter One).*

5. *What is your current experience of God on a day-to-day basis (feeling His presence, His love, your heart moving in the Word, etc.), and what are you asking to experience of Him moving forward? Pray for God to stir your hunger for more of Him.*

6. *Ask God what areas of your life He is asking you to change or repent of in order to experience more of Him? Have you been pursuing and obeying Him with all your heart, or are there areas you know your obedience hasn’t been wholehearted?*

7. *Bring your desires to pray daily to the Lord and consecrate your life schedule to Him. Surrender your time to Him, give Him permission to reorient your life around prayer, and commit to the one-two hours a day of prayer as the beginning point. If you have any fears about this commitment, tell God and process those with Him. Ask Him to satisfy you to the point that you would long for more time with Him within the 40 weeks and beyond.*

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 1: SPIRITUAL PLANNING – CHAPTER 1

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this meeting is for the Discipleship Mentor to get to know the student more and to discuss the Consecration Assignment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Prioritize the Consecration Assignment*** - Discuss the Consecration Assignment questions and answers from your prayer time. Were any questions highlighted more than others? Did God speak anything to you? Pray together to consecrate these areas to God.
2. Briefly share a few significant pieces of your spiritual journey (10-15 minutes) or share your heart for wanting to grow in God in this season. If you would like to share more of your story, you can set up another extra meeting this month
3. If there is time, discuss what heart issues you want to pursue freedom from.
4. ***Chapter Questions:***
 - a. Have you had a high vision for encountering God in your past? After reading the chapter, what is your understanding of the spirit of revelation and encounter? What are your thoughts on the definition of encounter as presented in the chapter?
5. Briefly review next week's homework together.

MEETING NOTES:

2

INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL LIVING

■ INTENTIONALITY DEFINED

What does it mean to be intentional about your spiritual life? It means getting some sense of clarity concerning what God is highlighting in your spiritual life for growth and then creating a simple plan for how you're going to pursue that weekly. This directs what you read and meditate on from the Bible during your personal times, but it also directs books you read, what you pray about, and what you do with parts of your calling.

The basic idea is to form your weekly times with God around what He specifically wants to do in your heart in any given season of life. I call it breakthrough discipleship because it's focused on equipping people to hear the Holy Spirit's direction for spiritual growth, encounter God as a lifestyle, and receive supernatural breakthroughs in heart issues. Breakthrough discipleship focuses on getting victory over lies and sin patterns by intentionally feeding on biblical truths through study and meditation.

■ WHY INTENTIONALITY?

Why is having direction and a plan in your spiritual life critical to growing closer to God? God has specific things He wants to say and do in this season to bring you into the

deeper things of His heart. He's wise, strategic, and pastoral— and He knows what truths you need right now that will act as building blocks for future truths.

Also, spiritual breakthrough requires focused investment over time in order to bear fruit. If you're unfocused in what you're doing in your prayer and Bible times, you'll end up not going as deep as if you had stayed on one topic or in one direction for weeks or months. It takes significant time in one truth to come into true revelation and transformation.

I'm guessing that many Christians read the *One-Year Bible*, a morning devotional, or read random verses for their times with God and are not feeling deeply connected to Him. Drawing near to God in these ways can be edifying, but they probably lack the kind of spiritual depth that intentionality offers. If this describes your past approach to spiritual living, take courage, there is a greater place of intimacy with God to experience through a more focused pursuit of God's truths.

■ SPIRITUAL MOMENTUM

Having direction and a plan will help you feel spiritual momentum. Momentum will help you stay consistent in your daily time with God. When you feel purpose in what you're reading and meditating on, and if you're hungry for the Bible verses you're studying, supernatural desire for more time with God will grow in your heart.

Staying with a passage of scripture long enough will get you deep into its storyline. This will hook you with a holy curiosity and a desire for greater understanding. Being hooked by the Bible means an intense interest grows in you for greater insight into the things you're reading. When you're hooked, questions about the things you're reading start flowing from your heart. Once that happens, your hunger will grow to search out questions. This will continue to grow until you're thinking about Bible verses throughout the day, passionately talking to others about them, and adjusting your schedule to get even more time with God.

Being hooked on the Bible and feeling spiritual momentum could be compared to what you feel when watching a really good television series or reading a good book. If you're really into the storyline, you want to know what's going to happen next, and you end up wanting to watch the next episode or read the next chapter. Some people even binge-finish the book or series in one sitting. If a book or a television series can capture your

heart, how much more can the Word of God when it's anointed by the Spirit? You can get hooked on the Word of God in this way if you go deep enough in the biblical storyline.

I know my heart is hooked on a section of the Bible when I randomly have fifteen minutes to myself, and my automatic response is to study my Bible verses and read commentaries. Another sign is that I stay awake longer at night to read the Bible, or I wake up early with anticipation for what I'll discover during my time with the Lord. I think about the verses throughout the day, talk about them with friends, buy books about their subject, and wrestle with the truths until I understand and experience them. In a positive way, being hooked is disruptive to normal life because it demands satisfaction and moves you to reorient your life around discovering the truth.

STEP ONE – GET DIRECTION

Discerning direction from God and designing a plan should be a simple process. Start by asking yourself and God the questions listed below. As you answer these, you will feel purpose in what you're doing and feel like you're stewarding what God wants to do in you. These questions help determine your direction for Bible study, meditation, and prayer.

If you're not familiar with hearing God's voice, don't be intimidated. Get a notepad and your Bible and think about each question. As you do, write down your own thoughts, and then picture Jesus in front of you and ask Him the same question. You may have thoughts, a picture comes to your mind, or just experience deeper conviction about what He may be saying to you about direction. Many times, your own desires—or awareness of what you need spiritually—will be comparable to what you sense God is saying to you. So your own thoughts are totally valid. You can even ask one of your spiritual leaders who knows you well enough to give you a perspective on each one of these questions.

BIBLE READING DIRECTION

What are one or two Bible truths that you want to pursue right now, and why do they interest you?

What do you think you need to receive from these truths?

These could include Bible topics, specific Biblical passages, or specific books of the Bible. Then pray and ask God to bring to mind a truth or an area of the Bible to focus on in order to grow in these truths. These are the two most important questions you can ask yourself and God in discerning direction for your spiritual life because what you study and meditate on in the Bible will be the thing that makes the greatest long-term impact on your heart.

AREA OF TRANSFORMATION

What lie or character issue do you want freedom from and what biblical truth could help set you free in that area?

Ask yourself these questions and then picture Jesus in front of you and ask Him to bring to mind a lie or sin pattern from which He wants to free you during this season. Choose one Bible verse that has the truth that will oppose the lie or sin issue to meditate on. Meditation on this truth will become the doorway to transformation.

Experiencing freedom is foundational to being a follower of Jesus, so why not target the primary issues in your life that hinder you from experiencing God and walking in fullness? What if you were intentional about pursuing freedom from one area of sin or from the biggest lie that daily holds you back? What if you got supernatural freedom from fears, anxieties, depression, anger, unforgiveness, insecurities, addictions, various lusts, and lies about God and yourself by attacking them with truth during each season? Most people are aware of their issues but don't consistently attack them with the truth. You, however, can attack them by forming some or all your spiritual life around truths that will set you free.

AREA OF GIFTING/CALLING

What spiritual gift or part of your calling do you want to pursue in this season?

This could include gifts of the Spirit, ministry gifts that you see in your life, or aspects of your calling that you've identified. For me, this has included topics such as prophecy, healing, deliverance, preaching, and being a husband and a father. I give time to studying

the Bible and other books in order to grow in those areas of my calling because I know this is one way to partner with God in these areas.

STEP TWO – MAKE A PLAN

After getting some sense of direction, the next critical step is to make a simple plan to fulfill your spiritual desires. Plans put feet to your desires. The process of thinking a plan through will excite you and give you faith because you will feel empowered to walk out real desires.

These plans will help you to be focused on what God wants to do in you. My suggestion is to stay focused on what you're reading and meditating on for at least one to two months, but you could easily stay on them for a few months in order to go deeper into the truths. Below are the main areas for planning in your spiritual life.

PICK A BOOK OF THE BIBLE

Choose a book of the Bible, a section (New Testament, certain Psalms, Gospels, etc.), or several verses that have the truth you're wanting to pursue. Make that your Bible reading focus for one or two months. My overall value with Bible study is to go deep into a small section of scripture as opposed to reading through the entire Bible in a year.

MEDITATE ON ONE VERSE

Meditate on a single verse for one or two months or until your heart is burning with its truth. I suggest scheduling meditation times every other day of the week. The truth of the verse will act as a spiritual hammer progressively knocking down the walls in your heart.

MAKE A SIMPLE PRAYER LIST

Write down five to ten things you want to pray for in your life. As a part of your prayer list, put the truth/lie or character issue toward the top of the list until you see a breakthrough.

READ A BIBLE-BASED BOOK

Purchase Bible-based books or listen to a teaching series that will help you understand what you're studying in the Bible—or one that will help you grow in a part of your calling.

JOIN A CORPORATE PRAYER TIME

Schedule an extra prayer time or one of your personal prayer times at your church. This corporate time could have worship, meditation, or intercession as the focus.

STEP THREE – MAKE A SCHEDULE

FIGHT FOR DAILY PRAYER

Prayer schedules are crucial to actually growing in prayer. I'm convinced that the greatest spiritual warfare from Satan is over our daily time with God. Our daily time with God is where we plug into the divine outlet and receive power for the day. If Satan can get you unplugged from the divine power source, he can quickly get you off course with spiritual dullness, sinful desires, and deception. Spiritual warfare begins by resisting the flesh and the Devil and by fighting for daily time with God. Fighting for daily prayer will be very hard at first, but you will connect to God more, and you'll develop spiritual momentum.

Scheduling times with God is an expression of loving and prioritizing Him. It's very easy to let needs, distractions, the flesh, and other people's priorities define our schedules, but we must take the initiative with our schedules. Your prayer schedule shows where God is on your priority list in the same way that your budget tells you what your financial priorities are.

PRAYER SCHEDULE

Think through each day of the week and pick the best times to spend focused on God. I suggest picking times where you can focus on prayer and your Bible without distraction. You can always pray while exercising or working, but these scheduled prayer times are meant to be set apart from other activities.

Write down the exact times you want to spend with the Lord and what your plan is for each day based on your answers to the guided questions in step one. I have my sacred times with God written out in my personal journal, and I have certain things I focus on for each day. I reference my schedule most days to remind myself about what I've already planned to do.

Focus on one or two things each day (study, meditation, prayer list, etc.) so that you don't feel rushed in your prayer time. For me, some days are more focused on Bible meditation and others are more focused on Bible *study* and praying through my prayer list. Give yourself plenty of time to go deep into something and don't feel the pressure to do everything every day. Try a prayer plan and then adjust it every week as you learn what helps you. Be flexible to adjusting your weekly schedule to better fit your prayer schedule.

It takes time to dial down our hearts and receive a true encounter with God. Because of this, I suggest scheduling one or two hours a day with the Lord as a starting length of time, then to grow from there. If you already have a strong rhythm of time with God and are hungry, try scheduling two hours or more a day with the Lord. Also, look at your days off and see if you can get a longer prayer day once a week. If you already fast or are ready to fast on a weekly basis, plan your fasting days and prioritize more time with God on those days.

MORNING PRAYER

Consider scheduling your prayer times for early morning before school, work, or family responsibilities. I see three practical benefits to early morning prayer. The first benefit is that your mind is fresh and uncluttered. Second, if you pray first, you'll do it for sure. If prayer is saved for later, things could come up that get in the way of your prayer time, or you just might not feel like doing it. Third, if you connect with God during the first part of your day, you will be more likely to overflow with His life for the rest of the day. In the same way that eating food in the morning gives you energy, morning prayer will fuel you for the day.

Waking up early can be challenging for a lot of people, but don't dismiss the option. Much of the challenge is because people don't give it a fair chance and don't set up a full life rhythm that allows them to wake up early while feeling fully rested. From my experience, it takes around two weeks of going to bed at the same time to be able to set my body clock to comfortably wake up early the next morning.

SCHEDULE SUGGESTION

A simple schedule might be to alternate between Bible reading and meditation every day. Then pick which day—or days—you want to pray through your prayer list, pray in tongues, or simply worship. At the end of this chapter there is an example of a simple prayer schedule that alternates between Bible reading and meditation, has an hour and a half of scheduled prayer each day, a fasting day, one long morning of prayer, and a weekly corporate prayer time.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week, your assignment is to follow the three steps outlined in this chapter to make a rough draft prayer schedule. This includes answering each question on the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* and creating a daily prayer schedule. After meeting with your Discipleship Mentor, you will have another two weeks to finalize the *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. This prayer schedule will become your reference point throughout the 40 weeks. Be intentional with it but know you will probably change it in small ways each month as you grow and learn. Also, write down your three main practical questions from this chapter to discuss in your discipleship meeting.

EXAMPLE PRAYER SCHEDULE

Monday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Tuesday/Fasting Day (5:30 am-7:00 am, 12:00 pm-12:30 pm, 8:00 pm-8:30 pm)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation - Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:00 am and 8:00 pm-8:30 pm)

Prayer List (12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Wednesday (5:30 am-7:00 am, 12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Church Prayer Meeting for my city (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (12:00 pm-12:30 pm)

Thursday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation – Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Friday (5:30 am-7:00 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Reading – Ephesians Chapters 1-3 (6:00 am-7:00 am)

Saturday/Longer Prayer Day (5:30 am-8:30 am and 8:30 pm-9:00 pm)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am)

Bible Meditation – Psalm 149:4 (6:00 am-7:30 am)

Bible Reading – Reading through New Testament (7:30 am-8:30 am)

Spiritual Book – Parenting Book (8:30 pm-9:00 pm)

Sunday (5:30 am-7:30 am)

Pray in Tongues (5:30 am-6:00 am) Prayer List (6:00 am-6:30 am)

Bible Reading – Reading through New Testament (6:30 am-7:30 am)

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 1: SPIRITUAL PLANNING – CHAPTER 2

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss the value of scheduling times with God and to talk through the rough draft of your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Chapter Questions:***
 - a. What are your three main questions from this chapter?
 - b. Do you understand the value of being intentional? What excites and challenges you about having an intentional approach to your times with God? Are there parts of this chapter you initially disagree with and want to discuss?
2. ***Spiritual Pursuits Document:***
 - a. Talk through what you've written down on your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. Ask any directional or practical questions you need that would help you better answer the document questions over the next two weeks. Do you feel clear on what you want to pursue in the Bible, heart issues, gifting, and how to pursue them?
 - b. Are there other times in the day you can get more prayer time? Are there any days you can get more than one or two hours of prayer? What lifestyle changes do you need to make to prioritize your prayer times?
 - c. Starting tomorrow, try to follow your rough draft prayer schedule.
3. ***Heart Issue:*** If you have time, start or continue the discussion about what you want to pursue freedom from. With heart issue discuss, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.
4. Briefly review next week's homework together.

MEETING NOTES:

3

CHALLENGES WITH INTENTIONALITY

■ INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the most common struggles I've observed in myself and others for years in the area of intentional spiritual living. I believe the struggles and lack of clarity about this topic are keys to Satan's assault to rob people of powerful daily connections with God, connections that are meant to launch them toward their God-given destinies. By identifying these challenges and exposing the lies, you will grow in wisdom and feel more free to embrace structure in your spiritual life.

Some people gravitate towards schedules and plans and others avoid them, consciously or unconsciously. But both approaches come with potential challenges. As you dive into the challenges in this chapter, please know that the fruitfulness of intentional spiritual living is worth overcoming any obstacles in your heart.

■ CHALLENGE ONE – FEELING OVERWHELMED

NEW RHYTHMS

Feelings of being overwhelmed and stretched by thinking about developing spiritual direction and plans and walking them out may sound odd, at first. But some of these

feelings are good because they signal that this new approach is challenging a casual and unfocused approach to spiritual living. Shifting from one life rhythm to another will always produce this feeling, but the experience becomes easier if you slowly bring plans and desires into place over the course of several weeks. Similar to entering into a new exercise lifestyle, start by putting one thing in place in your spiritual life at a time, such as committing to spend time with God when you've scheduled it. Let the spiritual "muscle" of focus and consistency grow and give room for spiritual desire to increase. Then add other components at your own pace (Bible plan, meditation verse, prayer list, praying in tongues, etc.).

ADDRESS HEART ISSUES

When you recognize the feeling of being overwhelmed, ask God why you're feeling that way. Talk to Him about it rather than giving up or deciding that living focused isn't for you. You will develop new spiritual muscles in this process, so the growing pain should be an expected part of the process.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Sometimes, people are overwhelmed because they imagine planning is more complicated than it really is. Your Bible direction should be very simple, and your plan can be straightforward and easy to memorize—so keep it basic for now. If needed, ask a more mature friend or spiritual leader for direction in what you should read and meditate on based on your growth goal.

■ CHALLENGE TWO – FEELS RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELATIONAL

SATAN'S STRATEGY

One of Satan's strategies is to make believers passive in their pursuit of God by causing them to feel religious in doing spiritual disciplines altogether—or doing them with intensity. If he can make you feel "religious" when reading the Bible, praying, fasting, or obeying, he can get you to draw back from doing them aggressively. If he can get you to draw back from pursuing God like the hidden treasure that He is, then he wins by disconnecting you from God as your daily source of life.

Think about this for a minute. You need daily quality time with God to grow. To get that daily rhythm, you have to consistently fight your flesh and circumstances. If Satan can convince you that fighting your flesh and circumstances is religious, you'll back off and give way to the normal current of life. You'll still pursue God, but you'll be apprehensive about pursuing Him with all your heart because you feel religious. The result will be less and less quality time with God. The more disconnected you are from God, the greater the religious accusations will be, and the smaller your desire for God will become. If you struggle with these kinds of thoughts, confess to your Discipleship Mentor and rebuke the demonic confusion.

NOT LED BY DESIRE

The first religious struggle people confess is, "I feel mechanical, and I don't feel led by desire when I have a prayer schedule." My usual response is that plans don't make someone feel religious; they bring the once hidden religious mindset to the surface. The instinct is to throw out the schedule because of the negative feelings, but in this situation, I think it's best to address the heart issue through repentance. Rather than throwing out the thing that is exposing and has the power to heal the religious mindset, let it help you encounter the truth in Jesus.

Scheduled prayer times don't have to feel fake and mechanical. They can be led by desire. Making and prioritizing your schedule is an act of desire for God. Following through on it, whether you feel like it or not in the moment, is being led by desire because you made your schedule out of a sincere longing to be with God each day. Even in friendships, there is the need to schedule time together to make sure it happens. We schedule time with them out of love, whether we feel it or not at the actual time.

Being "led by desire" often means being led by our unsanctified flesh. Schedules are a good thing because they show us how often we don't "feel" like talking to God. If we were led by the Spirit at every point of the day, wouldn't we feel a desire for God during our scheduled prayer times? Not feeling desire for God in the moment probably means we're operating out of our broken flesh instead of our spirit-man. Why give in to what our flesh is feeling in those moments if our flesh is at war with the Holy Spirit within us?¹

¹ Galatians 5:17.

This is like the tensions we feel when we want to eat right and exercise but struggle to walk them out. We get excited about healthy eating, so we buy wholesome food. We get excited about working out, so we make up an exercise routine. But when meal and workout times come, we may not “feel” like doing what is healthy. The problem in this scenario is not the health plan, it’s the weakness of our flesh to follow through with the initial healthy desires. Your flesh is getting in the way of following your spiritual plan so that you can be spiritually healthy. So, wage war against it and know that it’s an expression of your love for God.

What people mean by feeling mechanical and fake during prayer times is that their emotions don’t feel what their mouths are speaking and singing to God. They don’t feel like they are being authentic when their heart doesn’t feel the truth of their words. This fake feeling is part of the normal process of being tenderized by God. It might not feel authentic for a while, but when people start to spend consistent time with God, their hearts will start to move and feel more authentic.

EARNING AND DISAPPOINTING

The second religious struggle people confess is, “I feel religious with schedules because I feel like I’m earning God’s love when I fulfill them and disappointing Him when I don’t.” This is a common hurdle for many people to overcome when growing in prayer because they don’t yet understand the extravagance of His free love. If you feel this way, know that you’re not alone and that this motivation will change as you encounter God’s love more and more. It’s fruitful to wrestle with this for a season because there’s a significant revelation of God’s heart throughout the process.

The main answer to this challenge is that God’s heart doesn’t change towards us whether we do or don’t follow our prayer schedule. Instead, our hearts are impacted and tenderized to feel Him more when we spend time with Him. His presence and affections towards us are always there for us to experience. But those who touch His presence, are the ones who say yes to that open door day after day.

Some people wrongly use the words “legalistic, works, and religious” regarding anything spiritual that requires time, effort, and resisting the flesh. They probably assume that anything to do with God will be easy or that God completely determines the quality of our relationship experience, because to say otherwise means you’re earning something from God. The biblical truth is that we have to deny our flesh, pursue God with energy and

focus, and sow in the Spirit to reap of the Spirit.² They praise people for their diligence and faithfulness in doing other life things consistently, but they prefer to call these same people legalistic and religious if they're as zealous about their times with God.

Being intentional about spending time with God involves a relational principle that governs all friendships. The principle is that relationships require focused times together to talk, and also require heart responses from both parties. When we spend time with Him, there is a natural growth in the relationship. When we don't do our part—giving Him focused time consistently—there is a natural decrease in our tenderness and sensitivity to His friendship.

That negative experience is painful—and is revealing. We have to resist the lie that we're disappointing Him, but the pain of spiritual dullness is good because the pain is a sign that love is moving in our hearts. It's a sign that we are longing for intimacy with Him and we realize it is lacking. I even dare to say that such pain is the beginning of repentance turning the heart toward God.

Wrong motives and feelings of disappointing God are broken as we stumble in our sincere, but weak, pursuit of God and continue to experience His free love. My first experience with this was during my first month at IHOP. I was excited to try praying for hours a day and had a fresh vision to encounter God. At the end of one day, I was fasting and sitting in the prayer room feeling so weak in my pursuit of God, and not “feeling led by desire.” I was doing what I knew to do, fasting, praying, and reading the Bible that day, but in the moment, I became so aware of how little I had to offer God. I was weak in my pursuit of Him, and my heart didn't feel much love for Him.

My pursuit was real and meaningful, but it became clear to me that His affection was towards me unrelated to my level of pursuit. I began to weep as He spoke to me about His love for me in the midst of my weak love and my weak pursuit of Him. I truly felt the reality of Psalm 40:17, “*But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me.*” That experience shifted my heart because it made me more confident in His free love for me despite my weak pursuit. This actually increased my desire and pursuit of Him.

To get free of the lies and wrong motivations, acknowledge them to God any time that you're aware of them. Repent of them out loud to God by saying you are choosing to not be led by those lies or wrong motivations. Then keep praying and reading the Bible as normal,

² Matthew 7:14; James 4:8; Titus 2:12; Galatians 6:7-9.

trusting that He will wash away those motives day by day in His presence. Ask Him to wash you with His presence that day and renew longing in your heart for Him.

TANGIBLE MEASUREMENTS

Schedules and plans make us aware of how we're doing in our pursuit of God. They create some level of expectation or standard that we naturally want to meet. This is beneficial because it makes us aware of how much we are actually praying—or not praying. If we're a little blind or willfully ignorant to how much we're not praying, the reality check can awaken desperation within us and help us get on track.

When we have a schedule, expectations, and accountability, we quickly become aware if we don't pray for several days in a row. When this happens, we can examine our hearts and confront the underlying issues that have always kept us from consistent prayer. Again, there is good pain in the reality check—it's the revelation of our hearts and repentance.

There is a potential negative related to tangible measurements for *perfectionists*. They have a sense of earning God's love and presence if they fulfill the plans, and conversely, they feel like a failure if they don't. I believe feelings of earning God's love or disappointing God were already happening in the person's heart before the schedule was created—it just wasn't as clear to them. Those motivations and feelings were subtle. They were there with many other things in life and caused negative patterns in relation to God.

Praise God for the schedule that brings these things to the surface. Now the hidden motives and feelings can be addressed and healed. Any day that you become aware of these motivations or feelings, acknowledge them and repent before God. As you spend daily time with God and talk to Him about these heart challenges, trust that He will free you from them.

CHALLENGE THREE – “I PRAY ALL DAY”

Some people say, “I pray all day, so I don't need to schedule focused times with God.” When people tell me this, I think they are either lying to get out of praying or they really are unaware of how much they don't talk to God. They think they pray while they run, drive, and work, but at its best, it's superficial and distracted prayer. Either they don't have

a vision for more experience of God, or they want distracted prayer, because it keeps them unaware of their spiritual dullness.

I've never yet met the person who has proven to me with spiritual fruit that their prayer lifestyle of no scheduled times actually works. The fruit I would like to see from these people is a growing hunger for God, a tender heart that weeps when they read the Bible, spiritual clarity and understanding when they share about Bible verses, and to hear God's voice clearly, particularly in the areas of personal conviction and prophecy.

I truly believe we all need focused quality times with God each day to experience Him in deeper ways. These focused times, in turn, cause our hearts to overflow in prayer throughout the day. If you are wrestling with the idea of praying all day versus having scheduled prayer times, ask yourself these three questions. What is your vision for experiencing God, and is that happening with your approach? Are you avoiding the deeper things of God in prayer by engaging in distracted prayer throughout the day? Are there legitimate reasons why you can't schedule undistracted times with God?

■ CHALLENGE FOUR – FLEXIBILITY WITH PLANS

Many people ask, "How flexible should I be with my schedule and plans?" It's okay to be flexible with committed prayer times occasionally, but not to the point of losing spiritual momentum. I say fight to keep your plans the same as what's written down. If you've made a prayer schedule, you've thought through your life enough to know that these are the times you want to consecrate to prayer. My prayer times get interrupted by sleeping in or by my kids waking up early, so my wife and I talk through how to prevent those things from happening or how to get us prayer that day if they do happen. If you sleep in, or something comes up, try to rearrange your schedule that day to get in your prayer time.

Being flexible *within* your prayer time is a little different. First, I always want to be responsive to what I sense God doing in my heart in the moment. If I'm praying through my prayer list, and God is clearly doing something in me, I don't stop. I keep praying for the thing on my prayer list that moves my heart until I'm ready to move on to the next thing in my schedule. If He's speaking to me through my meditation time, or I'm flowing in worship, I stay with it as long as I want that day. If I need to shift my focus for a few days to allow for the expression that God is touching in me, I do that.

Scheduling long amounts of time for each thing I want to do during my prayer time helps remove this tension because I don't usually feel rushed to go on to the next thing. Also, pushing for more prayer time every day removes the tension. The second value is that I always want to be aware of what I have spent my prayer times on each week. For example, this awareness helps me know if I need to change my plans to make sure I get more Bible meditation if that seems to be lacking due to going long in other prayer-related things that week.

If I feel like reading or meditating on something other than my main verses on a certain day, I do that. Normally, I just write down the verses to do at another time. If I'm unusually stirred and excited to read or meditate on something other than my verses, I change my plans for a couple of days—or even a week—until I receive clarity on the topic.

Recently, I was listening to a sermon, and it sparked a hunger in me to search out a few verses that had not been on my radar. I wound up reading a book by the same pastor, and I processed a lot of the information for a couple of weeks. After I felt closure from chasing the Bible bunny trail, I went right back to my original Bible reading direction.

■ CHALLENGE FIVE – STRUCTURE AND SPONTANEITY

Is it possible to be led by the Spirit and have a prayer schedule? Yes, it is possible to have both because they flow together naturally. The Holy Spirit is the One who will help you decide your direction for Bible reading, meditation, and prayer times as you create your prayer schedule. If He's the one helping with that initial process, then your plans are led by the Spirit overall, so you don't have to wonder if He's directing you somewhere different every day. You can have confidence that God is leading you from the start and that He wants you to be consistent with your plan so you can go deep into the truths.

Some people feel confused about this and wonder if they are supposed to be spontaneous in everything related to the Bible and prayer, as if that is what being led by the Spirit means. The Holy Spirit knows that it takes time to get revelation in truth, so He's not going to distract you or have you investing in different things in the Bible every day. He's the wisest teacher in the universe. Wise teachers slowly and intentionally build on truths each day instead of speaking about random things each day.

As a general rule, being led by the Spirit while having a plan means responding to His presence, truth, conviction, and direction within the things He's called you to in the Word.

For example, as you read and meditate, you will feel the Spirit prompt you to repent of lies and sins that are contrary to the truth you're reading. Another example is when you feel an increase of God's presence in meditation or worship. When this happens, be sensitive and steward His presence in the ways you feel led as opposed to moving on too quickly without regard for what He's doing.

CHALLENGE SIX – DISCOURAGED ABOUT INCONSISTENCY

It's normal to get discouraged by your inability to meet your committed prayer times. I don't know all the reasons why it's easier for some people to fulfill their prayer commitments than others. What I do know is that you'll grow in consistency when your longing for God increases, and that only happens as you spend time with Him. Your ability to spend time with Him should not fully depend on your discipline over your entire life. It's a choice and a discipline to begin with, but, as your heart grows, it should be fueled by desire and personal encounters with God. Also, being aware of your weakness is a good thing. Seeing your lack of spiritual hunger and follow-through will cause you to come to God with fresh desperation for His empowering grace. This initial humbling will probably help deliver you from any thoughts that you're earning God's love by doing your prayer schedule.

CORPORATE PRAYER ROOMS

The best suggestion I have for you to normalize your prayer schedule is to establish or participate in a corporate prayer room. You don't have to grow in prayer alone! A major part of this discipleship program is growing with others by doing the curriculum together and by praying and reading your Bibles in the same room. The program strongly encourages a prayer room because there are many practical and spiritual dynamics and graces that are released when people set their hearts to seek the Lord together in the place. (Refer to the prayer room value section in the "How to Implement" chapter of the book for more perspective on this.)

My ability to maintain my prayer schedule for the past fifteen years has been deeply connected to my involvement with corporate prayer rooms. Because of these prayer rooms, I was strengthened to grow during my early years, I've been able to be more consistent, pray for longer times, and grow in friendship with those around me. I encourage you to make the extra effort to participate in a prayer room as many days a week as you

need, even if it's every day for some weeks. It's good to lean on the body of Christ for strength in the place of prayer and the Word.

■ WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

There are two assignments for this week. For the first one, write down any challenges you're becoming aware of with the value of having a prayer schedule or challenges you're having with walking it out so far. Include any comments or disagreements you have with the ideas in this chapter. Take one prayer time to bring the challenges or questions to God and ask Him for wisdom and truth. If you're willing to be honest and wrestle with your challenges, you will find freedom. Your second assignment is to finalize the answers on your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. This includes having direction and a growth plan in the Bible, heart issues, giftings, and then a detailed prayer schedule. The next chapter will help you write a personal prayer list, so be sure to include a time in your weekly schedule for praying through this list. You will fill the *Spiritual Pursuits Document* out at the beginning of every module to refresh your focus on what you're pursuing and to get a rhythm in asking these intentional questions of the Lord.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 1: SPIRITUAL PLANNING – CHAPTER 3

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to talk through any challenges you are aware of with having a prayer schedule and discuss your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Discuss any practical or heart challenges you've noticed with having a prayer schedule and walking it out. Discuss any heart challenges you have with filling out the *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.
- b. What challenges did you most relate to in this chapter? Pray together concerning each challenge. Repent where you know you're believing a lie and ask for wisdom with the ideas you're not sure about.

2. ***Spiritual Pursuits Document:***

- a. Practically, how has your prayer schedule been going? Did the times of day you picked work well? How many days were you able to complete your prayer times? Do you need to make any changes to your schedule?
- b. How did your prayer times go spiritually? Were they difficult or enjoyable? Did anything impact you?
- c. Share and discuss any updates you made to your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. Talk through each question and finalize plans for each area of the document.
- d. Continue to follow your updated prayer schedule each day and make note of what you need to change after trying it another week.

3. Briefly review next week's homework together.

4

PRAYER LIST

PRAYER LIST VALUE

It is foundational for your weekly prayer schedule to include a Bible reading plan, a meditation verse, corporate prayer times, and a written-out prayer list. It is important to have a prayer list so that you can be clear, thoughtful, and intentional in your prayers. A prayer list should include praying for yourself and praying for others and specific topics. The Bible highlights different prayers that you could pray for yourself and highlights what God values. It is worth the time to think through and lean into how you want to invest your prayers. Review the rough draft of your prayer schedule, and experiment with times and days to pray through it. Try scheduling one morning a week to pray through a list, but you could also pray parts of it over several days—according to your preference.

VALUE OF PRAYING FOR YOURSELF

Having a prayer list reminds you to pray for yourself as a value. Just to be clear, it is godly and biblical to pray for yourself. Purposeful prayer for the needs of others or praying in groups for your city at other times is very important. But it's equally important to pray for yourself. It isn't selfish to be focused on what you need from God in your heart or life and to spend time in that kind of prayer. It is holy to partner with God in praying His destiny (heart and calling) over your life. God has ordained prayer as the primary way we partner with Him to release His kingdom. By praying for yourself, you will see God answer and increase His presence, revelation, wisdom, provision, and power.

Not only is praying the way to see His plans manifested in our lives, it's also a powerful way to reconnect with His heart. I find that, in the place of prayer, God fills me with zeal and details for the things I'm praying about. When you pray His prayers for your life, it will refresh your vision and passion for those topics. You'll be reminded of them each time, which helps with intentionality. Through prayer, God will fill you with faith and courage in His promises. These refreshing times will give you the clarity to repent and re-align in any ways you have strayed from the truths you're praying about.

VALUE OF REMEMBERING

One practical value in writing a prayer list is that it will be a constant reminder of what you are wanting to pursue in God. If I didn't have a prayer list, I would forget the things that I was so excited to pray about. The more you pray over your list, the more the list will be rooted in your heart—but the reminder is always helpful. Also, reading and praying through what I've written before aligns me to a longer-term vision for where I want to go in God for the next decades.

VALUE OF RECORDING

Having a written prayer list—with some space to journal thoughts in between each prayer point—allows you to record things that stir you while praying for specific things. When you write down your stirrings, you can pray further into them the next time you pray through your list. The act of journaling is helpful to your heart, and it helps you remember it for the future. By recording and praying into the things that develop each week, you receive more from God in so many ways.

■ PRAYER POINTS

When you're making your prayer list, I recommend keeping it simple and limiting it to about ten different prayer points. As you begin, keeping it shorter will make it less intimidating, less of a task list, and easier to focus on the main prayer values. As you go on, you will discover your rhythm and know if you can add more points to the list.

There are no wrong ways to make a prayer list, so make it look however you want. Put any prayer points you want on there and change them whenever you want. You'll find a groove in the core things you want on your list long-term. Then you can change other points

around at different times. Start by making a rough draft list of Biblical values, Biblical pursuits, personal circumstances, and promises that you want to consider praying over yourself. After brainstorming, pick the ideas you want to start with and make a physical copy of your list.

Here are examples of what you could include in your rough draft list: intimacy with God, the revelation of God, insight into the Word, wisdom, increased holiness, humility, fear of the Lord, hearing God's voice in dreams and visions, walking in the power of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, personal promises from God (prophecies, desires, dreams), and personal circumstances (relationships, finances, responsibilities).

For one of your prayer points, I encourage you to pray for the heart issue (e.g., sin, lie, negative emotional pattern) you're pursuing freedom from. Along with meditation, living in a spiritual community, and deliverance sessions, praying over this area of your heart is one of the things God will use to deliver you. This sounds so simple, but it's fruitful. When praying through my heart issue, I pray for truth, repent where needed, ask God to protect and deliver me from the enemy, and for divine transformation.

FLOWING HEART VS. TASK LIST

As with any other prayer expression, the end goal of praying through your list is to connect with God. Therefore, take your time and connect with Him on each prayer point. Feel free to pray for a long time on one thing and not much time on another—and skip any points you want. There are no rules, and there is no pressure to thoroughly pray through your entire list every time.

Sometimes a prayer really moves me, and I only stay on one topic during my entire prayer time. At other times, I feel a little life on a few prayer points and end up praying through half my list. I feel God's heart for the prayer points, and the prayer time allows my heart to be strengthened and aligned by Him. To not feel rushed and to promote this deeper connection, I schedule one day's entire prayer time just to pray through my prayer list. Other people I know take their time in praying for one or two prayer points every day on top of whatever they have planned for Bible study or meditation.

Your prayer list is not a task list, or mission to accomplish. If that is your view, it will become an intimidating spiritual chore that might drain you. I used to make long detailed lists with the goal of making it through the entire list, which included myself,

circumstances, family, friends, and things in the nation. I dreaded that list, but I thought it was the best thing to do. The task list mentality drained me, causing me not to connect to God in the process. Since changing to an intimacy approach, I look forward to my prayer list times, and I leave my prayer times invigorated—not exhausted.

■ EXAMPLE PRAYER LIST

Again, design your list however you want, but I suggest leaving space between every prayer point so you can write down things that come to you while praying over those points. In that space, I write verses that connect to the prayer point, further Biblical language on my prayers, more direction in how to pray the prayer point, commitments to walk out the prayers, or promises and insights God speaks during the prayer times. I have space to pray for my wife and children, so I write down anything prophetic I feel about them.

Currently, I have my handwritten list in a notebook, and I have a page open for each prayer point. I include verse references or written out verses next to most prayer points so that I can grow in praying God's language back to Him. Below is an example of things I would include in my list. I'm able to have a short prayer list because I pray for my extended family and my nation at other times with my wife and friends.

BIBLICAL VALUES AND PURSUITS

#1 - Revelation of God's Heart (Ephesians 1:17-19; 1 Corinthians 2:10)

#2 - Experience God's Love and pleasure for me (Ephesians 3:16-19; Psalm 16:11) #3 - Walk in God's Power - Gifts of the Spirit, deliverance power, dreams and visions (1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:17-19)

#4 - Increased Righteousness—current heart issue God is highlighting (sin/lie/ negative emotional pattern), other Biblical pursuits (speech, thoughts, attitudes, actions, anger/ bitterness, etc.) (Philippians 1:9-11; Matthew 6:13)

#5 - Increased Fear of the Lord (Psalm 86:11)

#6 - Strength and Might of the Spirit (Colossians 1:11) #7 - Humility and a Servant Heart (Matthew 11:28-30)

PERSONAL ROLES AND CIRCUMSTANCES

#8 - Grace and Wisdom to Lead as a Pastor (2 Timothy 2:23-25; John 10:11-13) #9 - Grace and Wisdom to Lead as a Husband and Father (Eph. 5:25-26; Ps. 139) #10 - Prayers and Promises for My Wife

#11 - Prayers and Promises for Child #1 #12 - Prayers and Promises for Child #2 #13 - Prayers and Promises for Child #3

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week's assignment is to create a prayer list and finalize your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*. In your discipleship meeting, you'll have time to finalize either of these. Observe how your prayer schedule works for you and make changes as needed.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 1: SPIRITUAL PLANNING – CHAPTER 4

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this meeting is to talk through and finalize how to make a prayer list and the benefits of praying it. Discuss anything else that needs to be finalized with your *Spiritual Pursuits Document* and prayer schedule.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Prayer Schedule:***

- a. How is your prayer schedule going spiritually? What has God been doing in your heart in your prayer times (Bible reading, meditation, etc.)? Have you had any heart challenges to following through on your schedule?
- b. How is your schedule going, practically? How many days were you able to follow through in prayer? Are there any changes you need to make to the schedule?

2. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Discuss anything needed to finalize your *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.

3. ***Prayer List:***

- a. Read and discuss the different prayer points you have on your initial prayer list. When can you put your prayer list into your weekly prayer schedule? Pray through some of the prayer points together.

4. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Share how your heart issues have been this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to transform you.

5. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together. This is not necessary if you are having a group gathering to introduce the next module topic.

MEETING NOTES:

MODULE 2

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

MODULE INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this module is to ground you in the revelation that you were designed by God to encounter His beautiful and joyful heart, and for you to be filled with His pleasures. The foundation for growing in relationship with God in prayer is enjoying Him—and being enjoyed by Him. The main issue isn't about having more discipline—although that helps—it's about cultivating a revelation of His heart, so you will want to be around Him more. When your heart begins to enjoy Him more, you will begin to drop your guard and receive His love and life. When this happens, everything changes! Your heart gets satisfied in God, your emotions get healed, sin patterns get transformed, and you receive empowerment to walk out your calling.

These next four chapters are drawn from the creation story of Genesis 1-2, with the focal points being our unique design as God's image-bearers and God's extravagant heart as Father and Husband. These chapters are put in a strategic order to expose lies you likely believe about God's heart and to progressively unlock your heart to His overwhelming goodness. The assignments focus on meditating on key aspects of the creation story and praying through the things that hinder you from receiving from Him, things like self-hatred, unworthiness, rejection, and wrong beliefs about God's personality (His intense longings and infinite happiness). I urge you to come to these assignments with an open heart and to not assume you're totally free from these issues.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

MODULE 2 - FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Week Five Assignments:

- Read Chapter 5 – “***Designed for Encounter.***” Journal your thoughts about the chapter, including the specific truths you sense God highlighting.
- Meditate and journal on Genesis 1:26 at least one day this week. During meditation, ask God what emotions He was feeling when He spoke Genesis 1:26 out loud, and ask Him why He made you in His image.
- Continue following your daily prayer schedule and your *Spiritual Pursuits*.

Week Six Assignments:

- Read Chapter 6 – “***Jesus’ Longing for a Companion.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Meditate on Genesis 2:7 at least one day this week. Ask God what He was feeling when He was forming Adam and when Adam first opened his eyes.
- Continue following your daily prayer schedule and your *Spiritual Pursuits*.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

Week Seven Assignments:

- Read Chapter 7 – “***The Happy God.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Continue your meditation on Genesis 2:7 and add in the perspective of God’s happiness from Proverbs 8:30-31.
- Continue following your daily prayer schedule and your *Spiritual Pursuits*.

Week Eight Assignments:

- Read Chapter 8 – “***Enjoyed by God.***” Journal your thoughts and questions about the chapter.
- Meditate on Psalm 149:4 at least one day this week.
- Answer the three probing questions and take one prayer time this week to ask God where you feel shame or unworthy of being 100% enjoyed by Him.
- Continue following your daily prayer schedule and your *Spiritual Pursuits*.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.***

SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

DATE: _____

1. **Bible reading direction and plan**

(Write down what you will read and when you will read it):

2. **Meditation verse** (Choose a verse that speaks truth into your heart issue):

3. **Sin/character issue from which to get freedom:**

4. **Lie from which to pursue deliverance:**

5. **Gifts to pursue** (Include simple ways you can pursue it):

SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

6. **Weekly Prayer Schedule**—Write down your plan for the *specific times* you are committed to spending with God each day, and *what specifically you plan to do during those times*. Include what your study or meditation focus will be. Refer to the example schedule in Chapter Two. (e.g., Monday 6-6:30 am—Tongues, 6:30-7:30 am—Meditation on Song of Solomon 1:2)

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

5

DESIGNED FOR ENCOUNTER

■ INTRODUCTION

The vision to experience God comes from understanding His original purpose for creating us, part of which is reflected in the way He designed the breathtaking facets of our human make-up. Therefore, getting a revelation of God's heart in the creation story is essential to our spiritual lives. It helps to define our vision for encountering God, and it opens the door to higher expectations of what God wants us to experience in Him.

Genesis 1-2 give us incredible insight into God's eternal desires and intentions in relationship to humanity. God's original motivation was to design one creature in His image, someone He could relate to in deep friendship, rule creation with, and reveal Himself to for all eternity. We were handcrafted by God with the internal and external capacity to experience Him. This tells us that God wants to encounter us.

■ MY TESTIMONY

The creation story changed my life and became a spiritual milestone during my fourth year of Bible school. I had an assignment to write sermons on the subject of the Bridegroom Heart of God. I decided to meditate on the creation story to see how God had revealed Himself. During the following weeks, God confronted several flawed mindsets that were limiting my ability to receive more of His love. The perspectives suggested that

He was distant, emotionally disconnected, discouraged by my repeated failures, and that He was mad, sad, boring, and even lacking life within Himself.

After spending weeks journaling, singing, and praying through verses that highlight God's passion for humanity, something surprising happened—I broke down and began to weep. For weeks, I experienced God's free love and overwhelming desire for friendship with me. At times, I wept out of gratitude and love for God. At other times I was filled with supernatural joy and laughter as I rejoiced because of His heart. The weeks leading up to the encounters, and those encounters themselves were life-changing, forming the DNA of this module.

■ THE CREATION STORY: GOD'S INTENTIONS REVEALED

WEDDING NARRATIVE

The first two chapters of the Bible are mainly about Jesus' desire for a bride and the Father's desire for His Son to have an eternal companion who would love Him wholeheartedly. From beginning to end, the central narrative of the Bible is God's desire for a bride. It begins with the creation of the bride and a wedding in Genesis, and it ends with the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride in the Book of Revelation. Even the New Jerusalem, where Jesus and His bride will live together forever, is called the bride.¹

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.—Ephesians 5:30-32

The New Testament declares that Adam and Eve's story was literal, but it was also *poetic* and *prophetic*. Their creation and marriage foreshadowed a greater fulfillment in Jesus' marriage to the Church. In Genesis, the prophetic picture of Jesus and the Church is the foundation for the entire Bible.

¹ Revelation 19:7-9, 21:2.

THE CENTER PIECE: THE BRIDE

In partnership with the Father, Jesus created for six days and rested on the seventh day.² Jesus took His time to create and set things in place day after day like a wise builder. After the heavens, the seas, the plants, and animals were all in their proper places, Jesus made His bride. The events of that week dramatically build toward, and climax at, God's proclamation that He desired a bride in His image. In the drama of the ages, God set forth the scene of creation largely to highlight the formation of the only being He would make in His likeness.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.—Genesis 1:26-27

In Genesis 1:26-27, I believe there was a holy conversation between the Father, Son, and Spirit on the fifth day in anticipation of Adam's (the bride) creation. I believe the Father, in an infinitely joyful burst of emotion, spoke out, "Now is the time! Let Us make man in Our image. Let's make one creature who can experience Our deep love and give wholehearted love back to Us. Let Us make a bride for Jesus and sons and daughters for My family."

IMAGE BEARERS: CAPACITY TO EXPERIENCE GOD

In the beginning, God revealed His desire for one creature to be made in His image. Being an image-bearer means that we are the one creature who can, because of our design and position, deeply relate to God, understand Him, give love back to Him, and display His glory to all of creation. We were fashioned, in a detailed way, with the longing and capacity to experience God. No angel or living creature around God's throne has the internal capacity to know and love God to the level that humans can.

We are relating to God and experiencing communion with Him all the time—potentially—without even recognizing it. We may be so accustomed to the idea of relating

² John 1:1-3; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2-3.

to God that we easily forget how glorious and supernatural it is. At any moment, we can close our eyes and see an impression of Jesus, hear His voice, and feel His emotions. This is only possible because of *how* God made us.

“FORMED” BY GOD

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.—Genesis 2:7

For five days, Jesus created every object in the universe by speaking out words, but He did something different with His Bride. He “formed” Adam from the dust. Jesus stood at a distance to speak the galaxies into existence, but with the image-bearer, He came down low to give a personal touch. Jesus made a billion burning suns and vast galaxies with gravitational pulls that keep them all together in a rhythm light-years away. But He took the time to form one creature in His image. *Let that sink in for a minute.* I imagine Jesus saying, “This is the most precious thing I am going to make all week. This is the centerpiece of it all. I’m going to take My time with this one.”

What was the scene like when Jesus formed Adam? What were the sights, the sounds, and even the smells? What was Jesus thinking and feeling in that moment, and how long did it take to form Adam? Was there a whirlwind of dust spinning in the air with Adam’s DNA within it? Or did Jesus take His time to scoop up the dust, make it moist, form it in His hands, and then begin to craft the perfect image like a sculptor would a clay statue?

In fact, the Hebrew word for “formed” is the same word that was used for potters crafting clay pots with meticulous detail at the spinning wheel.³ Like a potter with his fingers on the spinning clay, Jesus slowly formed you with laser-beam attention to the details of every cell in your being. His eyes were on you, and no part of your design is flawed, incidental, or accidental. Did you know that you have Jesus’ fingerprints on your spirit, soul, and body? The great architect of the universe crafted your frame and your design—and He wants you all to Himself.

What kind of wisdom and strategy did it take from Jesus to form that one creature? Our human makeup is more complex than any other object in the

³ Strong’s Hebrew #03335 - <https://www.studydrive.org/lexicons/eng/hebrew/03335.html>

universe. King David was filled with fascination and worship as he reflected on the revelation of human design, “*I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.*”⁴ We have been fearfully and wonderfully made. This means that God took our human design seriously, that our very existence is holy before God.

MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE—SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

To be made in God’s image means He designed our frames in such a way that we could relate to Him as friends. God has made us spiritual beings that have a soul and a body. These three aspects of our being reflect God’s desire for us to experience Him. This is the case because they all indicate that we are *sensory* beings, which means God has made us to receive from Him, experience Him, and respond to Him in love and worship.

THE HUMAN SPIRIT

At the core of our beings, we are a spirit. God is Spirit. He dwells in the spirit realm, and He made us so that we could relate to Him spirit-to-Spirit.⁵ Our spiritual essence is a complex idea to understand because we can’t fully define what our spirit looks or feels like outside of the Bible’s details. However, it is a Biblical truth that we are spiritual beings with a soul that functions within a physical body.

Jesus formed Adam from the dust and then breathed into him. Adam only became a living being *after* God’s breath was given to him, which I believe was when God created Adam’s soul and spirit and put the Holy Spirit in him. The spirit of a man is what brings life to the body, “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*”⁶

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.—Genesis 2:7

⁴ Psalm 139:14

⁵ John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, 6:17, 14:14.

⁶ James 2:26.

The original Hebrew word for “breath” is *Neshama*, which refers to God’s Spirit, power, and activity.⁷ Adam was the only creature to receive the breath of God, which makes him unique as the image bearer. Jesus modeled this giving of life again when He breathed the Holy Spirit on His disciples after His resurrection.⁸

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”—John 3:5-6

The gospel deals first with our spirit’s condition.⁹ Adam and Eve’s spirits were profoundly affected by their sin, and they lost their direct connection to the Holy Spirit because of it. But because of Jesus’ finished work of salvation, the Spirit of God fills us once again. He renews our spirit and joins it to His. Now we have the capacity to experience the same union and intimacy with God that Adam and Eve knew.

Jesus designed our spirit in such a way that God could live in it and be one with us. This union between our spirit and God’s Spirit gives us continual access into the deepest places of His thoughts and emotions. “*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*”¹⁰

Our spirit can commune with God and perceive eternity. Just as the body has senses to interact with the physical realm, our spirit was designed with senses to interact with God in the spiritual realm. We can only perceive His whispers, thoughts, and emotions, and understand God because of our spirit’s design and our direct connection to Him.

⁷ Strong’s Hebrew #5397 - Job 4:9; 26:4; 27:3; 32:8; 33:4; 34:14; Psalm 18:15; Isaiah 30:33. http://biblehub.com/hebrew/strongs_5397.htm

⁸ John 20:22.

⁹ John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:17.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.

OUR SOUL—MIND, EMOTIONS, LONGINGS

Jesus designed Adam's spirit and then his soul—which can be defined as the mind, will, and emotions. In this section, I'm commenting on longings instead of the human will. As you read this section and consider the purpose of the human soul, remember that every detail of our minds, emotions, and longings were thought-through by Jesus the wise builder. The One who planned the design of the galaxies, with all their complexity, devised the intricate design of our souls, and they point to our eternal purpose of encountering Him.

OUR MIND

The mind is the central operating system within the body. It determines everything we think, feel, and do. The mind is connected to more than 60,000 miles of nerves running through the body. These nerves gather sensory information from every location, including the sensory organs of the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin. The nerves then bring the information to the mind to process it, experience it, and ultimately respond to it—both physically and emotionally.¹¹ What this tells us is that our bodies and emotions can only interact with God and the outside environment because the mind directs and processes all the activities.

Jesus designed our mind to encounter Him by searching Him out, processing Him, evaluating Him, memorizing Him, and interacting with Him. Computers have a hard time matching the dynamic processing speeds, memory space, and ability to search things out like the human mind. If we're impressed by what technology can do, think about what the human mind can do, particularly when it comes to searching out and relating to God.

God calls us to set our minds on Him because that is the pathway to transformation, as well as the doorway to encountering Him.¹² As we search out and consider the truths of God's Word with our minds, doors are opened for those truths to touch and renew our emotions by the Spirit. We set our minds on spiritual things to experience spiritual things and have them become our reality.¹³

¹¹ Rita Carter, *The Human Brain Book 2nd Edition* (New York, NY: DK Publishing, 2014), 78.

¹² Romans 12:2.

¹³ Colossians 3:1-2.

OUR EMOTIONS

God has given us an incredible capacity for feelings—which we call *emotions*. In the natural realm, we experience positive and negative emotions every day, things like joy, happiness, love, peace, excitement, compassion, anger, sadness, and fear. Whether right or wrong, when someone asks how we are doing, we usually refer to what emotions we've been experiencing. Emotions are central to our human experience.

We have emotions because God has emotions, and we were made in His image. These emotions are holy containers for us to experience His feelings towards us. We get to “feel” God's emotions towards us in our emotions as an intimate experience and express our heart to Him through our own emotions. Emotional moments with the Lord give us a real sense of intimacy with Him in the same way that emotions connect us with others in our human relationships.

When restored and influenced by the Spirit, emotions are meant to be powerful and beautiful. God is emotional and He designed us to be the same. We get to feel joy and can rejoice with our whole hearts in worship. We get to experience love and weep as God's love and delight touch us. Hope and excitement fill us with anticipation of what God is going to do in our circumstances. Overwhelming peace becomes our experience as we see God on His throne over our lives. We get to feel God's compassion for a friend's difficult situation and partner with Him in intercession. These—and more—are available to us in our emotions.

OUR LONGINGS

Jesus fashioned Adam's inner being with longings and desires that could only be satisfied in Him. Our longings are one of the greatest proofs that God wants to encounter us because the deepest things within us are meant to draw us to Him more and more. Every human longs for pleasure, intimacy, fascination, and beauty. As Adam was being formed, I imagine the loving Potter putting His hand into Adam's heart and designing intricate longings while thinking, “Adam, these are going to draw you to Me in love.” Jesus hard-wired Adam with intense desires on the inside as an invisible work of art.

We all have these cravings inside of us, and whether we are aware of it or not, we spend most of our days trying to satisfy them. The gnawing feelings of unsatisfied longings are the most significant driving force to us going deeper in God. These longings

completely drive unbelievers, and they try to repress or numb them because they are tired of not being satisfied.

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.—Psalm 27:4

We long for pleasure, intimacy, fascination, and beauty, and God wants to satisfy us. Longings are like cups that God has given us so that He can fill them. For example, take a minute and think about the idea that we want to be beautiful, as well as to see beauty. We have an inherent knowledge and definition of what is beautiful. There is something in us that longs for beauty because God enjoys beauty. He is beautiful and wants to show us His beauty. God put the longing for beauty, as well as the other longings, in us to draw us to Himself as the greatest source of satisfaction. King David experienced God's beauty in prayer, and it became the chief goal of his entire life.

Jesus takes pleasure in beholding beauty, and He wants to encounter us with His beauty. Jesus isn't just practical—He loves to look at beautiful things and show us beautiful things. He loves it when our hearts are thrilled with the pleasure of seeing His beauty in worship or seeing His beauty in nature. The reality that God wants to satisfy our God-given longings may be a new paradigm for some, but God wants to expand our understanding to see Him as the God of encounter and satisfaction. Our human design declares that God didn't just make us workers for His kingdom. Instead, He made us to gaze on Him in all His beauty and overflow in pleasure-filled worship.

OUR BODIES

God made our bodies to take in and experience His life and then respond to Him in love and worship. Our bodies are perfectly designed to interact with and experience the natural realm in ways that are supposed to bring us godly pleasure and joy. From the beginning, God's plan was for us to dwell in a paradise that was the full union of the natural and spiritual realms.

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed, and out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Tree of Life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.—Genesis 2:8-9

God first placed Adam within the garden called Eden, which literally means *paradise*, because He wanted Adam to enjoy the physical surroundings. Then God promised believers that they would live forever in a paradise called the New Jerusalem. God bookends the storyline of history with a wedding and a physical paradise to reveal His original intentions for us to enjoy His creation with our physical bodies.¹⁴ The fullest experience of this will come when we have our resurrected physical bodies and can fully interact with both the natural and spiritual realms.

Adam had all his physical and spiritual senses alive in the garden to take in the things that were “pleasant to the sight” and “good for food.” Just like us, Adam had over 60,000 miles of nerves running through his body to react to every sensation creation had to offer. He had eyes to see beauty, ears to hear every kind of sound, and a mouth to taste flavorful foods. He had hands to touch the textures of creation, and he had skin to feel the atmosphere around him. Adam’s human design was built around godly stimulation and pleasure.

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus didn’t pick a barren desert as the place to cultivate friendship with Adam? Instead, He personally designed a beautiful garden that was filled with physical pleasures to be their place of communion and fellowship. Jesus wanted a place for them to spend time together, time that would bring Adam pleasure. That paradise is where we’re going to live for all eternity. There is tension in this age as to how much physical pleasure we should pursue and within what godly boundaries it should be sought. But in the next age, we will have a perfect and holistic experience of pleasure in both the spiritual and natural realms.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:2; Revelation 2:7.

SUMMARY

As an image-bearer, God has designed you with the desire and the capacity to encounter Him, and He wants to encounter you. Your eternal calling and divine design are to know God in His deep places and be known by God in your deep places. The beautiful God who is fully satisfied with pleasure wants you to experience beauty and pleasure in the Spirit as you draw near. Deep satisfaction and fascination *in* God are what your heart has been yearning for since He formed you in the womb. This is the season to believe for Him to satisfy longings and for you to reach for an encounter lifestyle. It's not too far off, and it's not reserved for elite Christians.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

For this week's assignment, journal your thoughts about this chapter. Include what parts you feel God is highlighting for you. Also, meditate (picture God, write down your thoughts, speak and sing the truths) on Genesis 1:26 at least one day this week during your scheduled prayer times. Meditate on the truth of being an image-bearer and meditate on what emotions God was feeling when He spoke this verse out loud. Take time to picture God's face and ask Him what His emotions were and why He made you in His image. Your meditation times on this passage will begin to tenderize your heart in preparation for the truths and verses in the following chapters, so come to this expecting what God might do in you.

6

JESUS' LONGING FOR A COMPANION

■ GOD DESIRES FRIENDSHIP

A foundational revelation of God's heart, one that takes us deeper in prayer, is knowing He desires deep friendship with us, even to the point of *longing*. God isn't content to know about us in His omniscience, or for us to know about Him in our heads. He wants an authentic relationship where He knows us experientially, and we know Him the same way. God wants an ongoing, ever-deepening experiential relationship with us where we both share the deepest places of our hearts.¹

The revelation of God's love for us is what sets our hearts on fire with love for Him. Our longings for Him will grow to the degree we experience His thoughts, emotions, and longings for us.

Let's continue our study of the creation account through the lens of Jesus' longing for a bride.

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:10.

OVERVIEW OF ADAM AND EVE'S STORY

The entire creation story is summarized in Genesis 1 with a quick mention of the image-bearer at the end. In Genesis 2, God tells the story again, but zooms in on the centerpiece of the storyline—the formation of the image-bearers and their marriage relationship with the Creator.² Genesis 2 is an expansion of what God was thinking, feeling, and doing in Genesis 1:26 when He said, “*Let Us make man in Our image.*”

Ephesians 5 gives us insight into Adam’s wedding story and declares that Adam represented Jesus and Eve represented the church. The apostle Paul connected the literal story of Adam and Eve to Jesus’ future desire for a bride. This means that we can look back on the creation storyline with a greater perspective and see how Jesus, as represented by Adam, longed for His bride.

An interesting poetic change occurs in Genesis 2 that signifies a shift in God’s relationship with humanity. In Genesis 1, God is given the title *Elohim*, which refers to His creative power and eternal nature. In Genesis 2, His only title is *Yahweh-Elohim*, which is God’s covenant name paired with His creator name. In this holy chapter, God connects these two names to purposefully reveal Himself as the Creator who desires covenantal friendship.³

ADAM NEEDS A COMPANION

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.—Genesis 2:7-8

At the beginning of this story, God set the context for friendship with humanity. Adam was formed out of the dust and set in an enclosed garden within Eden. Jesus then gave him the job of cultivating and maintaining the garden as his home and place of fellowship with Him.

² Matthews, Kenneth. *Genesis 1-11:26*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 189.

³ Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*. 192.

After Adam was placed in the garden, God said something unusual that purposefully takes us into the prophetic storyline of Adam and Eve, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*”⁴ This statement is unusual because Adam lived in an environment of paradise before sin and brokenness ever entered the created order. He had full access to God’s presence and the tree of life, yet in God’s perspective, he still needed a companion. In this story, God deliberately waited to make the bride to get Adam’s attention— and ours.

The statement about being alone without a helper was about Adam, but it was also about Jesus’ desire for a companion. In this statement to Adam, we see the Father speaking prophetically over Jesus. The Father’s heart was for Jesus to have an eternal companion in His likeness with whom He could rule the nations.⁵

LOOKING FOR A COMPANION

Out of the ground the LORD formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. . . . So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.—Genesis 2:19-20

After telling Adam He was going to make him a bride and that it wasn’t good to be alone, Jesus brought him animals to name. Again, it seems out of place for the Lord to tell Adam he needed a companion in his image and then immediately bring animals to him to be named. But the animals are not a deviation from the bride topic. We know Jesus was doing something specific with the animals because the end statement is that Adam didn’t find a creature like him. The naming process was twofold: it was about Adam expressing dominion with God in naming creatures, and it was about finding Adam a partner in his likeness.

Jesus used the naming process to awaken Adam’s desires for a companion in his exact likeness. Adam got to see all the animals, and he got to take time to consider their make-up and their purpose before naming them. He was able to see that every animal

⁴ Genesis 2:18.

⁵ Matthew 22:2; Psalm 2:7; Ephesians 1:18; Revelation 19:7-9; John 17:24.

had a counterpart, but he was alone and didn't have a counterpart. It's as if his desire and hope for the one in his likeness grew every time a new animal approached him, "Will this be the one made for me?" I imagine Jesus standing next to Adam asking how he felt as he saw each animal and helping him identify his longings for a companion. "Adam, you don't have anybody to relate to deeply. They don't have the capacity or the make-up to be friends with you—but one is coming soon."

EACH ONE ACCORDING TO ITS KIND

In Genesis 1, there's a pattern of God making everything according to its kind and blessing them to be fruitful.⁶ Something new was created every day, and everything had a creature in its image to relate to and with which to be fruitful. After all the plants and animals were formed, God said, "*Let Us make man in Our image.*" At the climax of creation, God essentially says, "Let's make a companion suitable for Us and let Us bear fruit and multiply together."

Two storylines are unfolding. It is a *literal story* about Adam, but it is also a *prophetic story* about Jesus. Adam was longing for the companion that God promised Him, and prophetically speaking, Jesus was longing for a companion. The rest of chapter two describes the literal and prophetic story of how God would make the bride.

THE BRIDE FASHIONED

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.—Genesis 2:21-22

After Adam finished naming the animals, Jesus brought him into a supernatural encounter to make him a bride with his DNA. This part of the story is so dramatic. This deep sleep was the same kind of visionary encounter that Abraham experienced when God made a covenant with him.⁷ As with Abraham's experience, Adam was probably able to see God taking out his rib and forming it into a woman.

⁶ Genesis 1:11-12, 21-22, 24.

⁷ Genesis 15:12-17.

The deep sleep and the rib are a prophetic picture of Jesus being put to death on the cross by the Father so that a bride could come forth from His side.⁸ Adam was put to sleep by God so that he could give life to a bride in the same way that Jesus was put to sleep on the cross to give life to a bride. In other words, the cross was necessary to bring forth the bride of Christ.⁹

THE BRIDE PRESENTED TO THE HUSBAND

God took Adam's rib and hand-crafted another living being in direct relation to the man. This is a massive statement because Eve was the only creature not directly made from the dust. She was specifically made from Adam's DNA to be in his image and then presented to him in a marriage ceremony. In the same way, the Father will present Jesus with a wholehearted bride at the marriage supper of the Lamb.¹⁰

BONE OF MY BONES

In that visionary encounter, Adam saw Eve and declared, "*Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of Man.*"¹¹ Eve literally came from Adam's flesh. They were of the exact same DNA. Adam was saying bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh because she was in his exact same likeness and had the ability to be his companion in every way.

This is what God wanted in Genesis 1:26 when He declared His desire for a creature in His image. In the beginning, we were made in Jesus' image, but sin corrupted us. Through the cross, our spirit man was washed and renewed so that we could relate to Jesus spirit to spirit once again. We came from Jesus, and we have the ability to be friends with Him because we are bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh.¹²

⁸ John 19:34.

⁹ Mike Bickle, "Eve: Relating to God in intimacy without shame," *The Bride of Christ: Growing in Intimacy with God Series* (Lecture Notes, International House of Prayer University, Grandview, MO, May 11, 2018).

¹⁰ Revelation 19:6-9.

¹¹ Genesis 2:23.

¹² Ephesians 5:30.

JESUS' LONGING FOR A BRIDE

In the Hebrew language, when Adam said, “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” it was a loud and excited affirmation.¹³ Adam was shouting, “At last, here is one of my kind. This is the one that I can relate to. This is the one that I can fully love and be loved by. This is the one that I’ve been longing for!” Remember when he was naming the animals and his longing for a companion was being awakened? We don’t know how long it took to name all the animals, but we do know his longing was growing. In this moment, all his stirrings burst out in one satisfied and celebratory shout.

Jesus wanted Adam’s longings to go deeper and deeper in that process so that when he finally received his bride, he would fully appreciate her value. Through the process of making and presenting Eve to Adam, I believe Jesus said, “This is how I feel about you, Adam. This is what I say to you, you are bone of My bone and flesh of My flesh. You are My companion forever. You are the one I have longed for. I am going to join Myself to you in a human body forever! Do you feel the longings inside of you for a bride? This is the same desire I have for you. Are you aware of how beautiful she is to you and how amazing it feels to be with her? This is how I feel on the inside of My heart for you. The emotions and the affections you’re feeling for her now are what I feel for you! These are but a glimpse and a whisper of what I feel for you right now!” I believe Jesus was saying this to Adam. And I believe it is what Jesus is saying over you right now.

LONGING AT CREATION AND THE CROSS

God longs for a relationship with us with an intensity and capacity that only He could contain. Many of us instantly discount that thought because it sounds exaggerated. We think, “Yeah, for the other guy maybe, but I’m not that good or that special. How do I know that God is so passionate about me? Isn’t that a little bit exaggerated?” It’s not an exaggeration, and we have proof of that in the cross. The same passion and longing that drove Jesus to the cross for us is the same passion and longing that was in His heart while He created in Genesis one and two.

This next statement will confront any unworthy feelings you may be experiencing in your life. Jesus was naked on a cross and crushed by the Father as the greatest display of

¹³ Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*. 220.

selfless love the world has ever seen.¹⁴ He was humiliated in an undignified death and held nothing back, saying, “Here I am, this is My heart. This is who I am, and this is how far I will go in My love for you. I’ll lay bloody on a cross if I can have the bride that I fashioned for Myself.”

That was His display of passion on the cross, that was His passion in the beginning of creation, and that is His passion for us now. I don’t think we even know the beginning of Jesus’ desire for us as His bride. He came into a human frame, lived for 30 years, died a violent death on the cross, was crushed by the Father bearing the weight of the sins of the world, and went through demonic warfare and suffering, all because He was longing for friendship with us. Let the reality of the longing of the cross confront the lies that say He isn’t passionate for us or that we are unworthy of His love.

GOD FEELS AND WEEPS

As we look at the cross, coupled with the creation story, we must say, “Jesus, You are longing on the inside.” God is emotional. He is not detached, stoic, and unmoved. To view the creation story correctly, and to understand the intensity of God’s longing heart, we have to open our hearts to the truth of His emotions.

One example of this is when Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem before His last Passover. The Bible says that He stopped outside the city to weep over its coming destruction.¹⁵ His desire for repentance caused Him to weep. Weeping isn’t casual—it’s usually intense and only takes place when deep pain is in the human heart. I believe a deep longing was stirred up as Jesus approached the city and knew that He was going to be rejected. He longed for them to be with Him, but He knew that they were going to reject Him. In this story, the lack of human response to God’s love cut Him to the core of His being.

In the story of Lazarus’ death, Jesus again expressed raw emotion. As Mary approached Him weeping, Jesus saw her heart and wept and groaned with her.¹⁶

What did it look like for the Son of God to groan in the spirit and weep, and what does this display say about the intensity of Jesus’ emotions?

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:3-10; Romans 5:5-8; John 15:13; Galatians 1:4; 1 John 4:10; Revelation 1:5.

¹⁵ Luke 19:41.

¹⁶ John 11:33-36.

God weeps and feels. He longs with such an intensity that we will need all of eternity to comprehend it. God feels more emotion and desire than we ever feel because He is perfect and eternal. We think we're emotional at times, but God's emotions are infinite. Do you believe God could be so deeply pained with longing for friendship with you that He could weep in heaven?

JESUS' LONGING FOR ADAM DURING CREATION

Jesus was uniquely stirred with longing during the creation story. He created the galaxies, plants, and animals for the first five days, but He knew that on the sixth day the burning desire of His heart was going to be fulfilled. Jesus' longing and anticipation grew day by day for His bride.

I'm sure Jesus didn't have to sleep at night for each of those five days but imagine how hard it was for you to sleep in the days leading up to exciting events in your own life. The week before my wedding was filled with emotions and anticipation. I did not sleep well. I found myself lying in bed, dreaming about the wedding day that I'd been waiting for my entire life. For six months, we had planned and prepared for one day, our wedding day, and our emotions were only building with greater intensity in that last week.

If we could feel that much longing as humans, how much more could the Creator feel who is filled with perfect love? Oh, the longing He must have felt the evening before Adam was formed! Remember, He's not passive, and He's not unmoved. He's the God of desire and all-consuming fire. We must keep this perspective in mind while pondering the story of the wedding between God and humanity.

In the first five days, Jesus designed a cosmic sanctuary within which He cultivated friendship with the image-bearer. Jesus slowly formed Adam's body and then breathed His breath into Adam to bring him to life. There's a priceless picture to envision at this point, one that informs our entire theology about what God is like, how He feels about us, and how He relates to us today.¹⁷ The question is what was Jesus feeling and doing as Adam began to open his eyes for the first time, and what was Jesus' face like when Adam first saw Him?

Was Jesus silent and somewhat still? Was He emotionally disconnected? Was His expression serious? Did Jesus look unimpressed or a little discouraged with Adam? Was He thinking He could have done a little bit better job making Adam or that Adam was a

¹⁷ Allen Hood, "The Playfulness of God" (Audio Lectures: International House of Prayer University, Grandview, MO).

mistake? I believe many people, if they were more self-aware and honest, would say that Jesus had a negative expression on His face when Adam opened his eyes.

Then I (Jesus) was beside Him (Father) as a master craftsman, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.—Proverbs 8:30-31

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.—Job 38:7

What was Jesus thinking, feeling, and doing during those first moments of Adam's life? Proverbs 8 and the book of Job describe the mood of heaven during the creation events as joyful and celebratory. Heaven was singing and so was God.

Jesus was beside His Father as the master craftsman, and They were rejoicing over the things that They created. I believe Jesus, the most joyful being in the universe, had the biggest smile and was singing and dancing as Adam opened his eyes for the first time.

And it happened, as the ark of the LORD came to the City of David, that Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David whirling and playing music.—1 Chronicles 15:29

The Hebrew word for “rejoicing” in Proverbs 8 is the same word used for King David dancing and whirling as the ark of the covenant was ushered into Jerusalem. The word that describes Jesus rejoicing over creation in Proverbs, and David dancing before the ark means to laugh or dance out of joy and pleasure.¹⁸ I believe Jesus was singing love songs, shouting for joy, and whirling around in an emotional display of celebration because of His bride's arrival. He is the God who rejoices over us with singing, “*The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*”¹⁹

¹⁸ Strong's Hebrew #07832 - <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/hebrew/07832.html>

¹⁹ Zephaniah 3:17.

I imagine Adam taking his first breath, opening his eyes for the first time, and seeing Jesus rejoicing before him. Adam might have thought the same things we typically think, “Why do you like me so much? I’m just dust, and everything that I am is from You anyway. I’m not that special or that amazing for You to rejoice in me. I haven’t done that much for You, and I’m not devoted enough to be worthy of Your rejoicing.” I imagine Jesus saying something like this, “Adam, I’m the joyful God who is filled with love, life, and pleasures forevermore. I can’t help but overflow onto you! And I’ve made you unique among all the created order. It’s not based on how much or how little you think you’ve done to impress Me, but it’s based on what I’m like in My heart and what I’ve designed you to be. I love you; I’m moved by your love for Me, and I enjoy you, Adam!”

Jesus is saying these same things over you all the time. You are not an accident. You are not a mistake. He is not disappointed in you or shut down towards you. Your birth and storyline were not missed as if you’re just one person out of billions of others on the earth. Jesus longed for your birth with weeping and groaning, and He celebrated your birth with shouting and dancing. Even now, His heart is burning with longing for your friendship. He is dancing and singing songs of love over you with unbridled emotion. He’s laughing with joy over your life because of how happy He is and how beautiful He’s made you to be.

NAKED AND UNASHAMED

The unearned love and enjoyment that Adam experienced with God in those first moments are exactly what we can experience in our relationships with God through the blood of Jesus. Adam hadn’t done anything good to earn Jesus’ rejoicing or anything wrong to disappoint Him in those first moments. In the same way, we come to God as righteous, accepted in His presence, and enjoyed, not because of our good works or devotion, but because of what He is like in His heart and what He has accomplished for us.

Adam and Eve were naked, vulnerable, and intimate with each other without the factor of shame. They were fully confident to be themselves around each other. In the same way, Jesus wants to make us confident in His grace and His desire for us so that we go deeper in our relationship with Him. He wants us to openly share the deepest parts of our hearts, affections, and desires with Him as well as our fears, hurts, disappointments, and weaknesses. He wants vulnerability and transparency with a spirit of confidence rooted in the revelation of His heart towards us.

Shame is one of the major hindrances to receiving God's love and experiencing Him more. Shame is feeling anything less than 100% confident in God's smile towards you, and shame results in a guarded heart. Many Christians feel some level of ungodly shame before God due to past sins, current struggles with sin, feeling un-devoted, or just not feeling worthy. Shame causes us to "turn our face" from the Lord during times of prayer and worship because we're unsure of how He really feels about us. We might not know we turn our face a little bit while interacting with God, but the message of God's longing is so intense that it will bring such levels of shame to light.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

In closing, here's a prayer that impacts me whenever I meditate on this story. Take several minutes to close your eyes and picture Jesus standing in front of you. Picture yourself by Him as if you were Adam in his first moments of opening his eyes. Slowly ask Him these questions, "Jesus, do you long for me in my weakness? How much do you feel for me right now?" Wait for a couple of minutes to see if He whispers back to or brings a picture to mind. Write down what He says and then talk to Him about it.

If you feel like His words are revealing lies you have been believing, speak them out loud to Him in prayer and break your agreement with them. "God, I have believed the lie that____, and I break my agreement with that lie right now." End by agreeing out loud with the truths you learned about Him in Genesis 2 and with what He spoke to you just now. This week, your assignment is to meditate on Genesis 2:7 at least one day as a way of soaking in the truth that Jesus longs for you. As a focus, meditate on what God was feeling while forming Adam, and what He was doing as Adam first opened his eyes. Take extra time to pray through the prayerful response section above. Write down what touches your heart and continue to talk to God about these things in your meditation times.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 2: FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD – CHAPTERS 5 & 6

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss the intensity of God's longing for you and pray through hindrances to that truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Chapter 5 – Discuss your journaling and Genesis 1:26 meditation assignment from this chapter. What do you think it means to be made in God's image?
- b. Chapter 6 – Discuss your journaling and Genesis 2:7 meditation assignment from this chapter. What do you think Jesus was feeling and doing while He was forming Adam and when Adam's eyes opened the first time? What do you picture Jesus' face to have looked like and why? What might that reveal about your perception of God?
- c. Is the idea that God burns with longing for you easy or hard for you to receive? Why do you feel that way? Did the prayerful response from the end of the chapter make you aware of any feelings of shame or feeling unworthy of God's longing?
- d. Together, pray through any lies that come up in the chapter six discussions by confessing specific lies you're aware of, agreeing with the truth out loud, and asking God to touch you with the truth.

2. ***Spiritual Pursuits:*** *Do a brief follow-up to give more time to the above chapter questions or skip if needed.*

- a. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule or Spiritual Pursuits? How are your Bible reading, meditation, and prayer list times going? And how is God touching you in each of them?

3. ***Heart Issue:*** *Do a brief follow-up to give more time to the above chapter questions or skip if needed.*

- a. If you have time, briefly discuss your heart issue (from *Spiritual Pursuit Document*).

4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together.

7

THE HAPPY GOD

HAPPINESS IS HIS FOUNDATION

The revelation of God's longing heart and happiness flow together in the love of God. His depths of passion and mercy, as revealed in the creation and gospel storylines, are only possible because of His infinite happiness. This means that happiness is the foundation of His longing and pursuit of us in the midst of our weakness. In these next two chapters, the focus will be on God's joyful heart, His enjoyment of our lives, and His desire to fill us with His pleasures.

What we believe about God's happiness shapes our perception of Him. Without the Holy Spirit's revelation of God's happy heart, our foundational perspective of Him will be dramatically tainted and limited. This may seem like an exaggeration, but when this truth starts to get inside you, you realize how intensely your heart wars against the idea of God's happiness, and you see how it's foundational to His personality. Rejection, self-hatred, feeling unworthy, feeling unenjoyable, and feeling shame in God's presence will all be demolished in the revelation of His joy. The foundation of these broken thoughts and emotions is built on the lie that God is everything but infinitely happy.

God's happiness is the doorway to trust and intimacy. Our hearts will naturally open up to the other aspects of God's personality if we can rightly see and experience His happy heart. This is because it creates a safe context to draw near to Him in intimacy. In relationships, we don't open up to people who are unhappy, angry, or disappointed in us because they aren't

safe. However, we readily open up to those who are happy and enjoy us. God's happiness pulls down our guards so we can truly "go there" in intimacy and transparency with Him.

DREAM OF JESUS' JOY

While I was writing this chapter, my daughter had a profound dream that encouraged me. In her dream, Jesus appeared by her bedside at night with a purple robe that radiated the colors of the rainbow. As she looked at Him, He had a huge smile and began to laugh loudly with deep joy. Then He spoke to her while still laughing and said, "Moravia, I don't want night-night (what we call bedtime) to be that long!" After saying this, He continued laughing and walked out of her room. She knew from the dream that Jesus enjoyed spending time with her and that He was overwhelmingly excited for her to wake up. This dream paints a picture of what God is like in His joy and how He relates to us in the overflow of His delight.

■ MY JOURNEY

My journey into God's joyful heart started during my senior year in Bible school. The Holy Spirit began to highlight passages in the Bible that revealed God's joy in a way that I hadn't noticed before. At the same time, I started reading John Piper's well-known book, *The Pleasures of God*. For about a month, this book and key verses in the Bible seemed to penetrate the deepest places of my heart, bringing me into another level of freedom in my relationship with God.

As the light of His joy increased in my heart, two deep-seated lies became very clear to me. First, I felt unworthy of God's joy and passionate love. And second, I felt a measure of rejection in His presence because I didn't feel fully enjoyed. I knew that God loved me, but deep down, I thought He was unhappy, moody, and even angry at me. At some level, I felt like I was a child who was adopted by a grumpy father. One who took me in out of pity but was annoyed with my needs and treated me differently than his biological children. I didn't feel entirely accepted and enjoyed by Him. And I felt like He didn't fully embrace me as my father.

During my high school years, I played a lot of sports and had to travel quite often. At times, I had to ride with other families because my parents couldn't go. That was hard for me. The families welcomed me in their cars, hotel rooms, and wherever they went during

the trips, but I always felt like I was a burden. I was never confident that they wanted to bring me into their family for the weekend.

I didn't feel comfortable with them like their kids did, and I had to make sure I took care of myself even though I was under their guidance. I had to pay them for gas, food, and my part of the hotel room, but all of that was naturally taken care of for their kids. Sometimes I would have to switch hotel rooms or switch families for different parts of the trip. I remember the awkwardness of parents figuring out who I would be with and feeling like even more of a burden.

When God began to reveal the depths of His happiness to me, I realized that I had been feeling like a burden to Him. It was as if I was the only orphan in His family. I felt like He had let me into His spiritual family because I needed help, but I didn't occupy the same place of love and privilege as His actual children.

I had been experiencing amazing truths about His heart during my time at Bible school, but the crazy thing is that there were still deep layers of these lies within me I wasn't even aware of. The extreme depths of His happiness are what brought these lies to the surface because they forced me to reconcile His happiness and enjoyment of my life with my perceived worth.

During that season, there were times when a paragraph from John Piper's book or a phrase from the Bible would hit me so hard that I would be instantly filled with joy, causing me to alternate between laughing and weeping for periods of time. During those encounters, I felt like God was penetrating deep-seated beliefs concerning what He was really like and how much He felt for me. At times, the joy was from God, and other times it was the fruit of feeling relieved that God wasn't angry or sad. My heart felt free to laugh because I found deep rest in believing God was infinitely happy and deeply enjoyed my interactions with Him.

GOD'S HAPPY HEART

In Your presence is fullness of joy and the pleasures forevermore.—Psalm 16:11

The only way we can understand God's joy and original intention for us is to ponder what God was like in His joy and pleasure before He created anything. As we meditate on the truth of His happiness, we'll understand how He could be so joyful. This

understanding will help us grasp His motivation for creating us. God's enjoyment of us is not based on anything but the unchanging joy He experiences within Himself outside of any creature or circumstance. We can only come into the revelation of being enjoyed as we enter into the revelation of His joyful personality.

There are three foundational ideas to understand when pursuing revelation about God's happiness. First, He is filled with life within Himself, and nothing can add or take away from it. Second, He has the fullness of life within Himself. Third, joy and happiness are more than an experience for Him—they are part of His personality.

GOD IS FILLED WITH LIFE WITHIN HIMSELF

God is eternal, uncreated, and infinitely filled with life within Himself. This means He has been His own source of everything for all of eternity. We must understand that He is filled with life apart from us or any other creatures and that His life will never decrease. Otherwise, we will wonder if He has enough supply for Himself and if His internal life is dependent on us. God is an unending river that can fill every heart in the world every day and still never decrease in His life source. This is what makes Him so stable in the face of the darkness and neediness of the nations.

God is the only being in the universe who does not depend on another source for the life that moves inside of Him. He doesn't rely on anything outside Himself to experience perfect joy. God is His own fountain of life and happiness, "*For in You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light.*"¹ Because of His emotional life source, His heart is strong, never moody or needy, and never lacking anything that needs to be given as the Father of all things. He adopts masses of broken, needy, attention-seeking children into His family every day—yet His heart is full and never wavering as He cares for them.

GOD EXPERIENCES THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

The second foundational idea is that the life that God experiences moment by moment is the fullness and the perfection of life—and that never changes. The Father, Son, and Spirit have experienced and will continue to experience the fullness of life, joy, and pleasure every moment of every day. They have never in any way lacked in these areas

¹ Psalm 36:9.

for all of eternity. This is saying a lot because God’s joy container is massive. He has an uncreated heart and an infinite capacity to experience pleasure.

In Psalm 16, David says that in God’s presence there is fullness of joy and pleasures for all of eternity. Because God Himself is the source of the fullness, those in His presence get to enjoy what He enjoys. God cannot be denied the fullness of joy and pleasure at any moment. We only have human words and human perspectives that are informed by the Bible to define and measure God’s joy. However, we can ask the Holy Spirit this question: “What does it mean for an uncreated, eternal, and infinite Being to experience fullness according to His definition of fullness?”

We get a better perspective on His capacity for the life that surges inside of Him by looking at the natural created order. Out of God’s internal life source, He was able to speak a word and create a billion galaxies. Not only did He create the stars and galaxies with a word—He still sustains them with His words.² Jesus upholds the visible and invisible universe with the power that flows from His lips. This creative and sustaining power is but a whisper of what the fullness of life and joy within God looks like when visibly displayed.

GOD’S PERSONALITY IS HAPPY

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.—1 Timothy 1:11

The third foundational idea is that joy, happiness, and pleasure are part of God’s personality. They are who He is—not just what He experiences. A beautiful aspect of God’s glory that makes Him holy and completely other-than-us is His divine happiness. In his book, John Piper quotes 1 Timothy 1:11 and says that it could be translated to say, “*The gospel of the glory of the happy God,*” which means that God is happy and that the glory of His happiness is revealed through the storyline of the gospel.³ The good news of the gospel is that God is infinitely happy—it’s in His DNA. The extravagant love and generosity offered to us through the gospel are but expressions of what is in His heart.

God’s glory is another way of saying God’s heart or personality. His outward glory is the physical expression of His internal life. When that glory is released outwardly, we experience

² Hebrews 1:2-3.

³ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000)*, 25-26.

a part of God. Every aspect of God's personality is physically seen around Him by the angels and saints in heaven. An example of this is in Exodus 34, where Moses cried out to see God's glory. God answered Moses' cry by declaring aspects of His personality. God's glory is the same thing as His personality.

God's happiness is part of His glory and holiness, and those in heaven worship God because of it. Night and day, the four living creatures are singing about His holiness, which refers to God's complete distinction from creation. They sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" because they don't have the fullness of words to describe something so infinite and beautiful.

Part of what they are discovering and singing about is God's infinite and uncreated happiness. They see and feel it in His presence, and it is beautiful to them. It is easy to imagine God's throne room as being filled with power, majesty, and angels trembling in the fear of God. However, it is equally true that God's throne room is filled with an atmosphere of joy and gladness and that those around God experience the heights of happiness and pleasure, "*Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness are in His place.*"⁴

God has expressed His happy personality throughout the Bible. One display is through the Father's pleasure over His Son. In Isaiah 42, written nearly centuries before Jesus' birth, the Father declared His overwhelming pleasure over His Son. Then in Jesus' lifetime on the earth, the Father again declared His deep pleasure over His Son during His baptism and transfiguration, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*"⁵ I think the Father was doing more than just affirming His Son to others and connecting prophecies from Isaiah to the Gospels. I think He was bursting with joy and wanted to communicate His affection to His Son. Jesus received His Father's joyful celebration and was deeply moved by His words.

Psalms 45 reveals Jesus' glad personality and the Father's happiness. First, it says that Jesus has been anointed with the oil of gladness more than anyone else. He's the glad King. Second, Hebrews 1:8 tells us that Psalm 45 is about the Father singing a love song over Jesus, so as we read the Psalm, we do so from the perspective of the Father, "*My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. You are fairer than the sons of men.*" Through the Psalmist, the Father communicated that His heart was overflowing for Jesus and that He saw the supreme beauty of His Son as compared to all of humanity.

⁴ 1 Chronicles 16:28.

⁵ Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 3:17, 17:5.

In Luke 15, Jesus lays out three different parables that reveal and highlight God's joy and happiness in the context of His celebration over the lost coming back into His family. The story of the prodigal son is the third parable in the sequence, and it ends with the father gathering his household to feast and dance in celebration. God and the angels dance and rejoice in heaven when just one sinner repents because God is joyful and happy within Himself.

JOYFUL CREATOR

God's eternal joy was His motivation in creating the universe. Before Genesis 1:1, The Father, Son, and Spirit lived with divine pleasures surging through Their hearts. As three distinct Persons, They each experienced the fullness of joy within Themselves. In relationship, They lavished Their perfect love and joy on each other and fully received each other's love and enjoyment without any hindrances of shame, unworthiness, mistrust, rejection, accusation, or other broken filters. For billions of years, They lived in this perfect friendship of love and joy. Out of this infinite overflow, the Trinity created the universe.

Unlike what I had believed, God was not begrudgingly or hesitantly creating. With each creative word, there was a raging river of life and joy breaking out of His heart like water exploding out of a mighty dam. No selfish or needy motivation was in God's heart as He stood ready to speak out the words of life that would form the galaxies. There was simply an overflowing heart that was so extravagant and so filled with joy and pleasure that it had to create more things on which to lavish His love.

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.—Proverbs 8:30-31

The theme of the Trinity's love and joy for one another continued throughout the six days of creation and expanded to enjoying its fruit. Proverbs 8:30-31 gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus and the Father during those days. Jesus, as the master craftsman, architect, and skilled artisan, was beside the Father. As the Son, He knew the dreams and

plans of His Father and spoke them into existence each day. In this way, He built the universe with unimaginable precision and wisdom.

During the building process, the Father couldn't help but be distracted by delighting in Jesus. Each day that Jesus built something new, His Father overflowed with love and pleasure over His Son in the same way He had for billions of years. In this passage, Jesus is the one saying His Father delighted in Him daily, meaning He knew and celebrated His Father's display of affection. It's as if Jesus were saying, "Friends, I was daily His delight! Day after day My Father was lavishing Me with praises and singing and joyful affirmations!"

In the overflow of being enjoyed, Jesus rejoiced every day in front of His Father. Each day of creation involved Jesus rejoicing with supernatural joy next to the Father. This means Jesus was laughing, singing, and dancing out of excitement. He celebrated everything He made with the Father and rejoiced in its eternal purpose. The Spirit isn't mentioned here, but the picture is clear; the Trinity was infinitely excited and visibly rejoicing, because They were always filled with joy and They anticipated enjoying creation.

Jesus rejoiced in His Father's inhabited world, and His unique delight and pleasure were in the sons of men—His eternal bride. The God of infinite happiness and pleasure delighted in the creation of His bride and fellowship with her in the garden paradise. His infinite emotional capacity and happy personality lead me to believe that He exploded with longing and rejoicing as Adam's eyes first opened to see His face. I'm confident Adam was lavished on in the same way that Jesus was lavished on by His Father's joy and affection.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

In response to this chapter, continue to meditate on Genesis 2:7 with the perspective of God's happiness from Proverbs 8:30-31. All of us have wrong or limited perspectives regarding God's happiness and motives for creation, so let God wash your heart during your meditation times. Because we're broken and our parents and leaders have been broken and limited, though sincere, we have hurts and demonic (skeptical) perspectives concerning what God is really like as a father and husband. I believe God will speak and begin a healing journey for your heart to be able to see His heart and intentions more clearly.

8

ENJOYED BY GOD

ENJOYED AND PURSUED

We were created by God to be enjoyed. I believe it's a core spiritual need to know God enjoys us and that His joy for us isn't dependent on our accomplishments. Our primary calling is to be enjoyed by Him and to enjoy Him every day. We partner with Him to increase His kingdom, but our first calling is to be loved and enjoyed in an intimate relationship. In light of this revelation, I've started praying daily, "Lord, enjoy me and search me out today as I enjoy and search You out."

PSALM 149 - GOD TAKES PLEASURE IN US

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. For the Lord takes pleasure in His people. He will beautify the humble with salvation.—Psalm 149:2-4

In Psalm 149, the writer calls us to enjoy God and express it without any emotional or physical reservations. We are filled with joy and rejoice in song and dance because He takes pleasure in us. The experiential revelation that God is happy and enjoys our lives awakens love and rejoicing in us. This revelation of His happiness is one of the sources that fuels our worship.

Though God experiences the fullness of joy within Himself already, He feels specific pleasures because of our relationship with Him. There are emotions within God's extravagant heart that are attentive and responsive to our every movement. If He were an unemotional God who was disconnected from us, He wouldn't have pleasure in us. But He's a Father and Husband who is defined as Love (God is love), and His heart delights in our interactions with Him.

It is easy for many to believe that they are a bother to God or are annoying and too needy, but God chooses to engage with us because He wants to. Nobody is forcing Him to like or interact with us. It was His choice to create us, rescue us from sin, and marry us. The way He relates to us in joy is all based on His pleasure-filled personality.

JESUS SEARCHES AND PURSUES

Psalms 139 declares that God searches us out and surrounds us on every side. Have you ever wondered what exactly God is searching for in you at different moments of the day? He's God; shouldn't He have known everything about you before you were even born? There is a mysterious dimension to God's omniscience by which He can know all things and yet still be able to know us progressively and relationally.

Intimacy in God's kingdom comes through real, moment-by-moment interactions with God and Jesus delights in the search of love as He studies us and interacts with us at the heart level throughout each day. He engages with us in tangible experience and fellowship in the way a husband searches and pursues his wife.

When we said yes to salvation through Jesus Christ, we agreed to an eternal marriage covenant that permitted Him to inhabit the innermost places of our beings. We've laid down our rights to be our own and hold anything back from Him. In marriage, you give your spouse permission to go deep in you and become one. Jesus has the same license to live in us and enjoy us, and He considers His access holy.

Friend, Jesus is searching out your heart today, and He's not just looking for hidden sins. Those eyes are looking into your emotions and drinking your love. His heart is hearing and sensing every movement of love and desire in you and then responding to it.

Psalms 139 begs the question, "Why would God want to search me out, and why is He consumed with thoughts about me like the sands of the sea?" Of course, there is a mystery to search out within this answer, but the simple truth is that this is just what He's like, and this is just how precious we are to Him. He defines our worth because He sculpted

us into His image with His hands, and He gets to decide how much we move His heart with pleasure!

ENJOYING GOD'S PLEASURES

Does God want us to enjoy Him and experience pleasure in Him? The short answer is yes! There is a longing within God's heart for us to drink deeply of His pleasures and to be fully satisfied in Him. His will is for us to experience divine pleasure in our interactions with Him and for His pleasure to overflow into our lives.

John Piper says it this way, "God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him."¹ We glorify God by experiencing spiritual pleasures in Him and radiating joy and gratitude in His pleasure-filled personality. It's godlier to experience joy in God than not to. The heart that is satisfied in God and filled with pleasure is the heart that testifies of God's happy and extravagant personality.

DRINK OF HIS PLEASURES

And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely —Revelation 22:17

They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.—Psalm 36:8

Revelation 22 and Psalm 36 are both referring to the river of life that flows from God's throne and inviting believers to drink from it by communing with God. The river has its source in God's Being, therefore, it carries His life and His presence. Psalm 36 adds that it's "the river of Your pleasures," meaning that it carries the infinite and eternal pleasures of God within it. Those who drink of God's presence in prayer experience the supernatural pleasures of knowing Him.

God wholeheartedly invites you to drink of His presence and His pleasures. Like an extravagant Father, He wants you to be abundantly satisfied and overflowing in your

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 10.

relationship with Him. God isn't stingy or withholding anything of His presence; instead, He calls you to come as often as you'd like and drink as much as you'd like without any reservation or cost. The only requirement is that you're thirsty and have enough desire to go to the river. God has taken the initiative to call you to the life source, but are you thirsty enough to respond? Are you thirsty enough to change your lifestyle to spend more time drinking of God's presence and pleasures in prayer?

ABIDE IN GOD'S LOVE AND JOY

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.—John 15:5

In John 15, Jesus affirmed His desire for us to connect to the supernatural life that flows out of God. He encouraged His disciples to receive all that they could from God, otherwise, they could bear no fruit.

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.—John 15:9

After calling them to abide in the vine, Jesus explained that abiding is specifically about remaining in the supernatural experience of His love. Abiding in God's love is a supernatural lifestyle of discovering and experiencing God's unlimited affection for us. I say unlimited because Jesus loves us to the same infinite degree that the Father loves Him.

As in Revelation 22, God makes the invitation to live in His love and doesn't withhold anything. It's like He's saying, "Come in, come in! Drink of My love as often as you'd like, because you were designed to receive and give love with all of your being. I want to love on you and have your entire being overflowing with confidence in your worth and beauty to Me. I want you to live in the fellowship of the God who is love. If you knew the love and joy I experience with My Father, you would live the way that I live and bear the fruit that I bear!"

If God were stingy and not wanting us to live in His pleasures of intimacy, He would have said, "I love you, but I'm only going to show My love for you sometimes, because showing you too often would make you self-centered, wouldn't be practical, and would

distract you from the real work of the kingdom. Push through your life challenges by faith and perseverance alone and focus on impacting other people.”

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.—John 15:11

Then Jesus gave His companions even more clarity concerning His heart and motivations for calling them into abiding in His love. With His whole heart, He wanted them to live in His joy. And not just a little joy here and there, but the fullness of joy, and that it would remain in them through the Holy Spirit. God wants us to live in the experience of His love and the fullness of His joy, and for us to bear fruit in the overflow, all of which glorifies Him.²

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL PLEASURES

*That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
—Ephesians 3:17-19*

Paul experienced the truths of John 15 and prayed them over his churches. In Ephesians 3, he prayed that they would experience the vast expanse of Jesus’ love for them. He knew that if the churches were grounded in God’s love as an abiding experience it would transform their thoughts, emotions, desires, and choices. Paul lived in the love of God and knew that it was his only life source; therefore, he desired that the churches experience the same. As in John 15, we only bear fruit and glorify God if we live in the experience of His love, and we only achieve the fullness of our destinies if we experience His love.

² John 15:8.

ENJOYED IN THE PROCESS

It is essential to understand that God enjoys us during our growth process and that we're meant to experience His pleasure as we pursue victory over sins and lies. Because we are always in a process of growing, the wrong mindset that God can't enjoy us until we're victorious will hinder our experience of His love. If we feel enjoyed by God right now, it will give us the confidence to turn to Him for help instead of turning away from Him to clean ourselves up.

Experiencing His joy and free affection is what satisfies our longings so that we don't fall into sinful patterns. Because we're image-bearers, God designed in such a way that we only work right if our eternal longings are satisfied and fascinated in Him, and this only happens if we can freely receive from Him while getting victory over sin and brokenness. If we can't receive it right now, we are cutting off the very life source God has ordained to bring us into victory. His enjoyment opens the door for our hearts to receive God's pleasures and affections, and it breaks off ungodly striving, pride, and the orphan mentality that pursues freedom outside of the Father's power.

PROBING QUESTIONS

I ask people how much they genuinely believe (being honest with themselves) God enjoys them in this season of their life on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the fullness of enjoyment. The follow-up question is, why do they believe God enjoys them at that level? Depending on their answer, another question is, when will God fully enjoy them?

Usually, people say that God enjoys them somewhere between 1-5. Their reason is that they have specific struggles with sins or lies and aren't as spiritually disciplined as they think they should be. Then I ask them when they believe God will enjoy them at level 10. After thinking, people give me one of three replies. The first response is that God will fully enjoy them once they have overcome all their sin issues and have the spiritual disciplines down. The second group replies by saying God won't fully enjoy them until they're perfected in the resurrection. The third is that God won't fully enjoy them because they're human, and He isn't that joyful.

These reflective questions probe what we honestly think about God and how He relates to us right now. If you were totally honest and not just giving good Bible answers to what you should believe, how would you answer these questions? It's imperative to be

aware of how you would answer these questions because any false belief systems hinder you from receiving the experience of His delight over you. If you can be honest, you can identify and break agreement with lies and sow truth in your meditations.

REASONS GOD ENJOYS US

God can enjoy us in the growth process for at least four reasons. The first reason is that His heart is completely different from ours and overflows with happiness and love. Because of His infinite happiness, enjoying us in every season is an easy thing for Him. His heart is so complete and filled with delight that He even gets pleasure from forgiving and extending mercy!³

The second reason is that God has transformed us by the blood of Jesus. Through the blood, we have been given full access to God's presence, and He relates to us as though we had never sinned, "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"⁴ Jesus' blood completely removed the relational barrier of sin in our lives.

The third reason God can enjoy us is because we're fearfully and wonderfully made in His image. God made us beautiful and enjoyable from the beginning, and Jesus' blood has fully restored that image and position with God for those that love Him. We have to trust the design and value God has given us as restored human beings and not discount what He has made. If we aren't agreeing with our created value and beauty before God, we're pridefully saying we disagree with God about the most important thing He has ever made, which is the image-bearer. To refuse or cautiously receive His enjoyment and extravagant affection is to say that how God made us was wrong and that the value He puts on our lives is wrong.

The last reason God can enjoy us is because of His perspective. He sees us through the cleansing blood of Jesus, and He sees the fullness of our love and obedience, not just the sins we struggle with. Our perspective is skewed and limited, but His is perfect. He can see every movement of love and sin in us, and He knows how to hold them in perfect proportion to one another.

We are mostly aware of our lusts and sins, but God sees and counts our sincere desires to obey Him, and He relates to us according to our pursuits. He calls the small but growing godly desires real even before they begin to blossom. Then, like seeds in the ground, He

³ Micah 7:18.

⁴ Romans 5:1.

prophesies them over us by affirming, celebrating, and calling them forth.⁵ We see our stumbling in areas, but He sees a sincere reach to love Him, and He affirms us in those areas until we get the victory.

One gaze from our heart and one movement to love and obey Him is seen and greatly valued by Him. But, unfortunately, we're hardly aware of our small movements of love for Him. We rightly focus on how our sins bring relational pain to God's heart, but we must also cultivate an awareness of our love and obedience to God and celebrate it in the same way that He does. It is hard for us to celebrate the love and godliness that we do see in our lives, but we have to because God does.

I believe a big part of why we aren't as aware of the level of genuine love for God in our hearts as we are of our sin issues is because of our lack of understanding of God's joy and gentleness. We don't see the entirety of our hearts because of a lack of revelation. A wrong perception of God's heart causes us to overestimate our sin and lack of devotion compared to our love and obedience.

HOW DOES SIN IMPACT GOD'S ENJOYMENT?

When we sin, how is God affected, and how does it impact how He feels about us? Our decisions to sin do affect God because He's a person and the relational dynamics are real. But He is not like a human with swaying emotions, and His enjoyment doesn't diminish toward us once we have sinned. God can enjoy us in the overall sense while still being pained at the moment by a sinful choice in the same way that a parent can be pained over a child's disobedience but still enjoy them.

In our brokenness, we waiver in loving and enjoying others when there is sin, but God is consistent in His love and can maintain that heart flow even while addressing our sin. When we sin, God is relationally grieved because He enjoys deep friendship and agreement with us. When we break that fellowship in a sinful moment, our present-tense connection with Him is hindered and He is grieved. Confessing our sin to God heals the momentary disruption of fellowship.⁶

⁵ Romans 4:17.

⁶ 1 John 1:9.

REPENTANT VS. PERSISTENT

There is still an enormous difference between a believer who stumbles into sin and hates it and a believer who willfully persists in sin. The one who struggles in a sinful pattern calls it sin, repents of it, and sets their heart to obey God in that area. God thoroughly enjoys that person because they sincerely love Him.

The believer who willfully sins is not repenting. They want to live in sin, and they are choosing to let it disrupt their fellowship with God. This approach pains the Lord's heart. He is so patient and so gracious, but at some point, that person is not enjoyed by God anymore. God still loves that person, but the severe disagreement doesn't make friendship possible. Instead, God pursues them and calls them to turn from their sin so that their fellowship can be restored.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.—Revelation 3:19-20

Jesus came to the church of Laodicea, whose love for God was waning, with one message, to turn back to loving God with all your heart. The jealous heart of the Lover comes out in this rebuke. His pursuit and rebuke were motivated out of love and longing to have deep fellowship with them. Jesus knocked on the door of their compromising heart and invited it to open up to Him in obedience and friendship.

If you are not in agreement with God in any area of your life, decide right now to turn from it, receive forgiveness, and come into an enjoyable relationship with God. He's been knocking on your heart, asking you to turn from your sin and toward Him wholeheartedly.

If you sincerely love God and want to obey Him but feel guilt or shame from things that you have already repented of, bring them to God again and ask Him to wash you with the experience of forgiveness. Declare the truth that you are forgiven. Then, pray about confessing those areas to a trusted friend and have them speak forgiveness over you. King David freely received the happiness of being freely forgiven, "*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven.*"⁷ Set your heart to receive the happiness of forgiveness by meditating

⁷ Romans 4:7-8.

on the truth that you're freely forgiven and enjoyed by God until it begins to heal your thinking.

■ FIVE ACCUSATIONS

I've observed five accusations that hinder people from experiencing God's pleasure over their lives. These accusations act as closed doors that block the river of the Holy Spirit from going deeper into us as an experience. As we address each wrong mindset, our minds and hearts open their doors and allow an experience with God to happen. As you read each accusation, take a few minutes to respond to God in the ones that you know you have believed. As an initial response, repent out loud for agreeing with the accusations and slowly confess the truth. If you realize an accusation is a significant hindrance, consider meditating on the truth in your prayer times and bringing it up to your Discipleship Mentor.

#1 ACCUSATION

God isn't joyful and filled with pleasure, so why would I even pursue experiencing Him in that way?

Biblical response: God is eternally and infinitely happy and filled with pleasure. He is the most joy-filled Being in the universe, and all things receive their life from the life that surges in Him.

#2 ACCUSATION

God doesn't want me to be filled with joy and pleasure.

Biblical Response: God is the perfect Father and Bridegroom who wants to lavish you with happiness. His heart is to fully satisfy the longings He's given you. He's overflowing with happiness, and He's longing and inviting you to just come to Him and drink. "*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your*

wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.”⁸

God wants to delight you with the abundance of pleasure, and He wants to challenge us to choose to “let our souls delight in abundance” instead of resisting pleasures!

#3 ACCUSATION

I don't feel fully forgiven of all my sins, so God isn't completely happy with me. It would be unjust for me to receive freely from Him right now.

Biblical Response: You were fully forgiven of your sins the day you made a covenant with Jesus and were washed by His blood. Any recent sins are fully forgiven and are not hindrances once you have confessed them and repented to God. He delights in mercy, and He delights in forgiveness. He loves to lavish you with extravagant joy in your weakness and in the maturing process. God thoroughly enjoys you right now if you have a sincere heart to grow in righteousness in the areas He shows you. Receive the happiness of forgiveness and magnify His mercy.

#4 ACCUSATION

Even if God is joyful and filled with pleasure, I'm a weak and broken human being, and I couldn't possibly deserve God's extravagant enjoyment. Isn't it prideful to say that God could enjoy me wholeheartedly?

Biblical Response: It is false humility and pride to resist His pleasure over you because you feel unworthy. By resisting His pleasure, you're telling Him that His blood wasn't good enough to reconcile you to Himself fully. It is humility to receive something you haven't earned freely. God is glorified when you are humbled and receive His mercy, grace, and extravagant pleasure. But, by resisting His full pleasure over your life, you are also telling Him that He can't enjoy the image-bearer that He dreamed up and formed.

⁸ Isaiah 55:1-2.

#5 ACCUSATION:

Even if God does want me to experience joy and pleasure, I can't have too much joy because I feel the need to mourn my brokenness and the brokenness of the world around me. Overflowing with His joy doesn't seem fair because the rest of the world isn't experiencing that joy.

Biblical Response: There is a place for mourning sin and having compassion on the world, and it's holy to be broken in intercession. God is aware of our brokenness and the world's needs, and He feels it, but at the same time He experiences pleasure and joy. Therefore, we can give way to the Holy Spirit's leading in times of mourning and weeping in intercession and give way to God's happiness at all other times.

In John 15, Jesus said that He wanted joyful intercessors and joyful evangelists who showed the world another life source. The broken world needs to see God's happiness in the church to know there is an answer to their problems.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week, meditate on Psalm 149:4 at least one time this week. Also, pray about the three probing questions and discuss your answers with your Discipleship Mentor. Honestly answer what you believe deep down instead of answering with what you should believe. As you answer each of these, confess lies you believe about you and God, and agree with the truth out loud. Write down any questions you still have regarding if you can be fully enjoyed by God.

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the fullness of His enjoyment, how much do you honestly believe and feel God enjoys you today?

Why do you believe He enjoys you to that level?

When will God be able to fully enjoy you?

Take your time with this because it is as foundational to intimacy with God as freely receiving His longing for you.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 2: FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD – CHAPTERS 7 & 8

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss God's happiness and pleasure over your life and pray through hindrances to these truths.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Chapter 7 – Discuss highlights from the chapter and discuss your Genesis 2:7/ Proverbs 8:30-31 meditation assignment. Did the meditation time impact your heart in any specific ways? Do you have a view of God as being infinitely happy?
- b. Chapter 8 – Discuss highlights from the chapter, your Psalm 149:4 meditation assignment, and the three probing questions assignment.
- c. Based on the three probing questions assignment, pray through any lies that come up regarding shame or feeling unworthy of God's full enjoyment by confessing the specific lies you're aware of, agreeing with the truth out loud, and asking God to touch you with truth in your meeting.

2. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule or Spiritual Pursuits? How are your Bible reading, meditation, and prayer list times going? How is God touching you in each of them?

3. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Share how your heart issue has been going this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.

4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together. This is not necessary if you are having a group gathering to introduce the next module topic.

MEETING NOTES:

MODULE 3

MEDITATION

MODULE INTRODUCTION

Hopefully, after spending more time with God the past few weeks and reading about His longing to encounter your heart, you feel a greater desire to know Him. If so, these next chapters on Bible meditation will be really good for you because slow and deep conversation with God is the primary way we all grow in friendship with God. Meditation is the practical response to the vision of intimacy you read about in the last module.

Meditation is core to experiencing God and necessary for every believer to enter into, and it's not limited to any personality type. Meditation will set your heart in a posture of deep connection with God. That connection will help you flow more naturally in the other prayer expressions laid out in this book. It is fair to say that all the other prayer expressions build upon how your heart learns to interact with God in meditation. This is the longest module of the program because of this foundational truth.

The purpose of the first chapter is to give you vision and faith to go deep in meditation until you encounter God more deeply. The following chapters are focused on providing detailed practical instruction on how to engage God at the heart level in meditation. As you step into this topic, I encourage you to open your heart to the idea of meeting God in meditation and trying each practical suggestion for a while without giving up.

The meditation assignments include weekly meditation times and processing reflection questions related to hearing God's voice in meditation. These assignments are set up to help you process the topic of meditation, get a rhythm in meditating weekly on your specific Bible verse, and study God's interactions with you in meditation. If you take the time to meditate and reflect on your times with Him, you will become more sensitive to God's movements in meditation and grow in your journey by learning how He interacts with you.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

MODULE 3 - MEDITATION

Schedule a 2-4 hour group meditation day at the end of week twelve in place of the monthly group gathering. Gather in a prayer room together, meditate on your individual verses, and debrief together at the end of the meditation time.

Week Nine Assignments:

- Read Chapter 9 – “***Biblical Meditation.***” Journal thoughts and questions about the three specific sections in the chapter: *Meditation Defined, Learn God’s Interactions, and Heart Posture - Proverbs 2.*
- Pick one Bible verse or short Gospel story to meditate on for the entire module.
- Fill out a new *Spiritual Pursuits Document* for this module. The pursuits can stay the same or change but filling out the form monthly helps you refocus and develop a rhythm of intentionality.

Week Ten Assignments:

- Read Chapter 10 – “***Five Ways to Interact with God.***” Journal your thoughts and questions, including which of the five is the most natural for you and which is the most difficult.
- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse
- Incorporate each of the five meditation expressions in your meditation times throughout the module.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

Week Eleven Assignments:

- Read Chapter 11 – “***Ten Practical Tips in Meditation Part One.***” Journal thoughts and questions about the practical tips.
- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.

Week Twelve Assignments:

- Read Chapter 12 – “***Ten Practical Tips in Meditation Part Two.***” Journal thoughts and questions about the practical tips.
- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.

GOING DEEPER

- Participate in the 2–4-hour group meditation day.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

Week Thirteen Assignments:

- Read Chapter 13 – “*Seven Heart Progressions.*” Journal thoughts and questions, including answers to which stages have you experienced since the beginning of this module, which stage do you have the most questions on, and which stage are you looking forward to?
- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.
- After one of your meditation times this week, fill out a *Meditation Observation Document*.

Week Fourteen Assignments:

- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.
- After one of your meditation times, fill out a *Meditation Observation Document*.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

Week Fifteen Assignments:

- Read Chapter 14 – “*Quieting the Mind.*” Journal your thoughts and questions including answers to: do you struggle with quieting your mind in prayer and why, and are there lifestyle changes to make to have a quieter mind?
- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.
- After one of your meditation times, fill out a *Meditation Observation Document*.

Week Sixteen Assignments:

- Continue meditating on your selected Bible verse.
- After one of your meditation times, fill out a *Meditation Observation Document*.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

6. **Weekly Prayer Schedule**—Write down your plan for the *specific times* you are committed to spending with God each day, and *what specifically you plan to do during those times*. Include what your study or meditation focus will be. Refer to the example schedule in Chapter Two. (e.g., Monday 6-6:30 am—Tongues, 6:30-7:30 am—Meditation on Song of Solomon 1:2)

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

9

BIBLICAL MEDITATION

■ THE BLESSING OF MEDITATION

In Psalm 1, David laid out a glorious promise for those who engage God in deep heart meditation. Through personal experience, he affirmed that every person that delights in and meditates on God's Word will have a heart flowing with life. They will be like a tree planted by a river that brings life to it in every season.

We find our deep connection to God through meditation. As a result, we experience His life in our hearts like the tree's roots going deep to draw water from the soil by the river. Meditation is where we feast on the Lord and receive nourishment for our souls. In comparison to eating natural things, spiritual food is put on the table as we read the Bible, engage in worship, listen to Bible teachings, or have edifying conversations. But we eat, chew, digest, and absorb the life of those spiritual foods through meditation.

These spiritual things can stir and inspire us, but the God-given way to partake of the deeper life is to slowly speak and sing His Words back to Him in deep heart communion. Unfortunately, many believers are frustrated at their lack of experiencing God and transformation. This lack is probably due to their neglect of intimate meditation on the Word. They might know how to be inspired in spiritual things, but they haven't taken the time to eat His Word and digest it unto an authentic heart experience and transformation.

Like David, God promised Joshua that he would act wisely and prosper in leading Israel into their land if he meditated day and night.¹ I believe God encouraged Joshua to continue in the meditation lifestyle he had seen and cultivated under Moses' leadership.² King David and Joshua were both national leaders with lots of responsibilities; however, God rooted both of them in meditation so they would flow in supernatural life and blessing and prioritize friendship with Him.

The last Biblical promise is intimacy with God in meditation. Psalm 119 embodies the promise and displays where God can take the human heart in receiving love and spiritual pleasures. There are three themes in Psalm 119. The first is rejoicing in and loving God's Word.³ The Psalmist rejoiced in God's Word as in riches, had a value for revelation in God's Word, and experienced joy in encountering God in His Word.

The second theme is experiencing the delight and pleasure of God in His Word. The Psalmist oriented his life around the highest joy of experiencing God through His Word, the chief pleasure available to the human heart.

The third theme is the cry for God's revelation through His Word. The Psalmist repeatedly asked for understanding, eyes to be opened, and the Word to teach him about God.⁴ The primary entry point into the revelation of God is the Word ignited by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need Him to give us understanding.

MEDITATION DEFINED

In my past, meditation only meant focusing my mind on Bible verses while being in solitude, silence, and stillness. While I still believe in silence and stillness, I've broadened my understanding of how to meditate and become more specific in its purpose. *My working definition of meditation is that it's a focused and persistent searching of an area of God's Personality through deep conversation over His Word.*

In meditation, we search out one area of God's heart at a time by praying through single words until the Spirit brings us into an experience in the truth. It is focused and persistent in the sense that we focus on one idea about God, one word in a verse, and

¹ Joshua 1:8.

² Exodus 33:11.

³ Psalm 119:14, 47-48, 54, 72, 97, 103, 111, 119, 127, 129, 140, 159, 161-163, 165, 167.

⁴ Psalm 119:12, 18-20, 26-29, 33-34, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 124-125, 130, 133, 135, 144, 169, 171, 175.

we dialogue with Him long-term until we experience Him. For example, we take a Bible verse, and we lock into it for weeks or months, and say, “God, I want to explore this area of Your personality. I want to discover it. I want to be on a treasure hunt with this one thing specifically, and I’m not going to stop until I meet You in powerful ways.”

Meditation is about exploring, experiencing, and enjoying God in His Word. It is way more than just a spiritual discipline; it’s about going on a fascinating exploration of His heart. We meditate to explore an aspect of God in a precise and focused way. His personality is a vast ocean of beauty and love that we will search out for billions of years. Through meditation, we enter into a slow exploration of that endless beauty.

Our purpose for existing is to discover God’s Personality so that we can know Him. We step into that eternal calling now by giving ourselves to exploring Him in meditation. This process leads us to experience Him as a real Person when the truth becomes a discernible experience. Experiencing Him is enjoyable because it satisfies the God-given longing to know Him as a Person.

If our eternal purpose is to explore, experience, and enjoy God, why not begin that journey right now? Why wait until eternity to go deep into God’s heart? If meditation is the primary way to enter into that eternal calling, why not go deep in it now?

God has designed us in such a way that we only work right if we first meet Him intimately and then overflow from that place to impact others. He is to be known and enjoyed before He is to be partnered with in ministry. God is a jealous Husband who wants all of our hearts in a deep and enjoyable relationship with Him. He wants to impact others with us, but not at the expense of our relationship with Him, and not if our relationship with Him is mostly based on doing ministry with Him.

DOOR INTO GOD’S HEART

When talking about meditation, we must be clear that the source of our meditation is God’s Word. In His Word, God has communicated the depths of His heart to us. It is a supernatural door into His eternal heart.

Why is His Word so significant? Words have the unique ability to communicate the invisible interior life of a person. Our deepest thoughts, emotions, desires, and plans are mostly expressed through our words to others. In the same way, God’s Word has communicated

the fullest expression of His heart to us so that we can understand the invisible workings of His heart.

The Bible isn't just a boring storyline. In it, we see how God has interacted with people, and we can understand what He's like and How He relates to us. In the testimonies of the Bible, we hear literal conversations God had with people, and we hear His plans and desires for us. The Bible is filled with revelation about His heart!

LEARN GOD'S INTERACTIONS

Meditation is a lifelong journey in understanding how God interacts with you in the Word. It's more than learning practical techniques to get insight into Bible verses—it's learning how to posture yourself before God to understand how He interacts in real space and time. He's an actual Person with a personality and unique ways of relating and interacting, and we have to set our hearts for a life-long journey of learning Him in meditation.

Interacting with God in meditation is a spiritual skill that needs to be cultivated with great care. A long-term perspective is necessary because it causes us to pay closer attention to how God interacts with us, which causes our spiritual senses to be more sensitive. Cultivating the spiritual skill also increases our awareness that we're talking to a legitimate person who is really thinking, feeling, and communicating with us right then.

This active learning process makes me ask God questions to understand and sense Him more. I'm asking Him, "How do I relate to You in meditation? What are You doing right now in my heart? What am I sensing? How are You speaking to me? How do I respond to You right now? Teach me how You move and how You ebb and flow in my conversations with You."

TWO LEVELS OF REVELATION

It is helpful to understand that there are two levels of revelation in meditation. Revelation begins in the thought realm and grows into revelation in the emotional realm. Distinguishing them can help identify where you are in the progression of revelation and develop a Biblical expectation of what you can receive from God in meditation.

Revelation in the thought realm is the first phase of an encounter. It comes in the form of divine ideas, thoughts, questions, and clarity concerning phrases in a Bible verse. These thoughts are probably from God and captivate our attention for a few minutes and create a hunger for more.

If given time, revelation in the thought realm will develop into revelation in the emotional realm. In these moments, God is experienced intimately by many of our spiritual senses. In these moments, He takes an idea and makes it an experiential reality that becomes real inside us and allows us to feel Him as a person.

God wants to encounter us in our emotions. We will step into emotional encounters more often if we're patient and have a higher vision than thought realm revelation. I consistently see people stop meditating once they experience inspired thoughts, but they are frustrated that their experience and transformation aren't deeper. Most likely, their vision for revelation is too low; therefore, their pursuit of more of God at the moment gets cut short.

HEART POSTURE – PROVERBS 2

PROVERBS 2:5 – THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Proverbs 2:1-5 summarizes what the heart posture and pursuit of the knowledge of God look like in meditation. Verse five is the goal of the pursuit that is listed out in verses one through four. In verse five, we are promised an encounter with God if we walk out the heart posture and pursuit listed in these verses. Be encouraged; God has given us a roadmap to follow.

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.
—Proverbs 2:1-5

PROVERBS 2:4 – HIDDEN TREASURE

In verse four, the heart requirement is laid out—the person seeking depth must value encountering God as a precious treasure. As a result, they must have a hunger in their heart that causes them to change their lifestyle to seek God. Without understanding that God is a precious treasure within reach, we won't have the hunger necessary to pursue Him in meditation. Hunger ushers us into encounters with God, and it's fueled by a vision for more satisfaction in Him.

How much time, effort, and emotion would you give to finding a treasure chest in your backyard if you knew there were a million dollars in it? If you had any sense in you, you would drop everything right now and go home to begin your search. You would pay and do anything necessary to find that treasure chest because you would know that when you find it, life would be different. The vision for the treasure motivates you to push through the obstacles and delays until you find it. Likewise, God is a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered through the process of meditation. He hides Himself to be found by us, but there is a discovering process that we must press through.

Some people meditate for a few minutes here and there and don't experience God, but they lack the revelation that they are to search out God as if He were a precious treasure in their backyard. Their mentality says, "It didn't work for me, so I'm moving on." No! There are a million dollars in your backyard. Just stay with it, and you'll find the treasure.

PROVERBS 2:2 – SPIRITUAL HEARING

Verse two calls us to incline our hearts, which is a posture of listening to God in meditation. The inclining heart says, "Holy Spirit, I want to hear Your voice as I read these words. I want to hear Your voice speaking to me as I meditate on this phrase." So, it's a spiritual ear that we're inclining, and we're saying, "God, the Word is right there, but I want the Holy Spirit to open my ears to hear Your voice in this passage."

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.—Hebrews 5:13-14

In the process, God is training us to hear Him and respond to Him. In the stillness and invisible dialogue, He's tuning our ears to His frequency. As you incline your spiritual ears intentionally during your meditation times, you end up inclining your ears more naturally throughout the day. This inclining posture strengthens your spiritual discernment. Hebrews talks about having your spiritual senses exercised through interacting with God, and it's specifically talking about hearing and sensing Him in the Bible.

If anyone has ears to hear let him hear.—Mark 4:23

And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.—Mark 4:33

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
—Revelation 2:7*

In Mark 4, Jesus highlighted the fact that hearing Him in His Word is supernatural, and then He called us to cultivate spiritual ears that hear the Spirit of God.⁵ Later in the chapter, it says that He could discern when the people could not hear Him. This means that Jesus knew when their spiritual hearing was done and that His words would be wasted. At the heart of Jesus' message to hear the Spirit, He's saying, “Pay close attention to what I'm saying. Give time and energy to searching out My word while asking the Spirit for revelation. As you search out My words in meditation, expect layers of meaning and encounter to unfold.”

The author of Hebrews also referenced spiritual hearing in that he could not teach in-depth on specific topics because he knew the listeners were spiritually “dull of hearing.”⁶ Meditation is a focused pursuit of truth until it becomes alive on the inside of us. Therefore, meditation is the practical response to Jesus' exhortation to break out of dull hearing.

⁵ Mark 4:23.

⁶ Hebrews 5:11.

PROVERBS 2:3 – HUNGRY PRAYERS

Verse three tells us that meditation includes hungry prayers for understanding and experience with God. Once you meditate on something long enough, a deeper cry for the experience of that verse gets awakened. Often, I will be meditating on something on a specific day, and then I'll get a little stirred to encounter that truth, so I'll spend a while pacing and saying, "God, I want to feel this. I want to experience it. Let my heart burn with this." So there's an intercessory thing that can happen. An element of meditation that we need to understand is that we will see the truth, and we might be inspired by it a little bit, but there will be a journey to enter into a powerful experience with that truth. We meditate, set our minds, and sing, but there's also a place for asking God, "I want to feel this verse. Holy Spirit, write it on the inside of me!"

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

For your assignment this week, choose which Bible verse or short Gospel story you would like to meditate on for this entire module. You could continue meditating on your verse from the previous modules or choose a new one that speaks into your heart issue. During each meditation time, include writing your thoughts, questions, and prayers to God so that you can discuss your meditation experiences in-depth during your Discipleship meetings. Also, journal your thoughts and questions on three sections of this chapter: *Meditation Defined*, *Learn God's Interactions*, and *Heart Posture - Proverbs 2*.

10

FIVE WAYS TO INTERACT WITH GOD

■ INTRODUCTION

Most of the main meditation expressions included in this chapter are based on a well-known meditation model taught by Kirk Bennett, a leader at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. His training manual, *Revelation by Meditation*, launched me into meditation. The meditation expressions Kirk teaches are reading, writing, praying, singing, and speaking. I have modified it a little bit for this chapter: picture, read, write, pray, sing. Each of these engages something unique in us that helps maintain conversation with God and open our deep places to God. Incorporating these expressions helps take the truth deeper because we were made to meditate and learn by engaging multiple faculties of our minds, hearts, and bodies.

I usually start my meditation time by going in the order listed in the next section, but then I flow between them without a specific order until I move on to a new phrase in a Bible verse. Below, I've written out what I do in my meditation times and why I do it this way to clearly communicate learned values and give practical examples. But don't feel restricted to a specific order. Instead, use the example order as a template for your initial journey into deep meditation, and then see how your heart flows in the expressions after a few months of going deeper. In saying this, approach this chapter as a student by trying all the meditation expressions for months before minimizing or ruling any of them out.

PICTURE GOD

In all my prayer and worship expressions, I always close my eyes and picture the descriptions of Revelation 4:2-3, God on His throne in all His colors. This is a helpful way to engage with Him as a person and stay focused, especially in meditation times. Colossians 3:1-3 says to set our minds (imagination) on things above where Jesus is seated and where we are seated spiritually.¹ Doing this isn't just using our imaginations for fun or to help us concentrate. Setting our minds on the images God has given us brings us into the spiritual reality of where we live with Jesus in the throne room. It's a real place in heaven, and we have literal access there by the blood of Jesus.²

Picturing God is so critical to prayer that it is one of the modules in this program, so I encourage you to look at Revelation 4:2-3 and begin to picture God in your times with Him. When you speak or sing to Him, it will make the conversation more intimate and real. Imagining takes a little more focus and energy, but it will become natural over time, and it's worth it!

READ

Start by reading your meditation verse. Read through it slowly several times so that you get an initial feel for what it may be saying. During this time, the Holy Spirit will cause one word to stick out to you by drawing your attention to it on the page or by stirring your interest in the word. You don't have to over-analyze if God is highlighting it to you to meditate on it, but often there is some impression-level leading from the Spirit. If you're unsure if He's highlighting a word, just start meditating on the first word in the verse and meditate through the verse sequentially.

WRITE

Slowly write down the entire verse on a notepad as many times as is helpful to engage your heart. Next, write down the first phrase you want to meditate on, and write it as many times as you want. As you do this, questions and thoughts might come to mind, so

¹ Ephesians 2:6-7.

² Hebrews 10:19.

take your time and write those down. Then I have a conversation with God by praying and singing my thoughts to Him. I write down new thoughts that come during that conversation, or I re-write my thoughts repeatedly. At different times in my meditation time, I go back over things I've written, and I engage with the words by circling and underlining things that seem inspired, and then I write more notes in the margins.

ENGAGING THE MIND

Writing is a powerful and practical way of engaging God. In my experience, writing is the most necessary meditation expression in getting clarity and staying engaged at the heart level. Practically speaking, writing helps keep you focused and process what you are thinking. Thoughts float around in our minds and tend to be unclear until we have to articulate them on paper or speak them aloud. I often think I have clarity on something until I'm forced to write it down. At which point, I realize I don't have clarity and respond by meditating more and processing my thoughts.

Clear thoughts lead to deeper encounters, so they're worth fighting for. When we wrestle to get clarity on a truth and come away with detailed sentences, something clicks in the mind and heart. After writing clear statements, there is usually a flow of thought that follows and an increase of God's presence.

Writing forces our minds to engage in a deeper level of learning and exploration. It engages new sections of our minds, connecting them together neurologically in the process. Also, writing involves more functions of our hands and body, all of which increase the focus and engagement of our minds and hearts. This has been proven to impact memory and other brain functions related to learning, which I believe has the potential to practically help with renewing the mind in truth.

There is something transformative about slowly forming letters on a page to articulate an idea that makes it seem tangible and real. When I write, I feel the truth solidify in my thoughts and emotions. It's like my eyes and my heart see the words being written down letter by letter, and at the same time, my heart begins to accept the idea as truth. At this point, I feel the letters begin to be written on my heart.

STEWARDED REVELATION

Another benefit is that writing helps capture and steward key questions or revelations that you may forget. In my meditation notepad, I go back to circled and underlined

sections and pray them back to the Lord several times. Years later, I still have meditation times when I go back to pray ideas that seemed inspired and anointed when I first meditated on them.

PRAY

Slowly speak thoughts, questions, and truths back to God with repetition. Start by speaking the actual Bible verse to the Lord repeatedly in a way that connects you to Him. Picture Him in your imagination and speak to Him as a real person. As you pray out loud, you may find that clarity and more language come to your heart about the verse. Write those thoughts down and pray them again. At times, review your journal and pray out phrases and questions you've written down that move your heart or seem significant.

Speaking to God out loud will help connect your heart to Him, even if it's just a whisper. It's not enough to just think thoughts to God; the greater power is in speaking them. God has designed our tongues to be the steering wheel of our entire being, so whatever we speak out loud gives leadership to the rest of our being.³ Praying out loud brings focus and causes our attention to be given to what we're saying to God. Praying out the truth is a form of spiritual agreement with God, and therefore changes the spiritual atmosphere around us and transforms our thinking and feeling.⁴

WAYS TO PRAY IN MEDITATION

1. Speak the verse's exact words to Him and any thoughts about the verse. Based on what you have written down, speak anointed truths to Him. Thank Him and praise Him for the truths.
2. Make the truth personal and speak it to Him, "Father, I am the one that You love. You love me in the same way that You love Jesus. I am loved by You." Then take the truth and speak it over yourself from God's perspective. "Jeff, I love you with the same intensity that I love My Son, Jesus. You are loved, Jeff. You are enjoyed by Me. I'm thinking of you throughout the day, Jeff."

³ James 3:1-12.

⁴ Romans 10:8-10.

3. Pray out your questions about the truth of the verse for a while. I take 10- 15 minutes just asking God one question while walking and communing with God by praying in tongues.
4. Ask for experiential knowledge of the verse. I often pray, “God, I see the truth of the verse, but I don’t feel it, and my heart isn’t moving yet. Help me to experience it on the inside. Give me experiential knowledge of this truth.” I do this intermittently in my meditation times, but I also spend extended amounts of focused time doing this.
5. Pray and sing in tongues at different times and engage your mind in conversation with God about the verse. Engage your mind with a question or truth while you commune spirit to Spirit with God.⁵ Engaging your spirit will make you more sensitive to His voice and more receptive to the truth.
6. Once you feel a level of clarity and internal focus, silently commune with God with the verse’s truth. Communing prayer is simply being with God while focusing on the verse in your heart. Picture God in your imagination and bring one phrase or truth to mind as you gaze on Him.
7. Respond to anything you sense God speaking to you in the verse. If He’s bringing conviction of sin, take time to confess your sin and repent and receive His forgiveness. If you feel negative emotions or unbelief in your heart because of the verse, be honest and talk to the Lord about them so that He can speak the truth into them. Or maybe you need to speak the truth into a situation in your life and resolve in your heart to choose the truth daily in that specific situation.

SING

The singing expression of meditation is simple and very enjoyable. Singing is naturally engaging, intimate, and worshipful. Because of these, it can easily flow from our hearts. This creates new opportunities within meditation because it’s so easy and enjoyable to sing something out repeatedly.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:14-15.

Our prayer room always has worship playing, so it's a very natural environment to sing prayers back to God. But if I'm at home, I turn on worship instrumental music with no words, turn on regular worship songs, or just play my guitar so I have something to sing with during meditation. If you play an instrument even a little bit, play a couple of simple chords and sing your meditations. If you're more experienced in music, put your meditations together into a simple song and let it become one of the songs you sing over your heart.

I believe singing allows the deep places of our hearts to be expressed and unguarded and therefore opens up our deep places to have His words dwell in us and transform us.⁶ I say this from experience and because music and singing are such a significant theme in the Bible, which I believe shows us that they are a core part of our human makeup and God's divine makeup. Music moves us because God made us musical; therefore, something in us comes alive when we sing to Him. It's the language of our hearts.

Heaven is filled with worship and singing, and we're exhorted to worship and sing on the earth.⁷ I've also read several testimonies of people who have seen heaven and said that music and singing are a part of the fabric of heaven. This worship reality in heaven reflects God's value for singing. Even God sings and makes melodies.⁸

Singing is intimate, enjoyable, and vulnerable, so some people have a hard time singing to God in worship or meditation. I've noticed that speaking the truth to God can be easier than singing the truth. There have been times in my past where I could agree with a truth in the Bible by speaking it out, but then when I would try to sing it out, I wouldn't be able to do it because I couldn't believe it. In those moments of trying to sing, my conviction of what I believed to be true was revealed because singing opens our hearts.

When I feel restricted in singing the truth, I dialogue with God about why I'm not grabbing the truth more freely. When I have clear thoughts of what is in my heart, I repent for believing specific lies or holding onto anger and offense, and then I speak the truth out loud again and begin to sing. I may not be able to grab onto the truth with all my heart in the initial times of singing, but my heart always gets more tender to the truth and grabs on in due time.

⁶ Colossians 3:16.

⁷ Revelation 4:7-11, 5:8-13; Psalm 96:1-13, 119:54; Isaiah 54:1.

⁸ Zephaniah 3:17; Revelation 4:5; Psalm 42:8, 32:7.

FIVE WAYS TO INTERACT WITH GOD

One specific example of this was when I was meditating on Song of Songs 1:15. For months, I had felt oppressed with feelings of self-hatred, loneliness, comparing myself to others, and the fear of never getting married. I meditated on this verse every day for a month but couldn't do the singing part of meditation until one week in because my heart was so bound up in lies. I couldn't bring myself to sing it out loud. I identified the main lies and areas of offense towards God in those moments and spoke them out to Him, at times, with tears of desperation.

As I meditated on the truth, it slowly began to fill my heart with faith to grab onto it. When I started to sing it out loud with more confidence, my deliverance began to manifest. I sang short statements like, "Behold, Jeff, you are beautiful to Me. Look at how I've made you. You are the one that I love with all My heart. God, I'm beautifully and wonderfully made in every way. I am the one You love. I say no to self-hatred and loneliness because they're lies."

I felt the deep places of my heart breaking agreement with the lies as I sang, and I felt the deep places receiving the truths I was singing. There were many tears in those moments and noticeable shifts in my emotions of feeling peace, joy, and hope because I truly felt beautiful and enjoyed by God. I not only received discernible deliverance from the demonic oppression in that month; something significant was established in my heart to the point that it launched me into a new spiritual season of confidence before God and people.

Singing truths to God seems to be the one expression that people most often dismiss or minimize. I've seen many of those people give singing a chance at some point and be convinced of its place in meditation. I've also seen many others never try singing meditations, probably because they feel the intimacy and vulnerability of singing to God and pull back in fear. Whether you think you sound good or not or are used to singing in meditation or not, I encourage you to jump right in to singing the scriptures to God and watch Him move on your heart. If you feel the uncomfortable openness and vulnerability of singing, stay with the meditation and bring your struggle to the Lord. He has met me there, and I am confident He will meet you there. Singing is for you, and it will be intimate and fruitful over time, so don't give up on it.

WAYS TO SING IN MEDITATION

1. Sing the same things to God that you would normally speak to Him. Go back and forth between singing and speaking out your thoughts, questions, and declarations in the same way that you would flow between speaking and singing in tongues.
2. Create choruses or short songs from the truth and sing them out over and over again.
3. The truths might begin to touch your heart and awaken spontaneous choruses, so sing those out for a while.⁹ Singing spontaneously around the verse will bring you into more clarity, and it will bring you into a deeper experience in the moment. I've found great emotional healing and deliverance manifest in my times of singing meditations, and it seems like the singing moments bring me into worshipful climaxes that open my heart to express and receive more deeply.

MEDITATING ON GOSPEL STORIES

We have a unique treasure to meditate on in the Gospel stories; God fully manifested in a human body for all to behold! Nothing in the Bible compares to meditating on Jesus in the Gospels. In His stories, we get to see how the invisible God talks to His people, what tone of voice He uses, what attitude He has, what body language He displays, and how He interacts with real people in real situations. Jesus' disciples and eyewitnesses have truly given us a gift in writing down His interactions for us to dive into in meditation to encounter God as a real person.

The gospels are also powerful because, in them, we get to meditate on stories. We were made to read stories and then to enter into stories with our imagination. We connect to the characters and the scenery in a story, and they become somewhat real to us. Each gospel story has characters and scenery that we can relate to, and then we get to see how Jesus interacts with them, which creates a context for Him to show us how He interacts with us. In one moment, we can be meditating on how He interacted with a person, and in the next moment, the Holy Spirit puts us in the story, and we experience Jesus' interactions with us.

⁹ Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:18-19.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GOSPEL MEDITATION

READ THE STORY

Pick a Gospel story and read the entire story a few times so that you have an overall idea of what is happening in the story. You will pick up new details just by reading it a few times.

PICTURE THE SCENE

Then read it slowly one last time and get a growing picture in your imagination of what was happening in the story. Partner with the Holy Spirit and develop all the different aspects of the scenery of the story: the colors, smells, sounds, people, moods, and landscapes. You want this story to be as real as possible in your heart, because the more real the story, the more real the interactions with Jesus will be to your own life. God wants to reveal Himself to you in the details of the story. Journal the landscape of the story, your thoughts and questions, impressions about Jesus, and anything else that you want to capture in writing.

ASK QUESTIONS

You've probably noticed a few details in the story that interest you more than the others, so start there in your meditation and ask Jesus questions. Go phrase by phrase and ask Him questions about the story like, "What did You think when they did that? What did You feel at that moment? How did You feel about that person? What did You say to them? Why did You say that?"

IMAGINE INTERACTIONS

Go phrase by phrase, and picture each interaction that Jesus had with people. Go with the bunny trails in the story that aren't technically in the Bible story. For example, focus on one of the people in the story and imagine their background, their life, and what happened to them after the story. Imagine parts of the conversation that took place that are not detailed in the Bible.

TELL JESUS WHAT YOU SEE

Tell Jesus the things you notice about Him in the story. Speaking observations back to Him is prayer. Pause often and reflect on what you've read and seen about Jesus in the story. When you see displays of His heart, thank Him for that attribute of Himself and ask Him to touch you with that same aspect of His heart. "Jesus, I see Your compassion for that woman! You are so aware of our hearts in every circumstance, and Your heart is filled with compassion for us, thank You. Open my eyes to experience Your compassion."

ENTER THE STORY

In your holy imagination, picture yourself being the person Jesus is talking to in the story. Fully enter into their situation and have a real dialogue with Jesus from their perspective. Imagine yourself as one of the people Jesus healed, as one of those that lavished Him with perfume, or as one of those that were at the foot of His cross. When I do this, I receive tremendous insight into what was happening in the story, but also a real face-to-face moment of interaction with Jesus and experience of His words personalized to me.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

In your meditation times this week and onward, practice each of the five meditation expressions. As you do this, you will notice that some of them will be easy and enjoyable while others might be harder. Even if they're hard, or you don't sense a connection to God in them, take a student's posture and don't decide against them for several months or more. As a part of this week's assignment, write down your experience with each expression in your meditation times, and process them with your Discipleship Mentor at your next meeting. Included in this, write down which expression is most natural for you, and which one is the hardest.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 3: MEDITATION – CHAPTERS 9 & 10

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss the importance of meditation, review practical tips for meditation, and talk in-depth about your meditation verse.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***
 - a. Talk through your meditation journal from the last two weeks in-depth. How are your meditation times going? What is God doing in your heart during these times? How is it impacting your heart issue?
 - b. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days this week have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How are your Bible reading and prayer list times going?
 - c. Briefly review your new *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.
2. ***Chapter Questions:***
 - a. Chapter 9 – Discuss your journal response assignment (*Meditation Defined, Learn God's Interactions, and Heart Posture - Proverbs 2*). How would you define meditation? Would you say you understand the significance of meditation to your life in God?
 - b. Chapter 10 – Discuss your journaling from the chapter, including which of the five meditation expressions is the most natural, the most difficult, and how implementing them has been going for you. Have you tried singing your meditations yet?
3. ***Heart Issue:***
 - a. Share how your heart issue has been going this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.
4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together.

MEETING NOTES:

11

TEN PRACTICALS PART ONE

■ INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these next two chapters is to flesh out practical ways of meditating on God. Many of these have been taught to me by leaders that have gone deep in meditation in their own lives, and their teachings have helped me and instructed me on my journey. Then other practicals I have learned by giving much time to meditation over the past fifteen years. In that time frame, I have observed how God has interacted with me consistently in meditation, and I've observed how my heart responds to His movements. Use these practical tips as a launching pad for learning how God interacts with you in meditation.

■ FIVE PRACTICAL TIPS

#1 – SCHEDULE STRATEGICALLY

Think through your weekly schedule and find the best times for you to meditate. Two major hindrances in meditation are falling asleep and being distracted by other life issues, so schedule times when you know you'll be more awake physically and attentive to the Lord mentally and emotionally. Schedule the best times for you to meditate, the best days

that will give you the most time and pick the location that facilitates it the best. Don't fit meditation into your lifestyle; make needed changes in your lifestyle and schedule to prioritize meditation times.

For me, scheduling strategically means meditating in the morning on days that I have the most time. I do this because my mind is the clearest in the morning and I know I need certain amounts of time. For the location, I prefer to meditate most times at my church because I stay more focused, have less propensity to fall asleep, and because I can be louder and play worship.

On top of your regular weekly devotional times with God, try and carve out longer sacred times (one hour or multiple hours) for meditation occasionally. The longer time frames allow God to increase our heart size over time so that we have the capacity to experience more of Him more often. For some, this may be possible once a week, and for others, it may be once a month. Extended times in prayer allow your mind and emotions to dial down even more than they do in the shorter meditation times. The more you dial down and focus on God, the more sensitive you'll be to hearing God's voice and sensing His movements in meditation. You may be surprised by how God meets you, and you may be surprised by how enjoyable it is.

#2 – STAY WITH ONE VERSE

The first part of going on a journey in meditation is picking a Bible verse. As a part of the values of this discipleship program, I suggest choosing a verse based on what you're desiring and needing truth in. If you need freedom from fear, anxiety, rejection, shame, or feeling unworthy of God's love, find verses that speak truths into these lies to dismantle their spiritual strongholds. In general, I choose verses that clearly reveal God's heart or verses that reveal my worth and value to Him. That's not all that I meditate on, but that's the majority of my focus.

The next part of the journey is sticking with the verse until you begin to experience God in its truth. I encourage you to schedule 1-2 focused meditation times throughout your weekly prayer schedule and then stay with your verse for at least a month. I've been on my most recent verse on God's pleasure for several months now, and it keeps going deeper and deeper. If you give it a month or longer, the Spirit has more time to walk you through the process of revelation and transformation. If an encounter with God and

heart transformation are the goals of meditation, then stay with a verse until you observe those happening.

In the process of meditation, it's Biblical to expect tears to flow, to have hope and joy filling your heart, and to feel like God is moving on your emotions to some degree. I tell people to stay committed to their verse until they're crying or weeping because it answers the "how many weeks do I meditate on this verse" question. These experiences are signposts along the way indicating that the truth is dismantling lies and renewing your soul. I say weeping because that's a strong emotional experience, and I think that's our portion consistently. Our hearts can become tender as we stay with a Bible verse long enough.

#3 – DEVELOP A PHRASE

Developing a phrase means taking your time to let one word or one idea from your verse expand and open to you in meditation. As you pray and sing through it, the word will begin to have more and more meaning and may even lead you in multiple directions of thought, which are new things to explore with God. If you picture meditation as being in a huge mansion for the first time, meditating on one word is like going into a mansion. Each new idea or question that stems from that one word is like exploring a new room in the mansion. After exploring a new room, the one word you began with should only get more exciting over time.

Therefore, move forward slowly. There is no rush to move forward to a new phrase or a new verse. Success in meditation isn't just "completing" a word or "getting through" the passage but encountering God's heart in your emotions and mind. What's motivating you to get to the next thing? Slowness is a part of God's process. He could just download us with all the information we need so we could share it or be transformed, but He wants a slow dialogue. He's not interested in just giving information outside of intimate experiences with Him.

Here's an example of words unfolding from one of my meditations on Psalm 45:1, "*My heart is overflowing with a good theme.*" My meditation started with "my heart is overflowing." Within that phrase I spent days going in different directions: God awakens my heart, my emotions can overflow and should be felt, God can inspire my emotions with discernable love for Jesus, my tongue is the pen of the ready writer because my heart is overflowing, and I was made to overflow. The next phrase was "good theme," which

developed into the following ideas: Jesus is a good theme, He's the theme or current that runs through my heart, the first thing on my mind and encompassing, I see Your beauty and goodness in everything, the theme of my interior life, and Jesus is an all-consuming theme.

#4 – REPETITION IN ALL THINGS

Be repetitive in all things with meditation. Repetition slowly brings your mind and emotions into a truth with God. It's not to be confused with the vain disconnected repetition Jesus warned about or filling the air with words thinking it's prayer and more spiritual. It's about engaging with God over a truth through slow repetition of words with a meaningful heart engagement.¹ Some people automatically think repetition is religious, but it is foundational to meditation if you engage your heart in it. My encouragement to you is to be repetitious with the five different meditation expressions (picture, read, write, pray, sing) and to embrace the simplicity of it.

#5 – ASK GOD QUESTIONS

Asking God questions is also very foundational in the meditation process. The questions that come to my heart while meditating become the central piece of my conversation with God. Questions determine the direction of the conversation and create hunger in me to pursue Him unto deeper answers. They open up new areas of thought to explore, make truths more personal and applicable, and they give God specific things to answer. Asking questions and dialoguing over answers is a very fruitful discipleship model in the church, how much more so when we're asking the Great Discipleship Mentor questions.

Deep questions and deep answers fascinate me on the inside. Questions unlock the answers that reveal the heart in a friend, and the same principle is true in conversation with God. We explore God's heart by asking Him questions and pursuing answers, which produces fascination.

Asking God questions is a pattern throughout the Bible. King David connected asking questions about God with meditation and gazing on God's beauty.² Job received a tremendous revelation about God as Creator after asking questions about God.³ Daniel

¹ Matthew 6:7.

² Psalm 27:4.

³ Job 38:1-41:34.

received multiple open visions from God because He was asking God questions.⁴ As a pattern, Jesus always gave more understanding to those who asked Him questions after His teachings.

Even brain research affirms the power of exploring God through asking Him questions. This is a quote from an educational leader, “When our curiosity is piqued, our Limbic Reward System lights up and brain pleasure centers are stimulated through the release of dopamine. And not only does dopamine make us feel happy, but it also enhances connections between cells that are involved in learning. Our brains are wired to learn! Learners of all ages who retain and can activate their own curiosity are empowered to learn more effectively. Our brain’s hippocampus, which is associated with the creation of memories, sees increased activity in curious minds. So the questions we ask and the answers we seek out on our own not only make us feel good but are also more likely to be committed to our memories.”⁵

The author’s point is that curiosity and interest, which in meditation we call hunger and exploration, stimulate more parts of the brain to pursue a truth. The process of asking questions actually releases pleasure to the person because they’re pursuing a truth through questions. This is evidence that God has designed the brain to engage more fully when it’s in a question-asking mode and answer-seeking mode. It also proves that God has designed the brain to release pleasure to the person to encourage that approach.

Studies also show that our brains naturally focus more when they are interested in something and ask questions or are asked a question. “Questions trigger a mental reflex known as ‘instinctive elaboration.’ When a question is posed, it takes over the brain’s thought process. And when your brain is thinking about the answer to a question, it can’t contemplate anything else.”⁶ God has designed us to ask questions and to be consumed with desire and focus while pursuing a truth.

⁴ Daniel 7-12.

⁵ Denise Alquist, “Achieve Better Learning: Utilize Curiosity to Stimulate Brain Function,” August 11, 2017.

<https://www.gettingsmart.com/2017/08/achieve-better-learning-utilize-curiosity-to-stimulate-brain-function/>

⁶ David Hoffeld, “What your Brain Does When It Hears a Question,” February 21, 2017.

[https://www.fastcompany.com/3068341/want-to-know-what-your-brain-does-when-it-hears-a-question#:text=Questions%20On%20The%20Mind,can't%20contemplate%20anything%20 else.](https://www.fastcompany.com/3068341/want-to-know-what-your-brain-does-when-it-hears-a-question#:text=Questions%20On%20The%20Mind,can't%20contemplate%20anything%20else.)

There are three significant takeaways from brain research that excite me. Number one, God made our brains to explore things. Number two, what we explore is more deeply connected to the rest of our thoughts and emotions because of the deeper process of exploring. Number three, our brains are naturally consumed and focused when we have a question to explore.

As you start meditating on a sentence, pay attention to the initial questions that arise in your heart to the Lord. Write down your questions and then pick one to focus on and ask God about it until He begins to speak into it. I may take a few minutes on one question, a few hours on another, or days for others that have stirred me with hunger. In the mansion analogy, each new thought in meditation is like a new room to explore in God. If that is the case, one question is like the door that we knock on until it opens up with revelation into the new room of thought. I ask God a question with persistence with the expectation that He will fulfill Matthew 7:7 and open the door of revelation.

Ask Him general questions about Him and the truth in the verse, but then also make it personal and specific by asking detailed questions of how this truth applies to you. For example, If I were meditating on God's joyful heart, I would ask, "Do You feel joy towards me today? Why do You feel joyful towards me? Does Your joy change because of my sin or weakness? What did You feel for me when I chose righteousness today? Why don't I feel Your joy very often? Is there anything hindering me from receiving joy?"

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

In your meditation times this week, focus on developing one word in your verse and asking God questions. There's no pressure to develop the word on your own or figure out all the questions to ask. As you go through the process of writing, praying, and singing your meditations, they will both begin to flow naturally.

12

TEN PRACTICALS PART TWO

■ INTRODUCTION

You are weeks into deeper meditation, and I'm sure you're growing in it already! Continue to stay consistent in your times and with the same Bible verse even when it's hard because it will transform you and become an inner lifestyle. Any challenges you're facing will be overcome as you continue on. Remember, you're growing in your weekly prayer lifestyle, so any new lifestyle and prayer rhythms are going to be challenging at first.

Hopefully, you are observing and sensing God moving on your heart in new ways and having the Bible phrases become alive inside. If so, be encouraged that you're experiencing God and being tenderized. Also, know that your Bible verse is releasing light into the specific areas of your heart in which you're pursuing freedom and transformation. As you read the practical suggestions in this chapter, I think you'll see how God is leading you into deeper truths and experiences within your verse, and that more is right around the corner.

#6 – RESPOND TO THE EBBS AND FLOW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

At different points in your meditation times, you will sense God's presence touching your heart and body. When you feel His presence come upon you, respond by giving Him your attention. I've found that God's presence will come upon me little by little like

waves slowly coming back and forth onto a beach. In these moments, the verse's truth feels alive, and I feel God's presence like a little breath coming into me or the sensation of heat resting on me.

He will come for a moment and then pull back. If I give Him my attention in the moment, the waves often intensify and progress into an emotional experience with Him. I believe those waves of His presence are invitations to engage with Him longer in order to enter into even deeper encounters with Him.

The principle here is that God touches us and then pulls back to see how we will respond. He initiates the experience but then draws back and allows us to respond based on the measure of hunger and desire that we have for Him. He gives more of Himself based on our level of desire for Him.¹

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke to the crowd with a parable until He knew they couldn't receive any more from Him. He was able to perceive when they were at their physical and spiritual limit of listening. Then He would stop talking until someone responded to His words with a hunger for more understanding.²

Jesus did something similar when He encountered two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He walked with them and taught them about Himself in the scriptures to the point that their hearts were burning with revelation. But when they arrived in Emmaus, Jesus made it look like He would keep walking and end His revelation session with them. At the moment, they had to choose to respond to the experience of revelation with a desire for more or to be content with Jesus leaving them for the night.³ They made the wise choice in the moment to constrain Him and ask Him for deeper fellowship, and because of this, Jesus came into the house with them and completely opened their spiritual eyes to see Him. They were being encountered to a degree on the road, but their eyes were not fully opened to know that it was Jesus until they constrained Him and asked for more.

Jesus moves in the same way during our meditation times. He'll reveal Himself to a measure and release His presence upon us, but then He will wait and give us the opportunity to respond in the moment. There will be times when you feel your heart moving with a measure of revelation but stay engaged and ask Him for more because you may have eye-opening experiences like the disciples in Emmaus. I usually experience waves

¹ Mark 4:23-25.

² Mark 4:33-34; Matthew 13:36.

³ Luke 24:16-32.

of His presence that get my attention, leading to a progressive experience in the same prayer time. Within this time frame, the waves may pause for lengths of time, and my meditation posture may shift from silence to being more active in prayer. Also, it may all unfold over one or two hours of waiting on Him, not necessarily within five to ten minutes of initially feeling His presence. In a recent meditation time, I felt God's presence at a distinct moment, so

I began softly praying and staying focused on the truth that was resting on my heart. About thirty minutes later, I felt God pulling on my heart even more. I knew a deeper experience was probably around the corner, so I put everything down, focused my heart on Him, and let Him whisper phrases to me. Tears began to flow down my cheeks as I felt God's words going deeper into my heart. Within minutes, there was a deeper groan as my heart unlocked, and God's presence rushed in. I gave way to the experience and wept on and off for a while. In between weeping times, I continued to stay engaged in a quiet dialogue with the Lord asking questions and staying focused on His presence and what He was stirring in me.

#7 – STAYING FOCUSED MATTERS

Though very common, momentary distractions are giant enemies to fruitful meditation. Staying focused on God matters because encounters come as we set our minds on God for longer periods. The longer you can stay relatively concentrated on God and your meditation, the more you'll be impacted. So when you feel your thoughts wandering, bring them back to meditation by utilizing the five prayer expressions (picture, read, write, pray, sing).

I value longer times of meditation in the morning because my mind is naturally calmer, focused, and not stirred up by the interactions and responsibilities of the day. I don't look at my phone, emails, or checklist for the day, and I try not to have conversations with people during my scheduled meditation times. These little things stir my mind up in different directions and hinder me from entering into deeper communion with God. In the same way, think about small things that distract you and make some changes to remove them or steward them differently.

#8 – BE HONEST WITH GOD

The purpose of meditation is to agree with the truths of the Word, but a part of that is recognizing when you don't agree with it. When you identify a lie, be honest with God in conversation as a way of grabbing onto the truth and getting healing. As you meditate on a verse, you may realize that you resist that specific truth for some reason deep in your heart. I believe the Holy Spirit is making you aware of those parts of your heart so that you can confess it and dialogue with God.

This may include telling Him you haven't felt loved by Him in certain situations and that you've withdrawn or become angry at Him. Possibly, you haven't believed He answers prayer because certain times it didn't seem like it, and you've stopped praying for things out of unbelief. Or maybe you feel convicted by the truth and need to confess your sin and commit to righteousness.

It is helpful and healing to be honest with the Lord about the lies you believe. It's not as helpful to only confess the truth repeatedly without making it personal. The overall value is that you believe the Word to be true, but the honest conversation with God allows you to address your pains and unbelief and create new room for His Words to become alive in you.

#9 – ENGAGE ALL YOUR SENSES

Meditation is about engaging all our senses in conversation with God, even using the natural senses to serve the spiritual senses. We do this in part by picturing, reading, writing, praying, and singing, but other ways include arts, dancing, acting out the verse, or songwriting. Artistic expressions would be painting or drawing the truth you're meditating on or asking the Lord for a picture of what He's speaking to you in meditation. Dance expressions would be taking time to dance in a way that expresses the truth of the verse or in a way that expresses your response to God.

#10 – WALLS OF QUIETNESS AND BOREDOM

Resist giving up or being distracted in meditation when there are walls of quietness and boredom in your heart. Quietness and boredom are part of the meditation process, and they are actually fruitful. God is doing something in your heart in these portions of time, but there's also a deeper experience right around the corner if you can push through. I believe the quietness and boredom are the Lord teaching our souls how to wait

and respond to Him in hunger, or they're moments where He is breaking our distracted patterns and increasing our spiritual attention span.

The experience of boredom signifies that our heart has come to the end of itself and needs fresh fascination. We experience moments of boredom throughout the day and constantly satisfy it by busyness, eating, entertainment, and small distractions with our phones. But in meditation times, we don't have these options. This sacred time and space allows God to become our fascination and the thing our hearts turn to in the moments of boredom through the day.

God wants to train our hearts to drink from Him for fascination instead of the small fountains of distraction we have trained our souls to depend on. Today's culture and technology have allowed us never to face quietness and boredom. There's a constant supply of entertainment through media and phones so that we can engage in activity for any minute or even seconds when something is not engaging us. Because of this, meditation is counter-cultural and very necessary for training our souls to engage in God instead of media or activity.

Quietness and boredom are also signs of our spiritual barrenness in the revelation of God. Meditation should bring everyone to a place where they feel like they don't know God well because He is infinite and eternal. The awareness that you don't know that much about God experientially in a specific attribute is a revelation from the Holy Spirit. But many people don't have much depth in their friendship with God yet, so the feeling of quietness and unfamiliarity with God can be more intense and uncomfortable.

I've found that people avoid deeper meditation times because the quietness and depth of conversation reveal spiritual barrenness and a lack of understanding of who God really is. Our activity in prayer and Bible reading and our activities in life can cover these areas up. But in the stillness, and with the singular focus on a Biblical phrase, the reality of our hearts comes forth. This is actually a good thing that can bring us closer to Him, depending on how we respond. The wrong response is to push away from the barrenness and cover it up with the things. The right response is to face it and let God produce a hunger that will pull us into His heart for satisfaction.

I once had a friend I was introducing to meditation who tried a couple of short meditation times and told me that he didn't like it and didn't feel comfortable with it. I believe what he was really experiencing was that all the white noise and distractions in his life were removed in meditation and he didn't feel comfortable being alone with God

because he didn't yet have a friendship with Him. God wants to strip away all the things that deceive us into thinking we have more intimacy with Him than we really do so that we can experience real friendship with Him.

I remember feeling this same way when I began having more contemplative prayer times focused on talking to the indwelling Holy Spirit. I would talk to Him and speak phrases of the Bible about the Holy Spirit to Him, but I felt weird talking to Him because He felt like a stranger. I confessed that to Him, and He met me there, but that's a reality we must overcome. Meditation forces us to have an intimate conversation with a stranger in a quiet room with nobody else around. In this case, the stranger is God. But soon, the awkward unfamiliarity with Him will change into a safe and familiar friendship.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

During this week's meditations, focus on the ebbs and flows of God's presence. In the moment, be purposeful to observe when He's touching your heart, and practice responding to Him.

Schedule a 2–4-hour group meditation day for the end of this week in place of your monthly group gathering. During that time, gather in a prayer room with worship or worship instrumentals playing loud enough for everyone to feel like they can pray without disturbing others. If helpful, talk together before meditating and after, and maybe even at the halfway point to pray with each other and share what God is doing in your hearts.

The purpose of a longer meditation day is to stretch yourself by positioning your heart in meditation longer than usual. The benefit of this is that your soul will quiet down more, and you'll receive more from the Lord. The other purpose is to give you a taste of what a longer prayer day could feel like and look like for your personal life moving forward. The benefit of doing it in a group is that you will encourage and strengthen each other in the room.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 3: MEDITATION – CHAPTERS 11 & 12

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to review the 10 practical tips for meditation and talk in-depth about your meditation times.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Talk through your meditation journal from the last two weeks in-depth. What is God doing in your heart during these times? How is it impacting your heart issue?
- b. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How are your Bible reading and prayer list times going, and how is God impacting you through them?

2. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Are you trying each of the five meditation expressions (read, write, pray, sing, picture)? How is each one going for you?
- b. Chapter 11 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions. Talk through practical tips #3 (developing a phrase) and #5 (asking God questions).
- c. Chapter 12 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions. Talk through tip #6 (stewarding the ebbs and flows of God's presence).
- d. Group Meditation Day - Discuss anything necessary in preparation for the meditation day.

3. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Share how your heart issue has been going this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.

4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together.

MEETING NOTES:

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SEVEN HEART PROGRESSIONS

■ INTRODUCTION

Throughout my meditation journey, I've observed seven different stages that I call the progression of the heart. These are not hard and fast stages, but I believe there are some observable progressions God takes us through as we give ourselves to a verse for weeks or months. This progression is my attempt to put language to the invisible things that I've noticed happening during meditation in my heart and the hearts of those I've been around.

It seems beneficial to be aware of any progression God takes our heart through so that we don't get discouraged in the journey. Instead, we can be encouraged that God is doing something purposeful in us in each stage and have faith that another level of revelation may be right around the corner. In my experience, many people stop meditating after one or two stages of the heart progression and conclude that they've experienced the fullness. But knowing there are multiple stages and depths of experience increases expectations and perseverance to walk through the entire process.

#1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

There is an introduction to the verse's themes in stage one, and initial questions are brought to the surface. There may be an initial hunger or excitement to understand the verse. Depending on how long my meditation times are, it might take a few prayer times to get past this introductory stage.

#2 – QUIETNESS, BOREDOM, AND UNBELIEF

There is often a quietness at this stage. I will still have questions and thoughts about the verse's main ideas that I'm thinking about, but not much is happening on the inside. This is usually where I have to face boredom, distraction, and possibly hit "walls" of unbelief towards the truth. The walls are probably a combination of human brokenness and demonic accusation.

At this point, I tend to get bored or distracted and can check out. Here's what I'm thinking when I'm bored, "I'm not feeling it. What can I look at on my phone to distract me? This is boring. Is this what it's supposed to feel like? Is there something wrong with me? Should I be on a different verse? Maybe I'll go do something else for a while and then try again."

Quietness is a healthy part of the process because it prepares our hearts to receive from God in the next stages. Many times, it's the calm before the storm of revelation comes. I see God smiling during this stage, saying, "I have a purpose in letting you feel the quietness and boredom. I want your hunger stirred up by the pain of boredom. Keep responding to me, and I'll meet you in this verse."

#3 – HUNGER IS STIRRED

In the third stage, my heart is stirred with hunger to experience the verse' truth in a more profound way. The boredom and quietness of the previous stage pushes against my apathy, allows me to wrestle with discontentment, and then produces a holy hunger. This desire breaks me out of the boredom and lights a fire in my heart to keep pursuing God in my meditation. There's hunger at all seven stages, but I would say this is where the foundational hunger is birthed and fueled.

Throughout this stage, there's greater clarity about the truths in the thought realm, but it's not yet an experience of truth in the emotional realm. There's some satisfaction because of some revelation, stirred desires, and clear conversation with God, but it's mostly an appetizer that gets me hungry for the deeper things. My heart feels awakened with a vision for more, and because of that, the intensity of my pursuit of truth increases.

#4 - INITIAL HEART ENCOUNTER

In the fourth stage, God takes the hunger and clarity of the previous stage and turns it into emotional encounters that are very intimate and satisfying. In this stage, I begin to feel connected to the verse's truth and God's heart in a real way. The verse begins to have a sweetness to it, and my heart begins to move when I whisper key Bible phrases to God. What may have started as a discipline of meditation in earlier stages now turns into enjoyable prayer in this stage. Because there is an increased measure of heart revelation, the heart is stirred with a desire to spend more time with the Lord in meditation.

#5 - DEEPER ENCOUNTER AND DEEPER HUNGER

In the fifth stage, God consistently encounters me in a deeper way, and I experience tears, joy, and feel waves of His presence washing over my emotions. This is incredibly satisfying because it's a sustained experience over several meditation times and through the days as I whisper the truth to Him. Oddly enough, these deeper experiences produce a disruptive hunger and desire to know and experience God more in the verse's truth at any cost. I'm crying out in these moments, "God, Your love is so amazing; it's so unending. Oh, there's so much more! I have to taste that again!"

Only God can fully satisfy our hearts and, at the same time, produce a greater longing in us for more of Him. The depth of encounter opens my eyes to see that there is even more truth to experience, which produces that desperate hunger. This is the hunger that births lovesick cries for understanding spoken of Proverbs 2, "*Cry out and lift your voice.*"

This disruptive hunger and desire bring us into the next stages of revelation in two ways. First, this hunger and desire increases our hearts' size so that we can experience more of God when He touches us again. The larger our hearts, the greater the experience of pleasure and intimacy when He moves on our hearts.

Second, this level of hunger causes you to desire more experience with God desperately, at any cost. This hunger motivates you to move things around in life to get more time with God and be more willing to say no to small things that don't help your spiritual life. He pulls us into His presence by giving us the gift of desire, which changes everything and acts as an inner current pulling us towards Him. Desire and thirst cause you to forsake everything and run to His river for life. Desire takes you farther than discipline ever will. This is when you want to stay up later or get up earlier to be with Him, or when you see every short break as an opportunity to be with Him. This is when you discern the negative impact of idle time and words, small moments of entertainment, and ungodly relationships.

#6 – DELIVERANCE

The sixth stage is really fun! In it, the verse's truths penetrate my heart and shine a light on the root system of lies contrary to the verse. This is a positive thing, and it's a sign that revelation is increasing. A divine exchange of truth happens in this stage where I break agreement with lies and grab onto the truth more deeply. Hebrews 4:12 says that God's words are living and powerful as they move inside of our hearts. They are actively probing, bringing light, exposing darkness with truth, and then cutting off the darkness. When His words get into our hearts, they discern every one of our thoughts and intentions, and act like a brilliant searchlight revealing the root systems of lies which have lain hidden inside of us.

Realizing your brokenness isn't a sign that you're more broken than before or that God is angry with you. It means that His Word is making you aware of the brokenness you were unaware of so that you can break the agreement and be set free at a deeper level. If you give meditation time, His words will penetrate like a sword into your deepest thoughts, emotions, and the twisted paradigms of what you know about God and yourself.

By this stage, the Holy Spirit has already addressed some layers of lies, but there is a deeper work to be done to release a significant deliverance from strongholds. Strongholds are negative belief systems in our thoughts and emotions that function as open doors for demons to energize those lies supernaturally. Demons live within those belief systems, and then they seek to build on those belief systems and make them more pervasive. But the

Holy Spirit shines His light on them through meditation so that we can rise up in faith in agreement with truth and break agreement with the lies that are strangling our hearts.

This stage brings deliverance because His Word has had time to go deep within our hearts and become a double-edged sword that aggressively cuts off lies and disobedience. His Word pierces us and penetrates us, which I believe is a real experience we can have in the Spirit. A sword piercing someone is a violent act in the same way God pierces us with His sword. What I'm describing is more than just a conviction of a lie or a sin. It's a supernatural experience where the sword of truth goes in you, and you say "Yes, and amen" to it at an incredibly deep level. You come out of an experience like this, and you feel a bit different.

These are intense experiences with the truth where there is a lot of emotion and weeping. In these moments, real demonic strongholds are being torn down. This is not a casual experience, though I believe in different levels of the sword experience and honor those as authentic and powerful. This is a more intense experience where we're seriously gripped with the conviction of the truth, and we feel the divine confrontation on the inside.

There was a month that I was meditating on all of Genesis 1, and verse 1:26 stuck out to me like never before. I stayed with the verse for weeks and meditated on the truth that God created me because He was joyful and was burning with desire for me. The truth began to go deeper and deeper in me.

In the last stages of my meditation, the emotional experiences were so intense that I would either be laughing with joy and relief or weeping out of gratitude for what God was like. He was confronting stuff in me that was so deep that I began to respond with pure joy saying, "God made me 100% because He wanted to. I wasn't a mistake, and I wasn't an accident! I'm not just a little minion that God made who annoys Him and asks for money and help all the time."

It was the same idea hitting me at a deeper level, but I stayed with it. Because I stayed with it long enough, there began to be intense exchanges happening in me where I was wrestling with God, "Are You really like this? Are You really joyful by Yourself? Did You really overflow with joy while creating, and did You really make us because You desired us? If You have desire, how much could You have if You're an all-consuming fire?" Those words penetrated the deepest places in me and causing me to laugh with joy for long periods. It was God touching my heart, confronting thoughts of rejection, thoughts of being annoying, and thoughts of not being fully enjoyed by God. Stay with your meditation and wrestle

with God over His truth. His words will impart strength and faith to break agreement with the lies, where in the past, you may not have had the strength to say no to the enemy.

#7 – BREAKTHROUGH IN REVELATION

After some deliverance has taken place, there is a profound sense of ownership of the verse's truth, resulting in much singing, weeping, rejoicing, and freedom. We choose to sing during the entire meditation process, but there's another place in encountering God to where the song is in you because the truth is in you. In this place, the truth awakens praise and a deep song to the Lord.

This is a deeper place of encounter with God, and it's more sustained than before. It can even become a well of encounter that you can go back to months or years later. The truth becomes fresh breath and satisfying water to our souls, and it seems much easier to receive the truth without wading through internal arguments and demonic accusations. When I get breakthroughs in a verse to a deep level, I can just sit with my Bible open and speak the truths back to God with gentle weeping. Just whispering the truth back to Him in this condition is enough to live by, and it makes me feel very content.

I don't think we ever exhaust the revelation available to us in a verse. In this stage, we enjoy the benefits of an open heart and agreement with His truth. It's as if you've spent much time and energy digging for a well and removing all the hindrances, and now you've got a healthy flow of water coming more naturally. When the well is established, you enjoy the fruit of the labor, and now you drink as much as you want. In the same way, you get to stay at this newly dug fountain and drink of all the revelation that God has for you.

VISION FOR FULLNESS

Hopefully, after reading the heart's progression in meditation, you feel faith to keep going with your Bible verse. Encountering God and experiencing deliverance is your portion if you continue meditating with a high vision for all that God has for you. Many people stop meditating on a verse after walking through one or two stages and assume that there is nothing more to experience, but more is available.

SEVEN HEART PROGRESSIONS

But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.—Mark 4:20

In the parable of the sower of the seed, Jesus revealed that there are several heart conditions people have compared to different soil qualities. This parable is both sobering and exciting, and it applies to the idea of having a high vision for God's Word touching us in meditation. Jesus referenced four different soils; three soils were unreceptive, and only one was fit for the Word to penetrate. Good soil is the heart that takes time to hear God in meditation and doesn't give up until an encounter happens.

Within the good soil, there is a substantial range of fruitfulness. Some hearts will receive thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold fruit from the same seeds of God's Word. This fruitfulness isn't based on God's choice; it's based on the individual's choice to give God's Word time to penetrate and awaken. I encourage you to set it in your heart to not only have the good soil that Jesus described but to have the richest soil that produces the hundredfold fruit of revelation.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

As a part of your assignment this week, reflect on the heart progression stages. Identify which ones you may have experienced in your past meditations, which ones you may have walked through with your current meditation, and which stage you are looking forward to. As you process, be encouraged that the Lord is doing something intimate and specific with you. He has a tailor-made journey for your heart in the verse you've chosen to go deep in. Also, be persistent in meditation with a fresh perspective that God will progress your heart to the final stages to bring encounter and deliverance.

Once a week for the next four weeks, fill out a *Meditation Observation Document* right after a prayer time. This assignment is designed to help you identify and process God's movements. The reflective questions on the document will help you observe how God is interacting with you and help you recognize which Biblical phrases He's unfolding to you right now.

MEDITATION OBSERVATIONS

Meditation Passage:

Date: _____

1. What was the main thing God was communicating to you during today's meditation time?
2. In what ways did you sense God interacting with you (images, inspired thoughts, inspired emotions, physical presence, whispers). At what moment were you feeling Him the most?
3. How did you respond in the moments of feeling God's presence the most?
4. In today's meditation journaling, which sentences seemed the most significant to you (felt God's presence, had clear language for truth, exposes a lie, clear question)?
5. Did you learn anything about how to interact with God during meditation?

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Meditation Passage: _____ **Date:** _____

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5. Did you learn anything about how to interact with God during meditation?

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 3: MEDITATION - CHAPTER 13

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss the progression of the heart in meditation, talk in-depth about your meditation times, and give extra time to discussing your heart issue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Talk through your meditation journal from the last two weeks in-depth. What is God doing in your heart during these times? How is it impacting your heart issue?
- b. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How are your Bible reading and prayer list times going, and how is God impacting you through them?

2. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Are you trying each of the five meditation expressions (read, write, pray, sing, picture)? How is each one going for you?
- b. Chapter 13 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions. Discuss which stages have you experienced since the beginning of this meditation module? Which stage do you have the most questions on? Which stage are you looking forward to?
- c. Discuss your *Meditation Observation Assignment* pages from the last two weeks with the emphasis on learning how God is interacting with you.

3. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Discuss your heart issue in more depth (from Spiritual Pursuit Doc). With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.

4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together.

MEETING NOTES:

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QUIETING THE MIND

COMMON CHALLENGE

One of the most challenging things to overcome in prayer is a distracted and busy mind. In surveying people before writing this book, this was the most common struggle people identified in their prayer lives. When they sit down and close their eyes to pray, most people said that their minds go a little crazy thinking about their to-do lists for the day, replaying recent conversations, worrying, thinking about the next meal, or having random wandering thoughts. Being distracted in prayer is the fruit of a heart culture and personal lifestyle. Trying to quiet the mind in prayer isn't simply addressing one small problem: it's addressing an entire way of being. As a picture, the mind is like a huge pot of water that is stirred up each day by a distracted way of being. When looking at the water, we see the current moving in one direction around the pot, representing our thoughts flowing in a current of busyness. Then, when we go to be still in prayer, we become extremely aware that the water is still moving around in a strong current and have to fight against it. This imagery reflects both the lingering effect that busyness has on us and the truth that it's only recognized in prayer times.

If this has been your experience, take courage; it's normal, and you can conquer it. In prayer, I used to find myself thinking about random things, replaying movies I had watched, or being somewhat filled with anxious and fearful thoughts about life circumstances and responsibilities. Before I knew it, fifteen minutes would go by, and there wouldn't have been any real conversation with God. As I grew in my prayer life and removed distractions,

my mind began to quiet down quicker in prayer. Some days it takes me ten minutes to get focused. Infrequently, I'll be really distracted or weighed down by something for an hour or two. But for most of the time, I can enter into focused conversation with God within minutes. This quietness then continues through my day.

■ OVERCOMING DISTRACTION IS CRITICAL

Acknowledging your distracted mind and overcoming it can be very difficult at first. Still, it's critical because our thoughts are the starting place for engaging God in conversation and the doorway to encounter and transformation. When our conversation with God is disrupted, it affects our connection to Him and limits our experience of Him. A distracted mind hinders our ability to dialogue with God, ask real questions, and hear His voice. These aspects of relating to God are necessary to experience Him and receive His deliverance power.

Our experience of God will increase when we can pray in a focused way for longer periods, and that will only happen if our minds can be quiet longer. This same principle is true when spending time with our friends. If you are distracted

by your thoughts, phone, and other people while sitting down at a restaurant with a friend, you end up not hearing them or connecting with them. Likewise, if we are distracted in our conversations with the Lord, we won't hear all that He is saying to us, and we won't be as impacted.

■ WEANING THE MIND – PSALM 131

Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.—Psalm 131:2

Like King David, we have to go through the process of quieting and calming our minds. David compared quieting his soul to weaning a child, which is a messy process. In this process, we have to wean ourselves from the things that have created a distracted soul in us and have given us a false sense of life.

Weaning is a process that takes time and energy. It refers to the process of transitioning a child from one source of life and comfort to an entirely different one. Children are fussy

and uncomfortable in the process because they are so used to the pattern of drinking from their mom and receiving the emotional comfort that it brings. But after they finish the long and challenging process, they are at rest with their new food source and no longer crave their mom's milk. In Psalm 131, the fully weaned child could sit with its mother without craving and fussing for her milk. When a child can do this, you know they are fully weaned!

We all have to face our distracted and fussy souls as we pursue weaning and calming it long-term. Like a baby, we all have things and distractions we drink from that have become part of our daily rhythm. To transition to more spiritual food, we have to be aware of and accept the weaning process. The transition will be messy as you retrain your mind to focus on God as your source of life and comfort, but you will have a calm mind, and you will learn to feast on God's satisfying presence.

■ HOW TO CULTIVATE A QUIET MIND

Cultivating a quiet mind is done by changing your lifestyle and what you do in prayer. If you change in both areas and give your mind a season to grow quiet, you will experience dramatic results. Lifestyle changes include identifying and removing the things in your daily life that stir your thoughts up and the things in your daily rhythm that cause you to have a short attention span.

MEDIA USAGE

For me, I've identified a few things that lead to my mind being distracted consistently. Media is one of them. If I watch shows or videos, my mind replays them repeatedly throughout the day and during my prayer times. If I'm consistently checking my phone for texts, emails, news updates, or checking other things, I find that I end up wanting to check those during my prayer times. When I have a pattern of checking my phone out of boredom, it trains my mind to have a short attention span.

Phones give us 24-7 access to every form of entertainment and communication available. The danger with this is that our minds are being trained to be stimulated all the time. This has massive negative implications for our attention spans in the place of prayer. Even if what you are entertained by doesn't initially seem evil to you, it can still fuel distraction and increase your appetite for entertainment and fantasy. If you know you struggle with

distraction during prayer, consider completely removing media entertainment (social media, movies, YouTube, phone games, video games, etc.) for a few months to see how peaceful your mind becomes.

Consider changing your cell phone lifestyle by limiting usage to specific times and needs. Set clear boundaries on how much you use your device and what you use it for. For example, my wife and I try not to use our phones before or during our morning prayer times, and then we put them away in the evenings during family times. Also, I don't use my phone as a Bible study resource or note-taking resource during my prayer times. I prefer not to rely on my phone for everything in life. I don't want to be stirred by notifications, and I don't want to have the most distracting thing in my life in my hands when I'm the most tempted to be distracted.

Phones can take you out of deep thought in the moment, and then they will stir up your mind around the topic you just read about for a few minutes or even longer. Focusing on God and deeply connecting to Him is like getting an airplane off the ground and soaring in the air. In prayer times, it takes a while to get going on the runway and into the air. Then it takes some time to ascend, level out, and soar in that place of connecting to God. Distractions have the potential to make you start the flight process over again to get back into that smooth flying place to where your mind is fixed on God.

FEAR AND ANXIETY

Do you have a pattern of being fearful or anxious about things in your life, and do those things come to your mind when you want to pray? God could be highlighting a heart issue. Ask the Lord where you are anxious and what you need to do to have peace in that area again. Identify what specifically stirs up those anxieties and have a prayer time where you give those areas of anxiety to the Lord.

Bring this issue to your Discipleship Mentor to process and pray through, and watch the Lord change it over time.

Practically, God could be addressing a part of your lifestyle and schedule that is giving you anxiety unknowingly. You can address some levels of anxiety by creating and following a weekly schedule with committed planning times. Some people are anxious about things that need to be thought through or done simply because they don't have an appropriate time and place to think through them. Schedule a time to deal with the things that weigh

on you through the day and train yourself to not think about it after those scheduled planning times.

FANTASY

Although fantasy can be expressed in many ways, the common fruits are a distracted imagination and a frequent pull to escape into a mental pretend world. Fantasy is a relevant challenge to identify and address because its negative fruit will manifest itself in prayer times as you try to wean yourself from these distractions. Different forms of fantasy include sexually focused fantasy, playing out situations, replaying memories or conversations, daydreaming about the future in specific ways as a way of comfort and distraction, reading books as an escape, shopping online, and engaging in forms of social media.

Though all the forms of fantasy have a spiritual impact and need to be addressed, I want to focus on pornography and sexually focused fantasy. If you struggle with these issues regularly, you're probably having to fight against imaginations in prayer times. These are distracting and can lead to feeling shame in God's presence.

If you're not already doing this, it is worth asking friends and leaders for help and accountability if you struggle with looking at sexual images. Accountability will greatly reduce your options of what you are distracted by. The next step for removing distractions is to war against your pattern of indulging in fantasy to escape.

God has strategically given us Revelation 4 to help focus our imaginations on the imagery of God's throne room. Focusing on His throne room replaces immoral and superficial images, helps you not to wander, and has a supernatural benefit to it. Jesus said that our eyes are the lamp of our bodies and that if they are good, they will impact our entire being.¹ Setting your mind on His throne room enables the light of God's glory to enter our spiritual eyes, which then fills our entire being with God's light and begins to wash away immoral images and desires.

If you know you struggle with escaping something through fantasy in other ways, now is the time to call it what it is and war against it. Bring it to the Lord and your Discipleship Mentor for repentance and healing. As you do this, you will walk in the contentment and quietness that God desires for you. If you're not sure if what you think about is fantasy, take

¹ Matthew 6:22-23.

time to think through what you're actually doing and what fruit it's bearing. Also, bring it before the Lord in prayer and ask Him what He's saying about it.

PRAYER LIFE

Think through what time of day you pray and how long you're scheduling prayer because these can impact your effectiveness. If you are distracted but don't know what time is best, try praying at different times. The best time for me to pray is early in the day so that I don't have to "unwind" or process my day in my prayer times.

Is the length of your prayer times long enough to be able to quiet down? If they're too short, your mind won't have enough time to dial down in the moment, and it also won't have a chance to break distracted cycles. Consider scheduling longer prayer times than what you're used to currently. It takes time for our minds to quiet down for every prayer time. By increasing the length of your prayer time, you will get more focused time, which is when you will receive the most from the Lord. Experiencing that quiet mind for longer periods each day in prayer will carry through to the rest of your day and help you cultivate a quiet mind as a lifestyle.

CHOOSING WHITE NOISE

You might struggle with distraction because you want to be distracted. You might be creating "white noise" in your daily life so that you don't have to face the reality of the condition of your heart, how life looks for you, or what your relationship with God is really like. White noise is a sound that people play while sleeping to block out random noises, whether it be a sound machine or something else. In context to choosing distraction, white noise is the things you fill your life with that don't allow for silence and deep thinking. It's a noise that occupies your mind so that your true thoughts and emotions don't come to the surface.

Reflect on your life and see if you regularly distract yourself with things to do, a filled schedule, always watching or listening to things, or always thinking of something so that you don't have silence and stillness in your life. If this applies to you, talk to God and ask Him to replace the distraction and false satisfaction with His peace and satisfaction. Turn away from all the distractions and tell your Discipleship Mentor your struggle so they can help you get freedom. Completely shutting off the noise might sound impossible and

horrible to you, but life is better on the other side. You will face reality and find peace, contentment, and progress, and you'll experience the supernatural fruit of the Spirit.

■ PRACTICAL CHANGES

DON'T PLAN BEFORE PRAYER

It can be a huge temptation to be in planning mode before prayer times. This may be planning for the day, the week, or planning different things in life. This can take a lot of mental investment, so it's not easy to stop thinking about those topics once you start. Save planning times for other times in the day and train yourself to stop thinking about your planning topics outside of your planning times.

RESIST DISTRACTED THINKING

Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 10:5

When a distracting thought comes to you, exercise the muscle of your mind by resisting it and focusing back on God. At times, this only takes one moment of resisting, but other times, it takes several moments of refocusing on God. As this exercise becomes a lifestyle, the pattern of distraction will be transformed into a pattern of quietness. If you can't stop thinking about something, take a minute to write it down so you feel like you can deal with it later. If that doesn't help, dialogue with God about the things on your mind until you feel like it's resolved. In group prayer settings, you also have the option of asking a friend to pray for you.

Sometimes people wonder if their distracting thoughts are God directing them to do something else in the moment. This is definitely a possibility. At times, God will bring something or someone to mind prompting us to reach out to them, send them encouragement, or pray for them. My first response is that distractions do not mean "walking in the Spirit." My second response is that God won't redirect us most of the time when we're meditating on a truth. In my opinion, if this is happening most days, it's

probably not God. What He will do is take the meditation truth and make it personal by bringing up memories or situations so we can process its application.

PRAY AND SING OUT LOUD

Speak and sing your prayers out loud instead of just thinking your prayers. Speaking out loud has a real spiritual impact, but the mind also naturally focuses better if you talk out loud. God has designed our mouth to be the steering wheel of our entire being.² Our thoughts, emotions, desires, and bodies are directed by the things that we speak out, so be intentional to speak out most of the time, even if it's just a whisper. I am more focused and have way more clarity when I speak and sing out loud versus just thinking my prayers. From my experience, praying out loud and writing down prayers are the two most powerful ways to stay focused during prayer.

WRITE PRAYERS

Get a journal or a notepad and write some or all your thoughts, questions, and conversations with the Lord in your prayer times. Writing will engage more parts of your mind in prayer, which will help you stay focused. Writing also helps you get more clarity in what you're talking about with God. You have to have clarity to write something down, and once it is written down, you never lose it. If you're just thinking prayers and only speaking them out loud occasionally, you will lose track of what you were talking about with the Lord, and you'll miss some of what He is whispering to you.

WORSHIP

I usually have worship playing during my prayer times because it helps focus my thoughts and emotions on God. Worship music changes the atmosphere and helps direct the heart towards God. For me, worship music includes live worship at the local prayer room I'm a part of, a worship recording in the background, or I play my guitar and worship while I talk to the Lord.

² James 3:2-6.

MOVE

Slow movements during prayer really help people stay focused in your thoughts and emotions. Moving around is significant enough for me that for most of my prayer times, I slowly walk back and forth or gently rock in my chair. Rocking has been a common motion among praying Jews for centuries, and research shows it aids in concentration in people of all ages.

PICTURE GOD

I talk about picturing God often throughout this discipleship program because it is so helpful, but people often don't try it. Use your imagination to picture God in His throne room instead of focusing your mind on nothing. This will help your mind stay focused, and it will make you feel like you're actually talking to a real person. A simple way to begin doing this is to read Revelation 4:2-3 during every prayer time and picture one description of God and His throne in your imagination. Focus on that image of Him as you talk and sing to Him.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

As part of this week's assignment, reflect on this chapter and identify if you struggle with a distracted mind in prayer. If so, ask the Lord what internal or external things are causing distraction, and write down what you want to change in your life as a response. If you set your heart to make life changes, you can expect to have a quiet mind in prayer in the next few months. When you close your eyes, you will focus on God, hear His whispers, and have little to no thoughts coming to your mind outside of prayer. Through the day, you'll be as clear and peaceful and able to connect with God while you're doing other things.

MEDITATION OBSERVATIONS

Meditation Passage: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What was the main thing God was communicating to you during today's meditation time?

2. In what ways did you sense God interacting with you (images, inspired thoughts, inspired emotions, physical presence, whispers). At what moment were you feeling Him the most?

3. How did you respond in the moments of feeling God's presence the most?

4. In today's meditation journaling, which sentences seemed the most significant to you (felt God's presence, had clear language for truth, exposes a lie, clear question)?

5. Did you learn anything about how to interact with God during meditation?

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5. Did you learn anything about how to interact with God during meditation?

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 3: MEDITATION – CHAPTER 14

MAIN FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to discuss hindrances to having a quiet mind, talk in-depth about your meditation times, and give extra time to talk and pray about your heart issues.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***
 - a. Talk through your meditation journal from the last two weeks in-depth. What is God doing in your heart during these times? How is it impacting your heart issue?
 - b. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How are your Bible reading and prayer list times going, and how is God impacting you through them?
2. ***Chapter Questions:***
 - a. Are you trying each of the five meditation expressions (read, write, pray, sing, picture)? How is each one going for you?
 - b. Chapter 14 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions. Do you struggle with having a quiet mind? If so, why, and what can you change in your lifestyle? Take time to pray together about any hindrances to having a quiet mind.
 - c. Discuss your *Meditation Observation Assignment* pages from the last two weeks with the emphasis on learning how God is interacting with you.
3. ***Heart Issue:***
 - a. Discuss your heart issue in more depth (from Spiritual Pursuit Doc). With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation.
4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together. This is not necessary if you are having a group gathering to introduce the next module topic.

MODULE 4

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

MODULE INTRODUCTION

The topic of praying in the Spirit is an exciting topic for many. But for some of you, it might bring up fears, anger, spiritual insecurities (feel less spiritual than others or less loved by God), offenses, confusion, questions, or hurts from past experiences. Whatever your experience has been with the Holy Spirit or the topic of praying in the Spirit, know that this module is a safe context to process with others, dig into the scriptures, and take a step forward.

There are a variety of Biblical perspectives on this topic that are worth searching out. Having said that, here are specific perspectives that this module is centered around: *(1) speaking in tongues is for today, (2) tongues is available to every believer, (3) personal tongues is distinct from the corporate gift of tongues, (4) the apostle Paul emphasized tongues as a lifestyle, (5) there is always more of the Spirit available to every believer, (6) there are multiple infillings of the Spirit available after salvation, (7) infillings of the Spirit are usually discernible experiences, (8) tongues is usually the initial manifestation of the Spirit but sometimes takes time and coaching to vocalize it, (9) it's Biblical to pray in tongues as a group without needing interpretation.*

The assignments are geared towards those who have received tongues in the past or will receive it within the first weeks. They are focused on establishing your daily rhythm of praying in tongues long-term. For those who haven't spoken in tongues yet, take the assigned prayer times to study the verses and ask the Spirit to fill you until it happens. For those who aren't at a place to pursue tongues, take the assigned prayer times to study the verses and process questions and challenges with your Discipleship Mentor.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

MODULE 4 – PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

Continue to follow your prayer schedule and Spiritual Pursuits each week. Schedule a time to pray in tongues as a group during Week 20.

Week Seventeen Assignments:

- Read Chapter 15 – “***Receiving The Holy Spirit.***” Journal your thoughts and questions on the chapter.
- If you have received tongues, pray in tongues for 15 minutes at least three days a week. If that’s not a challenge, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Write a paragraph on how each prayer time goes for you, was it difficult or easy, did you sense God’s presence or any spiritual benefits?
- If you haven’t received tongues at this point, study the Bible verses from the chapter and pray about the topic of tongues for 15 minutes three days this week.
- Fill out a new *Spiritual Pursuits Document* for this module. The pursuits can stay the same or change but filling out the form monthly helps you refocus and develop a rhythm of intentionality.

Week Eighteen Assignments:

- Read Chapter 16 – “***Praying From Our Spirit-Man.***” Journal your thoughts and questions on the chapter.
- If you have received tongues, pray in tongues for 15 minutes at least three days a week. If that’s not a challenge, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Write a paragraph on how each prayer time goes for you.
- If you haven’t received tongues at this point, study the Bible verses from the chapter and pray about the topic of tongues for 15 minutes three days this week.
- Do a simple study on the words “*mystery*” and “*mysteries.*”
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

Week Nineteen Assignments:

- Read Chapter 17 – “***Communing with God in Tongues.***” Journal your thoughts and questions on the chapter.

GOING DEEPER

- If you have received tongues, pray in tongues for 15 minutes at least three days a week. If that's not a challenge, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Write a paragraph on how each prayer time goes for you.
- If you haven't received tongues at this point, study the Bible verses from the chapter and pray about the topic of tongues for 15 minutes three days this week.
- In addition to one of your daily tongues times, pray in tongues for 30 minutes once. If you've been praying longer than 15 minutes each day, try doubling your time for one day. After the longer tongues time, write down if and when you felt a breakthrough moment during the prayer time.

Week Twenty Assignments:

- Read Chapter 18 – “*Praying with Groups.*” Journal your thoughts and questions on the chapter.
- If you have received tongues, pray in tongues for 15 minutes at least three days a week. If that's not a challenge, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Write a paragraph on how each prayer time goes for you.
- If you haven't received tongues or aren't ready to pursue it, study the verses from the chapter and pray into the topic during the assigned prayer times.
- In addition to your other tongues times, plan and participate in one 30-minute group tongues time.
- Meet with your Discipleship Mentor.**

Week Twenty-one Assignments:

- Read Chapter 19 – “*Different Uses of Tongues.*” Journal your thoughts and questions on the chapter.
- If you have received tongues, pray in tongues for 15 minutes at least three days a week. If that's not a challenge, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Write a paragraph on how each prayer time goes for you.
- If you haven't received tongues or aren't ready to pursue it, study the verses from the chapter and pray into the topic during the assigned prayer times.
- In addition to your other tongues times this week, pray in tongues for 30 minutes one time. This could be an individual prayer time, a group tongues time, or a prayer time with your Discipleship Mentor.

SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

DATE: _____

1. **Bible reading direction and plan**
(Write down what you will read and when you will read it):
2. **Meditation verse** (Choose a verse that speaks truth into your heart issue):
3. **Sin/character issue from which to get freedom:**
4. **Lie from which to pursue deliverance:**
5. **Gifts to pursue** (Include simple ways you can pursue it):

6. **Weekly Prayer Schedule**—Write down your plan for the *specific times* you are committed to spending with God each day, and *what specifically you plan to do during those times*. Include what your study or meditation focus will be. Refer to the example schedule in Chapter Two. (e.g., Monday 6-6:30 am—Tongues, 6:30-7:30 am—Meditation on Song of Solomon 1:2)

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

15

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

■ INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the topic of the infilling of the Spirit and receiving tongues. As you enter into this new module, it is important to understand what God has made available to you by the Holy Spirit. If you are unfamiliar with the Spirit and tongues, the following sections will inspire you to embrace all that God has for you. If you are active in praying in the spirit, you will be inspired to pursue fresh infillings of the Spirit and learn to impart the Spirit to others!

The following sections will break down the topic of the infilling of the Spirit by defining what it is, exploring its prominence and impact in the early Church, and connecting it to praying in tongues. The last portion of the chapter will focus on Jesus' promise for all believers to pray in tongues and give practical advice on how to receive tongues for the first time. My summary perspective is that all believers can pray in tongues, there are multiple infillings of the Spirit available and necessary for spiritual growth, and that tongues are a significant gift from God that is worth pursuing.

THE INFILLING OF THE SPIRIT

DEFINITION

“For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”—Acts 1:5

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”
—Acts 1:8*

The infilling of the Spirit is synonymous with the baptism of the Spirit and refers to specific moments when the Spirit releases an increase of His presence and power in and on a believer. The Holy Spirit comes into our spirit-man and resurrects it at salvation, so in one sense we have the Spirit after that moment. But the infilling of the Holy Spirit is when He fills, not just our spirit-man, but our souls and bodies, and then He rests upon us to minister in greater power. Another way to say it is that the Spirit came to live in us at salvation, but we become immersed (baptized) in Him, and have greater empowerment to walk in Him at the infilling experience.

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”—Luke 24:49

The infilling of the Spirit is the “Promise of the Father” that Jesus emphasized during His earthly ministry and right before His ascension. Jesus said that it was better for Him to go to heaven so He could send the Spirit and fill His people!¹ The Holy Spirit’s union with the Church through the infilling experience is the catalyst of the New Testament Church.

The central theme of the book of Acts is the Spirit’s power upon the church to witness to the nations. This theme is summarized in Acts 1:8 and then highlighted throughout the book as believers were filled with the Spirit and operated in power. Acts 2 is the climax of the

¹ John 16:7.

book in which the “Promise of the Father” was released to God’s people who were waiting in prayer. The first church was birthed at the infilling of the Spirit, and everything in the church and the book of Acts flowed from that place.

The theme of the Holy Spirit in Acts reveals God’s passion for the Spirit and how central He should be in the Church. The Spirit, the infilling, and tongues have been said to be divisive or optional topics, but Acts shows us that they are vital topics. Experiencing more of God’s presence and power isn’t limited to the infilling and tongues. Bible study, meditation, purity, and others are necessary as well, but these Holy Spirit topics (infilling and tongues) are unique and central to God’s long-term plans of bringing us into fullness.

■ MY INFILLING EXPERIENCE

The infilling of the Spirit and praying in tongues has been a catalyst in my life since college. I’ve had several defining moments with God, but one of the most significant ones was being filled with the Spirit. As I look back on that day, I know that it changed my life and set me on a new spiritual trajectory.

My journey to receiving tongues started when I went to a Holy Spirit conference as a newer believer. The preacher taught on the infilling of the Spirit and the power of tongues and said, “Pray in tongues for thirty minutes a day and it will change your life.” I was interested in tongues after that conference, but it wasn’t until the end of that year that I seriously pursued it. At the end of that year, for about a month, I asked for tongues every night. I knelt on my bed, put my face in my pillow, and asked God to fill me with His Spirit. As I prayed each night, I tried to speak something out, but I never sensed God’s presence or any kind of flow in tongues.

At the end of that month of praying, I began a fast for my college campus. As I prayed into my pillow that first night of the fast, I felt God’s presence on me and I began having syllables come to my mind. When I stepped out in faith and spoke out the syllables, I felt God’s presence on my body like heat. I began to be overwhelmed with God’s heart and wept for my campus. For the first time, I started receiving prophetic images in my mind; they were of students participating in sin or being depressed and broken. With each new image, a fresh weeping would come over me. Though speaking in tongues felt weird to me in the experience, I continued speaking out the few syllables that were flowing to my mind.

I didn't have a theology for everything that happened in that prayer time, but I knew that something had shifted in me, and I noticed immediate fruit in my life. I began experiencing God's felt presence more often and in stronger ways. My desire to live more focused on Jesus and be in the Word increased. Conviction of sin and sincere longing for righteousness increased, and I began a journey of walking in the gifts of the Spirit.

BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS – INFILLING AND TONGUES

There are five stories in the book of Acts that recount infillings of the Spirit. These accounts show us that the infilling of the Spirit (1) can be distinguished from the salvation experience, (2) is a discernible experience, (3) and is connected to receiving tongues. These accounts also show us the high value the apostles placed on the infilling experience in that they promoted it and made sure others were aware of it wherever they ministered. These five testimonies continue the Acts 1:8 theme of the Spirit filling and empowering believers to be witnesses to the nations.

The first story is in Acts 2:1-4. The 120 disciples were already saved and some of them had already received the Holy Spirit.² However, in this encounter, they were filled with more of the Spirit. This encounter was discernible in many ways and the result was them speaking in tongues.

The second story is in Acts 8:5-17. Because of Phillip's preaching and miracles, multitudes in the city of Samaria gave their lives to Jesus and were baptized in water. Days or weeks later, John and Peter made the 35-mile trip to help minister to the new believers. The story infers that when they arrived, they perceived or understood by questioning the people that they hadn't yet received the infilling of the Spirit. It says that they had only been baptized in Jesus' name. This means that John and Peter cared enough about the infilling experience to ask about it, didn't assume it happened at their water baptism, and weren't worried about offending or confusing the new believers by offering more of the Spirit. The apostles laid hands on them, and they were filled in a discernible experience; visible enough for Simon to see it and want the same impartation power. Tongues are not mentioned in this story, but it's fair to believe it happened because of the pattern outlined in Acts.

² John 20:22.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The third account is in Acts 9:3-18 where Paul gave his life to Jesus in a supernatural encounter and was blinded for three days while he fasted and prayed. Jesus sent Ananias to prophesy, release healing, and specifically pray for Paul to be filled with the Spirit even though he was probably already saved. This experience isn't detailed, but I assume Paul's infilling experience was as discernible as his healing. Also, tongues are not mentioned in this account, but it's safe to assume it happened at the same time because of the pattern outlined in Acts and because he referred to praying in tongues in his writings. In continuation of the Acts 1:8 theme, Paul immediately went out transformed and in power as a witness to the Jews in Damascus.

The fourth account is in Acts 10:44-48. While Peter was preaching the gospel to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit fell in a recognizable way, and they all spoke with tongues. In this experience, their salvation experience was coupled with the infilling of the Spirit. Notice that Peter and his friends specifically highlighted the gift of the Spirit and the infilling of the Spirit in the moment, not their salvation. This story is significant because these were the first known Gentiles to receive the gospel and the gift of the Spirit with tongues.

The fifth story is in Acts 19:1-6 in which Paul met some disciples in Ephesus. Paul assumed they were believers in Jesus, and the first question He asked is whether they had been filled with the Spirit yet. He didn't assume they received the Spirit at their salvation, and he wasn't worried about offending or confusing them. Paul cared about the infilling of the Spirit because this was the promise of the Father to the New Testament Church!

After questioning them, he realized they hadn't heard the full gospel yet, so he led them to Jesus, baptized them, and then prayed for them in a distinct way for the infilling of the Spirit. The Spirit came upon them in a discernible way and then all twelve of them spoke in tongues and prophesied. This story is significant because as you read the rest of it, Paul and these Spirit-empowered disciples brought Ephesus into a mighty revival that turned the entire region upside down. I believe Luke wove the disciples' infilling experience into the Ephesus revival account to highlight the Acts 1:8 theme of the Spirit filling and empowering believers to be witnesses.

MULTIPLE INFILLINGS

EPHESIANS 5 – KEEP BEING FILLED

Besides the initial infilling of the Spirit, there is an ongoing invitation to be filled with fresh or greater measures of the Spirit. Paul said, “*And do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*”³ In Greek, the verb “be filled” emphasizes an ongoing activity as opposed to a one-time action. In his Ephesians commentary, John Stott explains it this way:

“In the Greek there are two kinds of imperative, an aorist describing a single action, and a present when the action is continuous. Thus, when Jesus said during the wedding reception in Cana, ‘Fill the jars with water’ (Jn 2:7), the imperative is aorist, since the jars were to be filled only once. But when Paul says to us, ‘Be filled with the Spirit’, he uses a present imperative implying that we are to go on being filled. For the fullness of the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience which we can never lose, but a privilege to be renewed continuously by continuous believing and obedient appropriation.”⁴

As you grow in friendship with the Holy Spirit, you can receive consistent refreshings of His presence and power that renew godly desires, break off lust, apathy, and confusion, and empower you to move in the gifts of the Spirit. These fresh fillings may be small moments where you sense God’s power touching you, or they may be more intense experiences, but every experience is empowering.

ACTS – SECONDARY INFILLINGS

There are a few examples of these smaller infilling experiences in the book of Acts. In each of the following stories, the word “filled” in the original language is a verb, meaning

³ Ephesians 5:18.

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 209.

an action is taking place at the moment.⁵ In other places in Acts, leaders are described as being “full” of the Spirit, in which case the original language is using an adjective to communicate they had received the Holy Spirit.⁶ So there is a differentiation between the words “filled” and “full” as you read the stories.

In Acts 4, Peter was touched by the Spirit and filled in a fresh way to empower him to speak boldly and prophetically to the religious leaders.⁷ In Acts 13, the Spirit filled Paul to speak prophetically and release blindness on Elymas the Sorcerer.⁸ Later in the chapter, the Spirit filled Paul and Barnabas again resulting in joy amid persecution, “*And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*”⁹

ACTS 4 – ANOTHER CORPORATE INFILLING

The apostles had multiple experiences with the Holy Spirit, and each one released a greater experience of the Spirit’s presence and power in their lives. They had the Holy Spirit, but at the same time, they asked for more of Him and never saw it as a contradiction or a lack of faith in what they had already received. The apostles first received the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed upon them after His resurrection.¹⁰ Then at Pentecost, they were filled even more with the Spirit. In Acts 4, which was one or two years later, they experienced another corporate infilling.¹¹ The Spirit shook their house, freshly filled them, and launched them into a season of greater presence and power. The supernatural fruit of their infilling is revealed in Acts 4:31-5:16: power evangelism, boldness, unity, radical giving and sacrifice, fear of the Lord, salvations, signs and wonders, and crowds being healed and delivered. What we learn from the Biblical accounts is that God always has more of His Spirit or fresh touches available to every believer. For some, the first step to receiving more of God’s Spirit is the initial infilling of the Spirit with God activating tongues and the other power gifts of the Spirit. For those that have already had an initial infilling experience,

⁵ Strong’s Greek #4130 - <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/4130.html> Strong’s Greek #4137 - <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/4137.html>

⁶ Acts 6:3, 11:24; Strong’s #4134 - <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/4134.html>

⁷ Acts 4:8.

⁸ Acts 13:8-12.

⁹ Acts 13:52.

¹⁰ John 20:22.

¹¹ Acts 4:31.

God wants you to believe and ask for fresh infillings of the Spirit that impart a fresh or greater presence and power.

■ ALL BELIEVERS CAN PRAY IN TONGUES

It is important to have clarity on whether all believers can pray in tongues. I've seen people give up on pursuing tongues when it didn't happen right away because they assumed they were not one of the people God had chosen to have it. But if they had more understanding from the Bible, they might have continued the pursuit with the expectation that they would receive it. Below are the five reasons why I believe all believers can receive tongues from the Holy Spirit.

OUR SPIRITUAL DNA

We are first spirit beings, and tongues activate our spirit-man to communicate directly with God. God is Spirit, we are spirit, and tongues allow our spirit-man to lead our thoughts and emotions in prayer. I believe God wants all of us to be able to commune with Him spirit to Spirit and for all of us to have our spirit-man leading our minds and emotions in prayer. Within this perspective, praying in tongues is simply an expression of our identity and DNA as spirit beings.

This foundational perspective changes the conversation about tongues. No longer is the first question if God wants to give tongues, but rather, does God want to relate to every believer spirit to Spirit? I think the answer is yes, God wants the benefits of praying in tongues to be experienced by all.

The second reason I believe all believers can receive tongues is that Jesus said that all His followers would speak in new tongues, along with healing the sick and casting out demons.¹² Jesus connected tongues with things that every believer is anointed to operate in through the power of the Spirit. As an outworking of Jesus' promise, all the Acts accounts that include tongues indicate that everyone received it: the 120 in the upper room, Paul in Damascus, everyone in Cornelius' household, and the 12 disciples in Ephesus received tongues.

¹² Mark 16:17-18.

PERSONAL VS. CORPORATE

The third reason is that praying in tongues is different from the corporate gift of tongues and interpretation. Some people automatically assume they are the same, but Paul distinguishes them in 1 Corinthians 14. Personal tongues are for all believers at any time, are for personal edification, are spoken to God, and don't need interpretation.¹³ Corporate tongues are for all believers to some level but are only released in the timing of the Spirit,¹⁴ are for corporate edification, are spoken to people, and need interpretation to edify others as a prophetic word. Most of 1 Corinthians 14 is focused on bringing right order and humility in the context of the corporate gift of tongues in the context of a corporate gathering.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

My experiences and the experiences of others are not equal to the Bible, but they are worth considering in this topic. In over 15 years, I have seen thousands of believers operating in personal tongues in prayer, and I've seen several hundred receive the infilling of the Spirit with tongues. Out of all the experiences, I have only seen a small number of people not immediately receive tongues after a discernible experience with the Spirit. Most of those people received tongues later after some practical coaching and prayer that unlocked their hearts.

■ HOW TO RECEIVE TONGUES

ASK GOD UNTIL

Ask God for tongues with persistence until you receive it. In Jesus' teaching on asking for the Spirit, He said to come with persistence and to ask, seek, and knock until the door was opened.¹⁵ You might receive the Spirit and tongues within seconds of asking, or you might have to ask several times; just stay with it because He wants to give it to you!

Asking for it is proactive, which is what God desires. Some people believe that God will fill them with the Spirit when He wants to without them pursuing it at all. God can do

¹³ 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 5, 18, 28.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:11.

¹⁵ Luke 11:8-13.

that, but it's more Biblical to say that we have to desire it, ask for it, and pursue it. Three times in 1 Corinthians 14 alone, Paul said that our part is to desire and pursue the gifts of the Spirit zealously.¹⁶

Study the Bible on the topic of the infilling of the Spirit and tongues to get clarity, stir your hunger, and remove any unbelief. If you've grown up with teachings against it or have had any personal reservations on the topic, personal study and responding to the truths you see will open your heart to receiving it when He does fill you.

RECEIVE PRAYER

I recommend having others who've received the Holy Spirit lay their hands on you and pray for an infilling. The pattern in Acts was for people to lay hands on others to receive the Holy Spirit and tongues. Laying on of hands was also Jesus' method of releasing God's power.

Have them ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and then have them pray in tongues out loud. In the prayer time, focus your attention on God, and be aware of how His presence touches you. You don't have to experience a lot, but most times there's a clear presence that comes (gentle presence, heat, tears, joy, or peace). When receiving prayer, do not feel pressure to make anything up or copy their syllables; just wait for God to touch you.

SPEAK OUT

When others pray over you or when you're by yourself, open your mouth and speak if you feel God moving in you and sense syllables come to mind. If you don't feel anything stirring in you, don't feel like you need to speak anything out. In my experience, I felt a small urge to speak out, and then I had a few syllables to speak. There will be some level of flowing in tongues, but you will have to step out in faith to some degree when it first comes. As in the Acts accounts, there will be a deeper sense of worship and thanksgiving coming out of you when you speak in tongues.

With others praying over you, there is the freedom to quietly speak out the syllables that are coming to you without feeling the pressure of knowing if tongues are flowing or not. I remember it feeling good to my heart, but feeling weird and foreign to my mind,

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:1, 12, 39.

so I suggest speaking out the few syllables that flow to you. If there is no flow of tongues whatsoever and no discernable presence of God, keep waiting on God in the prayer time and then try again later if needed.

In my opinion, you can receive tongues in an experience but struggle to verbalize it. If you and the others felt God touching you with His presence, there's a good chance you did receive the Holy Spirit and tongues. Some people need extra time and coaching to step out in praying the tongues that they received in the prayer time. If this is you, take time every day to wait on God and then speak out any syllables that come to your mind and see if you feel more of a flow in tongues than before.

GROW IN IT

After you receive it, set aside time to pray and sing in tongues every day. Once you have tongues, you don't have to wait for another experience to pray in tongues. You can do it whenever you choose because your spirit-man has been activated in it. Praying every day will help you cultivate a new flow in prayer and build your faith in the truth of tongues.

HINDRANCES TO RECEIVING TONGUES

The first thing I've seen hinder hungry believers from receiving tongues is past unbiblical theology that believed tongues were demonic or not for today. Past beliefs can create fear and unbelief. When someone isn't receiving tongues and they share their past beliefs, I lead them in repenting and agreeing with the truth of tongues for today. If they are unsure of their beliefs, I ask them to study the verses on the infilling and the verses from 1 Corinthians 14 until they're ready to repent and pray again.

The second hindrance is a wrong expectation of what will happen when tongues are received. Some people expect God to take over their body and mouth to speak in tongues. Even with my intense infilling experience and others I've witnessed, there is usually conscious participation to speak out what is bubbling inside. When this assumption is there, it creates passivity and doesn't allow for their personal participation. Sometimes this perspective is there because people sincerely don't want it to be fake. In this situation, it is helpful to coach people through participating with their mouths in faith when there is some level of bubbling up inside.

The third hindrance is an intellectual struggle of unbelief that requires repentance and surrendering to God's ways. Some people want more of God in tongues, but the "foolishness" of the simplicity of "babbling" in tongues is a stumbling block to them. God's ways are foolishness to the minds of men and praying the same unknown syllables repeatedly is probably the clearest expression of this! For those struggling with this, I have them repent and ask God to help them enter into faith in this prayer language.

DON'T GIVE UP

If you have not received tongues, I encourage you to pursue them with all your heart. I've seen it frustrate many people when they haven't received an infilling experience or tongues soon after asking for it. Over time, it seemed like God gave it to everyone but them. To pray for it, or be prayed over several times, became too painful because it never happened, and it affirmed the accusation that God treats them differently. It becomes easier to retreat to the belief system that tongues are not for everyone because it removes the pain of asking God again. I encourage you to challenge this temptation.

The hindrances listed in the above section may be the only things holding you back. But the short delay may also be God's pathway to addressing deeper lies you believe about His Father's heart that loves to give to His children. Maybe He's using the issue of tongues to make you aware that you don't believe in His goodness toward you. If you continue your pursuit of the Spirit with an open heart, God will use the process to further heal you of these lies.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

The initial assignment for this module depends on your current experience with tongues.

1. For those who haven't received an initial infilling of the Spirit and spoken in tongues, journal your thoughts and questions on the topic and study the verses from this chapter. If you feel clear about pursuing the Spirit and tongues after studying, take time this week to ask for it in prayer or receive prayer from others. If it doesn't happen this week, keep pursuing it throughout the module.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

2. If you have received tongues, your assignment is to pray in tongues for 15 minutes a day for at least three days this week. After each prayer time, write down a paragraph of how these prayer times go for you such as if it was easy or difficult, if you sensed God's presence, if you learned how God interacts with you, and if you sensed any benefits from doing it. If 15 minutes is not a challenge to you, consider praying 30-60 minutes every day of the week throughout the module instead.

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PRAYING FROM OUR SPIRIT-MAN

■ INTRODUCTION

There are three essential truths to focus on from this chapter. The first is that praying in tongues is the prayer of our spirit-man. The second truth is that our spirit-man speaks supernatural revelations about God called mysteries or hidden truths. Last, our souls and bodies will come under the influence of the Holy Spirit and our spirit-man as we sow time and effort into tongues. As you focus on the topic of tongues for the next few weeks, give it time to bear fruit in your heart. I trust that as you pray in tongues every day, you will begin to discern moments of alignment and spiritual breakthrough that will encourage you in your prayer journey.

■ MY JOURNEY - CONTINUED

I had my initial infilling of the Spirit experience during my junior year in college. After that, I began praying and singing in tongues regularly, in prayer times, and walking around campus. My spiritual life was noticeably stronger and different in that initial season. Looking back, I can trace the beginnings of many of my giftings and spiritual hunger to that time.

Soon after college, I started Bible school at IHOP in Kansas City. During my first semester, Corey Russell taught a class on intercession in which we prayed in tongues for the first thirty minutes of every class. I had a value for praying in tongues for a few years before this class but praying in tongues that long gave me a higher vision for encountering God in tongues. Many times, God met us in those thirty minutes with deeper cries of intercession, joy, worship, repentance, freedom from lies, praying for one another, and increased revelation during the teaching times. Like the preacher said in college, praying in tongues thirty minutes a day in that class did impact my life.

Before my junior year of Bible school, I read the *Walk of the Spirit* by Dave Roberson. In his story, Dave prayed in tongues several hours a day when he began pastoring full-time. After a few months, God began to release words of knowledge and miracles in his life. I was intrigued by Dave's story and the apostle Paul's references to always praying in the Spirit and speaking in tongues more than anyone, and I decided to try and pray in tongues for a few hours a day for that summer.¹

It was hard in some ways, but God met me in those times and convinced me of the significance of tongues. It became normal for me to cry and long for God's presence consistently while reading the Bible. I learned what small daily spiritual breakthroughs felt like in the Spirit (shifting from operating in my soul to walking in the Spirit).² Also, I started learning how to wait on God in prayer and respond to ebbs and flows of His presence as each hour passed. During those long hours of praying in tongues, I would listen to worship, meditate on a Bible verse, pray through my prayer list, or wait on God in tongues.

For the next few years, I was blessed to be around many leaders and friends who had a history of praying in tongues, which gave me a lot of opportunities to grow by praying in group settings. To this day, praying in tongues for extended times and praying in group settings are still dynamic parts of my prayer life. They are so integral to my communion with God that I cannot imagine my prayer life without them. By experience, testing, and trial and error, I can say that praying in tongues is fruitful and worthy of the pursuit of every believer. Let this next section on the realities of praying from your spirit-man stir your faith to press into tongues even more.

¹ Ephesians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 14:18.

² Galatians 5:16, 18, 25.

WHAT IS PRAYING FROM OUR SPIRIT-MAN?

OUR SPIRIT-MAN PRAYS

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

—1 Corinthians 14:14

I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding.

—1 Corinthians 14:15

Praying in tongues is the prayer of our spirit-man under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is significant because our spirit is the one part of our being (spirit, soul, body) that has experienced the resurrection and is already living in fullness. It has been fully joined to the Holy Spirit, given access to God's heart and throne room, and is able to interact with God spirit to Spirit.³ This means our spirit-man can see, hear, sense, and feel God in the same way as those around His throne room right now. So when our spirit-man prays, it speaks from the place of spiritual clarity and revelation.

When we pray in tongues, our spirit-man is allowed to lead our souls and bodies into the experience of God's life that dwells within it. After sin entered into creation, humans have been wrongly led by the broken and lustful appetites of their souls and bodies. Praying in tongues reverses this broken pattern by allowing our spirit-man to take the initiative in connecting to God and aligning the rest of our being under the inspiration of the Spirit. Our thoughts, emotions, longings, and physical appetites can walk in the Spirit when this happens.

Also, because the make-up of our being is first spiritual, the prayers of our spirit-man are real expressions from the deepest places of our beings. Tongues are not just anointed words that God prays through us as if disconnected from a relationship. They are Holy Spirit-inspired expressions in partnership with what our spirit-man is thinking and feeling in response to what it sees, hears, and senses in the Spiritual realm. These deep expressions are personal thanksgiving, praise, loving adoration, prophecy, and intercession.

³ 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, 6:17; Ephesians 2:6-7, 18; Hebrews 10:19-20.

OUR SPIRIT-MAN SPEAKS TO GOD

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.—1 Corinthians 14:2

But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.—1 Corinthians 14:28

The corporate gift of tongues and interpretation is directed and spoken to people for their edification but praying in personal tongues is directed and spoken to God to bless Him and interact with Him. It's not a superstitious prayer that is disconnected from an authentic conversation with God, and it's not just spoken into the air or the spiritual realm. When we pray with our spirit-man, we talk to God as a person. Our spirit communicates real things to His heart, and God speaks real things to us. When I pray with my spirit-man, I picture God and remind myself that I'm entering into genuine dialogue and heart exchange with God as a person. Rather than "enduring" praying in tongues as a spiritual discipline, we can enter into a deep, enjoyable, and present-tense communion with God.

I led a small group of students one year, and one of the guys seemed to be struggling with our times of praying in tongues as a group. I noticed he just looked at the wall while praying in tongues, so I asked him why. He said he constantly distracted himself while praying in tongues because he thought there was no connection with God. I brought up this idea of picturing and praying to God spirit to Spirit, and it shifted his paradigm and helped him experience intimacy with God in tongues.

OUR SPIRIT-MAN SPEAKS MYSTERIES IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

However, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.—1 Corinthians 14:2

Speaking mysteries in the Spirit is a significant statement that needs to be unpacked and understood. First, Paul says that we pray "in the Spirit." Praying in tongues is mentioned three times in the New Testament, and each time it is referred to as "praying in

the Spirit.”⁴ This phrase means that the Holy Spirit anoints our spirit-man to see and supernaturally perceive God. I love what Corey Russell says about this, “When we pray in tongues, we pray into the realm of the Spirit - the place of revelation where divine mysteries are unlocked and communicated to our spirits. It is true that, as believers, we have the Holy Spirit, but we need to get into the realm of the Spirit.”⁵

In the New Testament, the phrase “in the Spirit” means either a momentary prophetic encounter with the Holy Spirit or a general living in the power of the Spirit. Both meanings have significant implications in the context of praying in tongues. The Apostle John had open visions and heavenly visions in the book of Revelation and described himself as being “in the Spirit.”⁶ Jesus said that King David had an open vision of Jesus in Psalm 110 and called Him Lord “in the Spirit.”⁷ Paul had prophetic encounters with the Holy Spirit about his ministry in each city and referenced being “in the Spirit.”⁸ When we pray in the Spirit, we draw on the Holy Spirit as the Revealer, and He awakens our spiritual senses to the spiritual realm. I believe the things we speak out are prophetic insights that our spirit-man is allowed to perceive in the realm of the Spirit.

Second, Paul says that we “speak mysteries.” Speaking mysteries is not mystical and ethereal; it refers to speaking deep truths of God’s thoughts, emotions, and plans back to Him. In the New Testament, mysteries are purposefully hidden truths about God’s Heart and His plans that He wants to unfold to those who are spiritually hungry. The Greek word for “mysteries” is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It refers to something hidden from the spiritually passive or ungodly, or something profound and worth searching out in partnership with the Holy Spirit.⁹ It never means something that is unsearchable or out of reach.

Paul used the word “mysteries” or “mystery” to describe the revelation of God and His plans through Jesus and the message of the gospel. Paul was a steward of the mysteries of

⁴ Jude 1:20; Ephesians 6:19; 1 Corinthians 14:2.

⁵ Corey Russell, *The Glory Within* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2012), 80.

⁶ Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 17:3, 21:10.

⁷ Matthew 22:43-44.

⁸ Acts 20:22-23.

⁹ Mysteries - Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 11:25, 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7, 4:1, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51; Ephesians 1:9, 3:3-4, 3:9, 5:32, 6:19; Colossians 1:26-27, 2:2, 4:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9, 3:16; Revelation 1:20, 10:7, 17:5, 17:7.

God. He had insight into the mystery of the gospel by revelation, and he preached the mysteries of the gospel to the lost. Paul used the word in context to the glorious realities of Jesus and the gospel that need to be searched out for all eternity: Jesus' marriage to the Church, Jesus' human and divine nature, resurrected bodies, the unification of heaven and earth at Jesus' second coming, Israel's blindness, and the Jews and Gentiles becoming one new man in Christ.

If indeed, you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery..... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.—Ephesians 3:3-5

Let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.—1 Corinthians 4:1

Paul and Jesus also used the word “mysteries” when revealing things to the hungry and hiding them from the passive or ungodly. Jesus spoke in parables so that people had to choose if they were going to pursue greater clarity in conversation with Him or if they were going to walk away from Jesus. God gives the hungry and godly believers insight into the mysteries of His kingdom, but He hides them from the passive and ungodly. To use the language of 1 Corinthians 2, when we pray in tongues, God opens the hidden mysteries and makes them known to us because they are taught by the Spirit and spiritually discerned by us if we are spiritual people.¹⁰

*And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables.
—Mark 4:11*

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, 3:1.

age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.—1 Corinthians 2:7-8

In context to praying in tongues, the word “mysteries” means that our spirit is praying out hidden truths about God’s heart, the glories of the gospel, and God’s eternal plans through Jesus. For example, that means that we can explore the profound, eternal mystery (hidden truth) of our marriage to Jesus by meditating the Bible and praying in tongues. As we do this in each meditation time, we progressively become more aware of the revelation of the mystery by Biblical clarity, thoughts, and emotional experiences with His presence and truth. Praying in tongues with meditation helps us receive from the Holy Spirit because we’re postured to hear and understand Him with our spirit-man instead of our natural man.

WE EDIFY OURSELVES

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.—1 Corinthians 14:4

To be edified means to be built up by the Spirit or to experience the life of the Holy Spirit in a greater measure. Edification is revelation, peace, joy, hope, faith, strength, and righteousness. God releases life and power in us as we engage our spirit in prayer. Paul’s encouragement in 1 Corinthians 14 was for the church to excel in prophecy because it released God’s power to individual hearts. Yet, personal tongues release supernatural power to our souls and bodies in the same way that prophecy does as we speak to others.

Edifying ourselves is a good thing, not a selfish thing because it’s all unto strengthening our friendship with Jesus and abiding in the vine. Resist believing the lie that praying for yourself or focusing on personal spiritual growth is ever wrong. Those edified and flowing in the Holy Spirit (intimacy with God) are the most impactful to other people.

Paul wasn’t devaluing tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, and he emphasized that when he said, “*I thank my God I pray in tongues more than you all.*” He was correcting issues that this specific church had with their corporate use of tongues. He also encouraged them to be zealous for personal edification through tongues and corporate edification through prophecy and the gifts of tongues and interpretation.

BLESS WITH THE SPIRIT-MAN

Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well but the other is not edified.
—1 Corinthians 14:16-17

This phrase highlights the reality that our spirit is expressing something personal to God instead of the idea that the Holy Spirit is just singing through our spirit in an impersonal way. As our spirits experience God’s beauty by the Holy Spirit, we respond with praises back to God. There’s a unique place of worship that our spirits automatically live in that our souls must enter into through prayer progressively. Our spirits are joined to Jesus in His throne room, so they see what the Living Creatures see and have the same praises to declare.

In Acts 2:11, the Apostles were blessing God with their spirits, “*We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.*” In Acts 10:46, Peter heard Cornelius and his household praising God with their spirits after receiving the infilling of the Holy Spirit, “*For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.*” Paul also said we could give thanks well, which means we can pour out our worship of thanksgiving by singing in tongues.

PRAY WITH OUR SPIRIT AND UNDERSTANDING

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.—1 Corinthians 14:14-15

In this passage, understanding refers to our thoughts and emotions, while unfruitful refers to their lack of engaging and experiencing spiritual benefits from tongues. This can happen because our minds don’t automatically engage with God when we pray and sing from our spirit-man. However, we can choose to engage them, and they can be fruitful. Paul encouraged believers to flow between prayer and worship from their spirit-man and their

understanding to bring the most fruitfulness. Combining the two is powerful because our thoughts and emotions were meant to flow in prayer and worship under the leadership of our spirit-man.

PRAY FOR INTERPRETATION

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

—1 Corinthians 14:13

Paul's encouragement to interpret tongues mostly concerns the corporate gift of tongues that are prophetic words to a group. However, asking for interpretation and speaking it out is not necessary regarding personal tongues because it's directed to God and for personal edification. I think it's okay to ask for understanding of what we're praying with our spirit, but not necessary. I believe the interpretation comes naturally to our thoughts and emotions in our prayer times and then progressively throughout the day in these ways and more: receiving revelation in the Word, praying inspired prayers, having spontaneous ideas come to mind throughout the day, clarity and wisdom, and receiving prophetic impressions for others.

I don't believe Paul was worried about interpreting what we say word for word. In 1 Corinthians 14, the Greek word for "interpret" emphasizes communicating a general message instead of a literal word for word translation.¹¹ Unless someone is speaking out an earthly language with clear sentence structures, interpretations of personal tongues are probably only communicating the main ideas God is speaking through the person.

¹¹ Prior, David. *The Message of 1 Corinthians*. The Bible Speaks Today Series (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 240.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

For this week's assignment, pray in tongues for three days or more for at least 15 minutes each time. After each prayer time, journal a few sentences on how it went for you. If you have time and desire or already pray in tongues as a lifestyle, try scheduling 30-60 minutes every day of the week. Wherever you are in your rhythm, stretch yourself for more time and watch how God meets you. If you've not received tongues yet, take the assigned prayer times to pray about and study the topic of tongues from the chapter.

The purpose of these prayer and journal assignments is to build your rhythm and usher you into spiritual breakthrough moments where you feel the life of the Spirit touching you. Once you experience these moments, you'll be encouraged and more excited to keep praying. By reflecting afterward, you will become more aware of how God moves during your prayer times, and you'll be more sensitive to the fruit. Writing down questions and challenges will also help you search them out during this module.

Also, based on 1 Corinthians 14:2, do a simple study on the words "mystery" and "mysteries." On a Bible search website (like www.biblegateway.org), type in one word at a time and review all the verses that have that word. Write down what you learn about the words based on the others verses.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 4: PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT – CHAPTERS 15 & 16

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week’s meeting is to discuss *your most relevant* questions about praying in tongues and process how your daily tongues times are going.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How is your Bible reading, meditation, and prayer list times going, and how is God impacting you through them?
- b. Briefly review your new *Spiritual Pursuits Document*.

2. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Chapter 15 – Discuss your most relevant questions (Bible and practicals) about receiving the Holy Spirit and tongues based on the chapter. Focus on the most helpful questions instead of smaller questions that can be discussed another time.
- b. If you have been praying in tongues, how have those times been going for you based on your journaling? If you haven’t received tongues, discuss your studies and the times you’ve prayed into the topic so far.
- c. Chapter 16 – Discuss your most relevant questions on the chapter, focusing on the idea of praying mysteries with your spirit-man. Discuss your study on the words “mystery” and “mysteries.”

3. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Share how your heart issue has been going this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation. ***Pray in tongues together and ask God to release power to the heart issue.***

4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together.

MEETING NOTES:

17

COMMUNING WITH GOD IN TONGUES

BENEFITS OF PRAYING IN TONGUES

In this chapter, you will read about some of the benefits of tongues and how to commune with God for extended times. The benefits section is first because understanding some of these will help you navigate your prayer times. They will also give you language for what you might experience in your prayer assignments.

HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRATION

We can experience spiritual breakthroughs daily by praying in tongues. A spiritual breakthrough is when you experience a shift from operating out of your soul and body to operating in the Holy Spirit. In these breakthroughs, our thoughts, emotions, wills, and bodies come under the leadership and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a discernible way. Galatians 5 calls it walking in the Spirit.

These breakthroughs usually happen after I pray for fifteen to thirty minutes, but sometimes they happen sooner or later. Many pastors and authors describe similar experiences around that same time frame. In these breakthrough moments, I sense a sudden increase of the Spirit's presence in and around me, and I sense things in my being come into alignment and under His inspiration. I feel various levels of peace, joy, hope, clarity on life, courage, desire for God, longing for righteousness, faith to intercede, Bible verses

come to mind, and I begin operating in the various gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy and healing.

Before these breakthroughs, I either feel okay or weighed down by negative thoughts, emotions, and accusations. Most of the time, all that negative stuff goes away as I pray and come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If I feel levels of fear, anxiety, accusation, or confusion, I know that praying in tongues will break it all off. These kinds of experiences are what convinced me of the power of praying in tongues in my twenties and still give me vision to experience God's inspiration daily.

Outside of these breakthrough moments, there is a general fruit of inspiration in my life from tongues that impacts prayer, worship, Bible study, and ministry to others. Here are some examples. God brings prayers to mind and inspires my emotions in prayer. He inspires spontaneous songs and choruses during worship times. He also gives prophetic impressions for me and others. God releases wisdom and practical strategies for things I'm leading, whether that be ministry or how to disciple my kids in each season. Also, He inspires my emotions with love, joy, peace, and the other fruits of the Spirit.

FAITH, STRENGTH, AND RESOLVE

When I pray in tongues, I feel a progressive increase of faith, strength, and resolve in my heart. Sometimes I feel disconnected from God and experience negative emotions such as anger, fear, and confusion, but things shift in those prayer times. Faith rises within me, and I feel God imparting strength to me. I feel resolve and strength increase to the degree that I feel determined to say no to lies or sin patterns that I didn't have the strength or the resolve to say no to.

In these experiences, I feel my spirit rising in faith to lead and speak to my soul like the Psalmist, "*Why are you downcast, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.*"¹ I speak to my soul from a place of faith and strength and break my agreement with darkness.

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.—1 Corinthians 14:4

¹ Psalm 42:5.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit.—Jude 1:20

To edify oneself has the same meaning as in Jude when he says to build oneself up in the Spirit. The picture of the word is of a building being established on the inside. God strengthens us on the inside and builds up our most holy faith. God's power increases in our thoughts and emotions, and He fills our inner man with supernatural might and fortitude.²

I feel faith regarding who God is, who I am to God, and what He says He's going to do. For example, once when I was driving to my hometown, I prayed in tongues most of the six-hour drive. Driving into town, I felt surges of faith for what God wanted to do in Sioux Falls. The clear feeling of faith and clarity remained for a few days because of that prayer time.

I've had to conquer doubts, fears, and challenges in different seasons when God has directed me into new parts of my calling. In those seasons, I've prayed into the new direction and prayed in tongues for days or weeks at a time. The result has always been a more vibrant faith for what God would do and an inner resolve and emotional strength to walk it out.

SPIRIT OF REVELATION

Praying in tongues releases a greater flow of revelation from the Holy Spirit to my thoughts and emotions. This is the fruit of speaking mysteries with my spirit-man. I experience revelation in understanding the Word and experiencing God as a person.

Often, I pray in tongues when reading the Bible or meditating, and I ask the Holy Spirit to teach me all things. When I do this, phrases stick out to me and expand in meaning. Ideas flow to me as I read and pray, God's Word becomes clearer, and I experience a deeper hunger to know Him in the Word.

God ministers experiential knowledge to my heart in Bible study, meditation, worship, or when praying in the spirit. This is what Paul called the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of God. In these times with the Lord, my thoughts become focused on Him, my emotions feel His emotions, and there's a tangible sense of intimacy and oneness

² Ephesians 3:16.

with Him. The spirit of revelation is a regular experience when praying in the spirit is a lifestyle.

DEEPER EXPRESSION OF PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Praying with my spirit allows me to express the deepest places of my being to God in ways that natural words can't always do. Also, singing in tongues allows me to express the deeper places of gratefulness and praise to God. In praying and singing, I feel like I'm expressing who I am to God, but it also overflows into my thoughts and emotions and inspires them to express themselves in deep ways. My emotions open up to God, and I feel more love and thankfulness for Him.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Praying in the Spirit ushers in all the gifts of the Spirit. Praying in tongues engages our spirit-man and allows the Holy Spirit to flow through us in power. When I pray in tongues, I am more sensitive to God's voice, His leading, the spiritual realm around me, and I'm more conscious of His power moving through me. I have heard this principle said in one form or another in many books and testimonials throughout my life, and I have experienced it myself. When I refocus on praying in tongues, I see more healings, prophecy, words of knowledge, divine appointments, and power in delivering others from demonic strongholds. Because of this, I try to make it a point to pray in the Spirit for extended times before leading worship, preaching, or praying over others.

COMMUNING IN TONGUES

Communing conveys the idea of an intimate sharing of thoughts and emotions with God. In it, God communicates the deep things of His heart, and we share ours in a way that flows back and forth. At the same time, there is a tangible experience of each other's person or presence that goes beyond the verbalizing of ideas. It's a present tense being with God as a person that is more intimate than communicating. Communing is expressing deep things by sharing your presence while communicating can just be verbalizing ideas to another person without intimacy.

The best picture for communing with God is John the Beloved leaning on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper. John talked to Jesus at the table and heard His words, but he also heard

Jesus' heartbeat and felt His physical nearness. Jesus also heard John's words and was able to feel his physical nearness. Between the two of them, there was a communing or sharing of hearts outside of the words they spoke.

In my opinion, Biblical meditation and praying in tongues uniquely postures us to commune with God. As we commune with God in tongues, we get to experience a supernatural flowing from our spirit to His Spirit. The main points in this section give practical ways of connecting and communing with God and giving language to what you might experience in your prayer times. As in meditation, you are learning how God interacts with you in prayer, so be a student of His presence as you read this and apply it to your prayer life.

■ PRACTICALS IN COMMUNING

You can apply the practical instructions below to any praying and singing in tongues times. But the primary context I'm speaking into is longer, focused times in tongues that are directed towards receiving from the Holy Spirit. As you grow in praying for longer periods, you will experience different levels of communion with God. Some of the practical instructions below will make more sense to you during these longer prayer times. Also, there are two stages I refer to in this section (**stage #1 – connecting and stage #2 – revelation**) that give language to the spiritual progression you may experience in your prayer times.

PICTURE GOD

When you pray in tongues, it is really helpful to picture God in your imagination. Our sanctified imaginations are spiritual eyes God has given us to engage with the Spiritual realm.³ Setting your mind on Him will help your understanding be fruitful and will significantly increase the feeling that you're interacting with a real person. Picturing God takes the majority of the effort in prayer, but it's worth it because it's where prayer becomes real.

Personally, I don't feel connected to God as a person or experience the power of tongues until I focus my mind on Him. Once I get focused, there is a small but instant shift inside of me. I liken this effect to putting a car in gear so it can drive forward. You

³ 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:1-2.

can pray in tongues without picturing and engaging God as a person, but it's like pushing the gas pedal and revving the engine when the car is in park. When you connect to Him in your mind and emotions, it's like connecting the engine with the transmission to make the car go.

I set my mind on a picture of God in three different ways: on His throne from Revelation 4, Jesus standing by me from Revelation 1, or the Holy Spirit in my spirit as a glorious light. Throughout your prayer time, refocus your mind on the image of God. Don't feel bad for putting a lot of energy into this. As you do this, the spiritual muscle of picturing Him will become more and more natural.

TALK TO GOD

Remember, when you pray or sing in tongues, you're communicating something real from your spirit to God's heart. So, engage your mind and emotions like it's a real conversation. When you do this, you will experience more intimacy with Him, and you'll feel a greater expression and opening of your own heart.

PRAY AND SING LOUD

I always encourage people to pray and sing loud enough to hear themselves (talking volume or louder). Most new people tend to be quieter, either because they are not confident in tongues or are unsure of how loud they are allowed to speak. I believe there is a spiritual dynamic to praying louder than usual, which helps our faith and heart engage. When I do this, I feel more faith in tongues, and I feel like I'm giving my spirit permission to lead my being in prayer. I suggest praying louder at the beginning of your prayer time and then following the Holy Spirit's current about whether you continue to pray louder or softer.

STAGE #1 – CONNECTING

Usually, for the first 15-30 minutes of praying in tongues, there's what I call the "connecting stage." This is where you focus on gradually connecting to God and getting into the Spirit. During this time, you may feel distracted, uninspired, or feel like you're plowing hard ground spiritually. Don't be discouraged in this stage, and don't stop praying because it's hard. It will shift, and you'll feel God's life flowing through you at any moment.

I suggest alternating between praying in tongues and praying out in your language until you sense God's presence during this stage. I've found that this helps people engage all of themselves in prayer. I suggest focusing your prayers on asking God for revelation and power in your heart, praises, and declarations of truth, or thanking Him for the Holy Spirit in you with language from key New Testament verses.⁴

Keep praying in tongues even if you feel nothing and are distracted. You might not feel anything initially, and you might be distracted, but staying steady in tongues will change your heart within an individual prayer time. Sometimes praying in tongues feels laborious and feels like I'm plowing up hard ground, but it doesn't faze me anymore because it almost always shifts in the prayer time.

PRAY UNTIL THE BREAKTHROUGH

Pray in tongues and commune with God until you feel the tangible shift or spiritual breakthrough in your heart and body. If you are used to praying in tongues for one or two minutes here and there, you won't fully experience the breakthrough moments God has for you through tongues. Again, this breakthrough might happen within a few minutes of prayer, or it might take longer, but it's worth praying into each time.

STAGE #2 – REVELATION

After taking time to connect to God in your heart, you will begin to sense God inspiring your thoughts and emotions progressively with faith, clarity, His manifest presence, and a sweet flowing of tongues. This is the breakthrough moment I described earlier. My interpretation of what's happening in this stage is that our spirit-man is rising inside of us and the rest of our being is starting to come under the leadership of God's Spirit in our spirit. When this happens, it releases supernatural inspiration. Inspiration will usually increase during the prayer time.

Once you step into this stage, you will feel more grace to pray, and it will be more enjoyable. In the connection stage, it can seem like you're going against the wind, but it feels like the wind is pushing you in the revelation stage. At this point, your focus is to commune with God's presence and follow the leading of the Spirit.

⁴ John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10.

SPEAK OUT

Once you feel God inspiring you with His presence and power, pay attention to your thoughts, pictures in your imagination, emotional stirrings, and ways God manifests on you. These may be gentle or strong impressions and stirrings, and God will lead you in what to pray by inspiring you in these areas. Sensing and then speaking out the inspired thoughts and emotions will make you more aware of God's voice, and it will help bring your soul into an agreement with what God is doing in your spirit-man. These inspired areas are probably interpretations of what your spirit-man is praying out. Pray out the thoughts and emotions in your native language as long as you want and flow between tongues and your language.

RESPOND

As you continue to flow between praying out the things God is putting on your heart and praying in tongues, respond to God in anything He reveals to you. As you get into a flow, God will bring revelation of Biblical truths to you, encounter your emotions, convict you of sin, bring you into His prayers, or reveal things for you to do. In whatever He brings up, respond to Him accordingly. As you respond, His presence will often increase and take you deeper into the same things or bring other things to your heart. Also, by responding to Him, you'll become more sensitive to His leadership.

FOLLOW HIS WAVES

The Spirit's presence and power will come and go throughout your prayer time like waves coming and going on a beach. These waves may last a few minutes or longer. They are identified by some of these: an increase of His felt presence, an increase of faith or thanksgiving, or a burden of prayer. As you feel a wave of His presence, respond to it in the way that seems right until you feel the wave withdraw.

Here are some examples of what I experience and how I respond. If I feel His presence and my faith increase like a small surge of power, I naturally pray louder, and my tongues sound a little different. I pray louder and pray ideas out in faith until I feel His wave withdraw. Sometimes, I feel a wave of love, joy, and peace touch me, and I breathe His life in and receive from Him by praying softer and communing with Him. When a wave of intercession comes, I alternate between praying in tongues with the prayer topic in mind and praying in my language.

When you feel the wave of the Spirit withdraw, continue to pray in tongues and engage with Him until you feel another wave. Praying between the waves is like positioning yourself in the water to ride the next good wave. Don't assume that your prayer time is done after one wave because His waves will keep coming if you give Him more prayer time. During the summer that I began praying in tongues for hours, waves of different sizes would come upon me for as long as I was willing to wait on the Lord in prayer. Because of that, I encourage you to stay in prayer as long as you want to wait on the Lord's presence.

■ WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week's assignment is to continue praying in tongues for at least three days (at least 15 minutes) and journal thoughts, questions, and observations from your time. In addition, schedule one day when you can pray in tongues for at least thirty minutes continuously. Observe how God moves on you in your longer prayer time and try to discern if you experience a breakthrough moment (as listed in the *Holy Spirit Inspiration* section). If you do, write down what it felt like and what fruit you experienced afterward.

If you have not received tongues, take the assigned prayer times to continue your study of praying in tongues and pray for the infilling of the Spirit and tongues. Journal your thoughts, questions, and challenges from your prayer and study times to process with your Discipleship Mentor.

18

PRAYING WITH GROUPS

■ INTRODUCTION TO GROUP TONGUES

Praying and singing in tongues with a group of people for extended periods is a powerful but uncommon experience for many that I meet. Even in churches or prayer ministries where tongues is accepted or promoted, it seems less common for there to be a corporate culture of group tongues. Church cultures and rhythms of praying in tongues as groups will increase as individuals grow daily in praying in the Spirit, and as people take initiative to create groups that pray in tongues together so people can experience the power of it. By doing both, faith and testimonies around individual and group tongues will increase, as well as experience and wisdom in moving in the Spirit together.

■ GROUP BENEFITS

The benefits of praying in a group are the same as individual prayer except multiplied and accelerated. This corporate grace applies to anything else in the kingdom because God loves unity and family in the same way that the Trinity is family. Compare the benefits of group tongues with the benefits of a worship team. One person can play guitar and worship in their room and it's impactful, but when that person plays guitar on a full worship team, the dynamics and benefits multiply. With a team, there are multiple sounds that flow together, varieties of spiritual giftings that bring strength, fuller perspectives to discern God's direction in the moment, musicians playing off one another's sounds and

creativity, and going somewhere together in God's heart together, which creates a shared spiritual experience.

STRENGTH AND FAITH

On top of the individual benefits of praying in tongues (faith, strength, resolve, spiritual sensitivity, interpretation of mysteries, and so on), the group dynamic adds strength, group discernment of the Spirit's leading, and a shared experience in God. When we pray together, there is a practical and spiritual strength and faith released to the group to stay focused while believing for more of God's presence. Practically, this happens by seeing each person lean into prayer in the moment. When you're distracted, discouraged, or oppressed, it's strengthening to look at a friend next to you praying in tongues. Spiritually, when more people pray together the Spirit's activity multiplies.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment increases in groups because each person is connecting to God with their spirit-man and becoming spiritually sensitive. When everyone is sensitized to God's presence, each person can speak into what they feel the Spirit highlighting or affirm what others are saying and praying out. This breeds more clarity and confidence around the Spirit's leadership. When there is group agreement, each person is more empowered to enter into the moment.

SHARED EXPERIENCE

The last group benefit is the shared experience in God, which means we all sense, hear, and feel led to respond to God in similar ways in the prayer time. This group encounter leads to spiritual unity and agreement that is deeper and quicker than if someone has to be convinced of a vision or value through teaching. Whether it's direction for the future, the conviction of a sin issue, or a prayer focus, the group has heart agreement because of the Spirit's power. Many times, I've seen groups experience God's heart or perspective over something which resulted in a shared clarity, conviction, resolve, and even practical action steps. Acts 13:1-3 describes this sort of group encounter and the resulting fruit of unity and commissioning.

The process of praying unto a shared experience has two benefits. First, believing for and pressing into the breakthrough moments builds group spiritual resolve long-term.

Second, group discernment of the Spirit's leading teaches those same people how to discern the Spirit's voice and leadership for anything else. My leadership teams know how to discern God's voice for church direction and decisions because they've learned how to follow Him together in group tongues times. I believe this process increases the bond of the Spirit, which is indispensable for a leadership team.¹

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14

Some believers have reservations about group tongues because of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14, but I think those can be resolved. To begin the discussion, it is important to understand that Paul was writing to people that may have been coming from pagan backgrounds that involved demonic trances and speaking or prophesying in demonic tongues. Some of Paul's guidance or corrections were probably addressing spiritual mixture (pagan expressions mixed with spiritual gifts) and their expectations of how the Spirit would manifest on them and through them.

CORPORATE TONGUES VS. PERSONAL TONGUES

The next clarification is that Paul was correcting the corporate use of the gift of tongues and interpretation that are spoken to people during speaking times in corporate gatherings, not prohibiting personal tongues that are spoken to God in prayer and worship times. The four values Paul wanted to see in their corporate gatherings were clarity, edification, submission to church leadership, and honoring one another in the gifts. When he limited tongues to one person at a time and asked for an interpretation, he was addressing people who were climbing over one another to give corporate prophecies in tongues. They had wrong motivations to be seen and heard because of their gifting, and they may not have understood the Spirit's order. Such practices led to confusion in the services, a lack of edification, and possible competition that was dishonoring to others.

Praying in tongues with a group can be celebrated within Paul's values when leaders communicate the values and Biblical perspectives of group tongues. When leaders teach on

¹ Ephesians 4:3

the difference between the gift and personal tongues and establish that everyone is directing their prayers to God, it removes the possible confusion and distractions of Paul's scenario. If the group agrees that they're all speaking to God, there is no confusion as to needing interpretation or only allowing one person to speak at a time. Group tongues honor Paul's values and lead to edification, clarity, submission to leadership, and honoring one another.²

LEADING GROUP PRAYER

These practical suggestions are for people leading focused group times (15 minutes or longer) of praying and singing in the Spirit and can be used for times of waiting on the Spirit, singing, or group intercession. These suggestions are almost identical to the ones from the previous chapter with some nuances that are unique to groups and leadership. Like the previous chapter, I reference the connecting and revelation stages because the goal in leading group prayer times is to envision and guide people into the breakthrough moments.

GIVE DIRECTION

As the prayer time leader, tell the group what the purpose of the prayer time is, how long the prayer time is going to be, how they can engage together throughout the time, and what the breakthrough moments might feel like. During the prayer time, speak out any directions or encouragements that would be helpful for the group. As the leader, you will probably sense when people are distracted or disconnected at different points. The best thing to do is to speak out or pray out short encouragements about the power of tongues and invite them to refocus on God in prayer. People that are newer to praying in groups will probably need consistent guidance and encouragement in prayer times.

PICTURE GOD

Encourage everyone to picture God the entire prayer time (Father on the throne, Revelation 1 Jesus, or the indwelling Holy Spirit). Focusing our hearts on Him in this way creates a much more intimate connection. Whenever you sense people disconnecting in prayer, encourage them to refocus their hearts on that image.

² Acts 2:11, 10:46.

PRAY LOUD

Encourage people to pray loud enough to hear themselves and to feel the freedom to pray louder when they need to or feel an increase of God's power. Praying louder causes us to rise in faith and confidence, which produces a more wholehearted prayer engagement in prayer times. Sometimes, it is helpful to ask people to start out louder to get hearts engaged and overcome any awkwardness of praying in a group setting. There are times when God's presence will move in a prayer time and bring people to silence and quiet tongues, but when that presence is not moving, quiet tongues can indicate that people are disconnecting and lacking faith in what they are doing. In these moments, you can refocus the group by reminding them to picture God, ask them to stand up, and invite them to pray louder as a way of engaging their spirit-man.

STAGE #1 – CONNECTING

I call the first section (15-30 minutes) of prayer time the “connecting stage” because people need to connect to God individually but also as a group. Unity in the Spirit matters in a group context, so everyone needs to engage in prayer and learn how to flow in tongues as a family of believers. The level to which individuals engage in prayer does affect what the others experience in the prayer time. God's presence and power will begin to move and inspire the group as each person intentionally connects to Him.

During this initial stage, ask people to pray in tongues out loud and for people to take turns speaking out prayers in their own language. Both of these help engage hearts and facilitate the process of everyone connecting to God. When people speak out their own prayers, it helps everyone focus and it brings unity to the room. When someone prays out loud and everyone agrees with it in prayer, there is unity in the group's pursuit. This unity of purpose is part of what I mean by connecting to God as a group. The purpose of praying in a group is that you enter into God's heart unified and together in the Spirit.

Instead of praying into your prayer points right away, consider focusing on asking for the spirit of revelation and the Spirit's presence to manifest in the group. I suggest holding off on your prayer list for that time until there is some inspiration from the Spirit in the room. People could also focus prayers on speaking out verses about praying in tongues or thanking God for specific promises and spiritual realities in the Bible. For example, I pray out verses about the Holy Spirit's ministry and presence in me, and then I ask for those to manifest in me in the prayer time. I also pray out the truths of what I'm doing by praying in tongues,

“God, we speak mysteries to You in the realm of the Spirit. We speak the deep things of Your heart back to You from our spirit-man.”

STAGE #2 – REVELATION

After individuals and the group connect to God, there will be an increased sense of God’s presence, faith, and inspired thoughts and prayers. A group context is different from an individual prayer time in that there is teamwork in the realm of the Spirit. Like a worship team, everyone in a group prayer time has a role to play, and everyone needs to flow together in prayer to walk in the Spirit and experience spiritual breakthroughs. When the Spirit begins moving in the group, He will use each person to release spiritual impartation, lay hands and pray, and release confirmation to others concerning what God is doing in the group.

Direct people to speak out the prayers (their native language) that are stirring in their hearts because many of these will be inspired by the Holy Spirit to guide the prayer time. I believe that these inspired thoughts and prayers are interpretations of the mysteries that people were praying out with their spirit-man just minutes before. If others are being stirred with the same thing, they can pray out loud in the same vein one person at a time. If you want the group to stay on a prayer topic longer, or respond in a certain way, speak out about what you’re feeling and guide the group.

As in individual prayer times, these breakthrough moments may lead to praying, declaring truth in place of lies, the conviction of sins, or encountering God emotionally. As various ones sense God’s life moving in them, encourage them to fully express it to God. This allows the group to support them in prayer and maybe even step into the experience with them.

FOLLOW HIS WAVES

The Holy Spirit’s presence and power will come in waves, and the group will respond to Him by praying louder and responding with clarity. If needed, encourage people to fully express themselves in volume, words, or physical posture. When a wave of the Spirit pulls back, people will naturally respond by praying quieter. If needed, encourage people to continue responding to what God just did in that wave of His presence if they feel the desire to; otherwise, encourage them to continue in tongues while waiting for another wave. After the first wave, the group will naturally flow in tongues and enjoy it, so these

secondary waiting times are enjoyable and serve to stoke the flame the Holy Spirit just awakened. The Spirit may even continue to touch people during these calmer moments.

GROUP SINGING IN TONGUES

I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.
—1 Corinthians 14:15

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.—Ephesians 5:18-19

Singing in a group has all the same dynamics as praying in a group, but two unique dynamics are singing simple melodies together and singing choruses together. As the leader, guide people by singing in tongues to a very simple melody or by asking a singer in the group to do this. Guide people to listen to the melody and then to sing in tongues in a way that flows well with the lead singer.

Once there is a flow in worship, invite people to sing out the praises in their hearts from their understanding. They can sing out loud to themselves, or they can sing loud enough for everyone to hear. Spontaneous singing will naturally lead to people making short choruses for everyone to sing together. Follow these choruses as one way that God will lead the group.

INTERCESSION IN TONGUES

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.—Ephesians 6:18

In this well-known passage on prayer and spiritual warfare, Paul encouraged believers to always pray in the Spirit in intercession and supplication. We can assume Paul did this as a lifestyle and knew its power. Interceding in tongues is easier than only praying from our understanding, it is unifying for a group, and it connects us to faith and the will of

God in our prayers. In context to the topic of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6, interceding in the Spirit helps us persevere in prayer and connects us to the prophetic spirit for our prayer topics, which is what being watchful refers to.

INDIVIDUAL INTERCESSION

Most of your intercession can be done by praying in tongues. If you're praying through your prayer list by yourself, bring one prayer point to mind and then pray in tongues. Intermittently, pray out the prayer point in your own language. Faith, clarity, and emotions will grow as you continue to pray out. If tongues are easily flowing out of you and you're feeling an increased burden from God in prayer, feel free to speak out your own prayers as much as you want.

Give full expression to what you feel inside during intercession, and don't hold anything back. When you intercede in tongues, you're allowing the deepest place of who you are to express itself to God. Your emotions will often be opened in this process, and you'll feel the desire to pray louder or cry under the prayer burden that God is giving you.³

GROUP INTERCESSION

Depending on how much time you have for your prayer time, take time to connect to God in tongues before praying through your prayer list. Then, as the leader, let people know when you're transitioning to interceding as a group. Have people take turns praying out their prayers and encourage everyone else to continue praying out loud in tongues while staying focused on the current person's prayers. Also, encourage people to intermittently speak out phrases from the current person's prayers. Keeping the one praying in mind and speaking out their phrases increases unity in the group.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

This week's assignment is to pray in tongues with a group for at least 30 minutes. After the prayer time, reflect with the group and write down your observations of how it went, what you experienced, and any practical questions you have. You may or may

³ Romans 8:26.

PRAYING WITH GROUPS

not love group tongues right away, but like everything else, give it a few months before you evaluate it. Also, if you've had reservations about praying in tongues out loud or reservations about group tongues because of statements in 1 Corinthians 14, bring them for discussion with your Discipleship Mentor and study the verses together. For those who are studying tongues or asking for it, it is still beneficial to join the group tongues times. Being around people engaging in tongues is a great way to learn about it or ask for it, and you can still join in the prayers. If you don't feel comfortable doing that, talk with your Discipleship Mentor about your desires and then you could take that time to continue studying and praying about the topic.

DISCIPLESHIP MEETING GUIDE

MODULE 4: PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT – CHAPTERS 17 & 18

MEETING FOCUS:

The purpose of this week's meeting is to process your praying in tongues time and to pray about your heart issue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. ***Spiritual Pursuits:***

- a. Practically, how is your prayer schedule going? How many days have you walked out your prayer schedule? Do you need to make small changes to your schedule? How are your Bible reading, meditation, and prayer list times going, and how is God impacting you through them?

2. ***Chapter Questions:***

- a. Chapter 17 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions from the chapter. Share how your 30-minute tongues time went and discuss the idea of experiencing breakthrough moments. Do you understand the idea, and have you experienced a breakthrough moment before?
- b. If you have been praying in tongues, how have those times been going for you based on your journaling? If you haven't received tongues, discuss your studies and the times you've prayed into the topic so far.
- c. Chapter 18 – Discuss your journaled thoughts and questions from the chapter. What was the most helpful Biblical perspective or practical suggestion for group prayer times? Do you have reservations about praying in tongues in groups?

3. ***Heart Issue:***

- a. Share how your heart issue has been going this past week. With heart issue discussions, process, confess, encourage, and pray together for God to release transformation. ***Pray in tongues together and ask God to release power to the heart issue.***
4. Briefly review the assignments for the next two weeks together. This is not necessary if you are having a group gathering to introduce the next module topic.

19

DIFFERENT USES FOR TONGUES

■ INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on how praying in tongues can be used in various individual and group contexts. Praying from our spirit-man can be integral to every aspect of our relationship with God and can bear fruit in every situation. As you read this chapter, write down some of the ways you could integrate tongues into your life. The last section highlights some testimonies of well-known historical leaders to encourage you in your daily lifestyle.

■ SEEKING DIRECTION

Praying in tongues is one of the main ways I seek God's direction for small or large decisions in my life (practical needs, family, job, ministry, and life-calling-related decisions). Praying mysteries to God with our spirit-man includes praying out prophecies about our future, which is God's will or God's plan for our lives.

As we pray out God's plans for our lives in tongues, our minds and emotions become aware of those plans, agree with them, and live them out. Paul prayed for believers to be

filled with the awareness of God's plans through wisdom and spiritual understanding.¹ I believe the spiritual understanding Paul prayed about refers to prophetic insight that comes by engaging the Holy Spirit in prayer.

When necessary, I start by scheduling special times to do nothing else but pray in tongues to ask God for direction. I prefer having an hour or more scheduled each time so that I have time to get deeply connected to God and quiet my mind. I pray in tongues while holding my request firmly in my mind before God. I ask God for direction, sometimes silently, sometimes aloud, while also journaling any thoughts or pictures that come to mind. During one of these intentional prayer times, clear thoughts come to mind about what I'm supposed to do, and if they do not, I pray until they do.

Out loud, I pray the thoughts or images that come to mind back to God in English and ask Him if this is what He's speaking to me. I do this intermittently as I continue to pray in tongues. If peace and agreement in my heart increase and God's presence increases on me while speaking the impressions back to Him, I feel more confident that what I'm sensing is from God. If these don't increase while speaking the impressions back to Him, I write them down and go back to just praying in tongues until more clarity comes to mind. At some point, I sense clarity and God bearing witness to what I'm feeling to the degree that I can move forward.

SEEKING STRATEGY

I regularly seek God's plans and strategies for my life, my marriage, parenting, finances, and ministry. Similar to praying for direction, I pray in tongues with my topic in mind before the Lord for one prayer time, or more if needed. With the topic of parenting as my example, I pray in tongues while, in my mind, I ask God how to parent and disciple my daughter in this season of her life. I speak out my questions and prayers and ask for His ideas and strategies.

As I do this, more prayer points or questions come to mind to talk to Him about. I take as much time as I want to pray into the prayer points for my daughter or to wrestle with God over questions I have about her heart and life. Usually, some ideas, timelines, goals, and approaches start coming to mind while praying. Sometimes they all come at once like

¹ Colossians 1:9.

a download of clarity, other times they come slowly throughout the prayer time. Either way, I take time to write them down. Not only do the ideas come, but I feel God impart strength, faith, and excitement to my heart to carry out the ideas.

SEEKING REVELATION

I pray in tongues for revelation about Bible verses that I'm meditating on or studying, and I seek revelation to interpret dreams and prophetic words. If I'm talking to God about a verse, I pray in tongues out loud and ask Him for insight and experience of the truth until ideas start to flow to my mind and emotions. Sometimes I pace and pray out the verses and pray in tongues for a few minutes and then go back to my Bible, and things become clearer. Other times, I pray in tongues and study something for weeks until understanding comes. I ask, seek, and knock on the door of revelation until the Bible verses begin to open to my understanding. Lack of clarity in the Bible does not usually mean we're supposed to move on; it means we're supposed to lean into the Holy Spirit to give Him time to teach us.

Also, God gives me more understanding in interpreting dreams and testing prophetic words when I pray in tongues. When I'm interpreting a dream, I read the whole dream and pray in tongues until I sense clear thoughts come regarding the dream's overall theme or meaning. Then, I slowly read the dream and pray in tongues to interpret specific sentences where I feel God's presence.

I test prophetic words through prayer, Bible study, and community.² For the prayer portion of the testing, I read the prophecy and pray in tongues with the words in mind. If I feel God's presence increase on me and feel clarity concerning the prophetic words, I take that as God encouraging me that it's from Him or at least an encouragement to continue the testing process. I put the prophetic words to the side if I don't feel either of these things from God. If I feel like it's from God, I continue to pray in tongues until I feel ways to respond to God in my heart and prayer.

² Testing prophetic words and dreams also takes Bible study and community. See if the prophecy is Biblical and carries God's heart as a Father or if any Bible verses help interpret. Use your Church community to pray and sense with you if it is God, and what it might mean. This includes prayer, study, and discussion.

BREAKING DEMONIC SWIRLS

Praying and singing in tongues is my first response to break off demonic swirls of accusation and oppression. A demonic swirl is when you feel an overwhelming amount of accusation in your mind and physical darkness over your body. The swirl might catch you up in specific fears, confusion, insecurities, rejection, hopelessness, anger, or sinful temptations. These might be intense experiences where you feel like you can't resist, or just powerful enough to hinder you from feeling and thinking normally for the day. Praying and singing in tongues is powerful in combating this because demonic swirls try to weigh you down and get you to live from your soul, not your spirit-man. Tongues cause your spirit-man to rise up, and they fill your heart with faith and might.

I have to choose to engage in prayer and worship; otherwise, the swirl will only intensify. I pray and sing in tongues and declare truth back to God in direct opposition to the swirl that I'm feeling in the moment until I feel completely free from the demonic swirl. In between praying in tongues and declaring truths, I rise up in faith and rebuke every demon that's attacking me. I know I've broken through the demonic swirl when I feel a dark presence lift off me, feel God's presence rest on me, and feel my thoughts and emotions calm down and feel control over them. I encourage you not to settle for just feeling better in these moments, but to pray and worship until you feel like you're thriving on the inside by the Spirit's power.

HISTORICAL TESTIMONIES

These are three encouraging testimonies of the power of tongues as a lifestyle and ministry value. These individuals, among many more, were shaped and fueled in their well-known ministries because of their aggressive lifestyle of praying in tongues. These testimonies, along with the apostle Paul's emphasis and fruit from tongues, have stirred my faith and helped me press into it as an intentional lifestyle. Let these bolster your faith as you continue to learn about the Biblical value of tongues and grow in it during your daily life.

JOHN G. LAKE

John G. Lake was marked by the infilling of the Spirit and praying in tongues. He lived in the early 1900s, and his ministry's fruit still inspires believers today to reach for more

of the power of God. Throughout his life, he planted many churches, multiplied leaders in Africa, was a powerful preacher, and saw hundreds of thousands of people healed and delivered from demons. John said this about his famous ministry, “I want to talk with the utmost frankness and say to you that tongues have been to me the making of my ministry. It is that peculiar communication with God when God reveals to my soul the truth I utter to you day by day in my ministry.”³ John credited his intimacy with God and his healing power to the communion he experienced with God while praying in tongues.

John went on to describe the fruit that he saw in his own life. “I went into fasting and prayer and waiting on God for nine months. And one day, the glory of God in a new manifestation and a new incoming came to my life. And when the phenomena had passed, and the glory of it remained in my soul, I found that my life began to manifest in the varied range of the gifts of the Spirit, and I spoke in tongues by the power of God, and God flowed through me with a new force. Healings were of a more powerful order. Oh, God lived in me, God manifested in me, God spoke through me. My spirit was deified, and I had a new comprehension of God’s will, new discernment of spirit, new revelation of God in me.”⁴

SMITH WIGGLESWORTH

Smith Wigglesworth, one of the most influential healing revivalists from the early 1900s, was also changed when he received the Holy Spirit. After speaking in tongues, his preaching became anointed, healings increased, and preaching on the Holy Spirit became one of his primary life messages.⁵ “It is a wonderful thing to pray in the Spirit and to sing in the Spirit, praying in tongues and singing in tongues as the Spirit of God gives you utterance. I never get out of bed in the morning without having communion with God in the Spirit. It is the most wonderful thing on earth. It is most lovely to be in the Spirit when you are dressing, and you come out to the world and the world has no effect on you. You begin

³ Roberts Liardon, *John G. Lake: The Complete Collection of His Life Teachings* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1999), 373.

⁴ Liardon, *John G. Lake: The Complete Collection of His Life Teachings*, 372.

⁵ Smith Wigglesworth, *Greater Works* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1999), 186.

the day like that, and you will be conscious of the guidance of the Spirit right through the day.”⁶

JACKIE PULLINGER

Jackie Pullinger, a well-known evangelist to heroin addicts in Hong Kong since the 1960s, said that praying in tongues changed her life and became the foundation of her ministry. She saw very little fruit in her ministry when she began her work in Hong Kong, but after receiving tongues and praying in the Spirit for fifteen minutes a day for weeks, she started leading people to Jesus. “After about six weeks, I noticed something remarkable. Those I talked to about Christ believed. Now I found that person after person wanted to receive Jesus. At my conversion, I had accepted that Jesus had died for me; now I began to see what miracles He was doing in the world today.”⁷

Jackie worked with heroin addicts and soon discovered that the horrible withdrawal symptoms could be entirely cured by praying in tongues. At the time of writing her book, she had discipleship houses where young boys could receive Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and be delivered from heroin addictions. Without fail, if the boys would trust her and pray in tongues, the withdrawal symptoms would never come, and they would be free of the addiction within several days. If they did not pray in tongues, the withdrawal symptoms would increase until they laid down their pride and prayed in tongues.

Soon, some of the boys who were set free stayed in discipleship houses to coach other boys. “In another sense, the work became easier and easier because the boys who had come off drugs themselves were very good at helping the ‘new boys.’ They happily cooked meals and did housework, and they had endless patience. They sat with the new arrivals, encouraging them to pray and praying with them. Having recently been through withdrawal, their faith was high. The other boys listened to them with some respect when they said, ‘It works - once you begin to pray, the pain goes. Just ask Jesus and pray in the Spirit.’”⁸

Here is Ah Tong’s testimony from Jackie’s ministry. “We gave him no medication, not even aspirin. We did not even give him cigarettes to help him in his withdrawal from heroin. Every time he began to feel a slight pang, he went back to praying and using his

⁶ Smith Wigglesworth’s Sermon on the Gift of Tongues. <http://www.smithwigglesworth.com/sermons/eif18.htm>

⁷ Jackie Pullinger, *Chasing the Dragon* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 65-66.

⁹ Pullinger, *Chasing the Dragon*, 100.

new prayer language. His withdrawal period was pain-free. No vomiting, no cramps, no diarrhea, no shivers. With this miracle, Ah Tong began a new life.”⁹

■ YOUR PORTION

Your portion in praying in tongues is a spiritual breakthrough and an overflowing heart. If praying in tongues daily is a newer idea to you, resist unbelief about God’s purpose for tongues and fill your heart with Bible verses about the power of praying with your spirit-man. In the early days of growing in tongues, Satan will always try to lie to you about this topic and say that it’s not fruitful or that the historical testimonies won’t apply to your life. But you can say yes to the Biblical promises and to the testimonies of this chapter until you begin to experience it for yourself.

■ WEEKLY ASSIGNMENT

On top of your daily tongues times this week, schedule a 30-minute tongues time. You can pray individually, in a group, or with your Discipleship Mentor. Reflect on your prayer time and write down your observations. If you are still seeking tongues or studying the topic, continue “asking, seeking, and knocking,” because God is a good Father who will give you all things and show you all things!

⁹ *ibid.*, 22-23..

CONGRATULATIONS

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HUGE milestone!

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await you.....

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About The Authors



We are lovers of Jesus who have been overwhelmed by God's goodness and beauty in prayer. We've walked through the normal obstacles that believers face when seeking greater intimacy with God and transformation and want to equip you to overcome your obstacles! We've been in full-time prayer and discipleship ministry since 2006, and currently minister at the Underground House of Prayer and Encounter Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Our 3 passions are: multiplying disciples

who take others deep in God's heart, raising up corporate prayer meetings and praying churches, and equipping parents to joyfully disciple their children in practical ways .

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