

GET
BETTER!

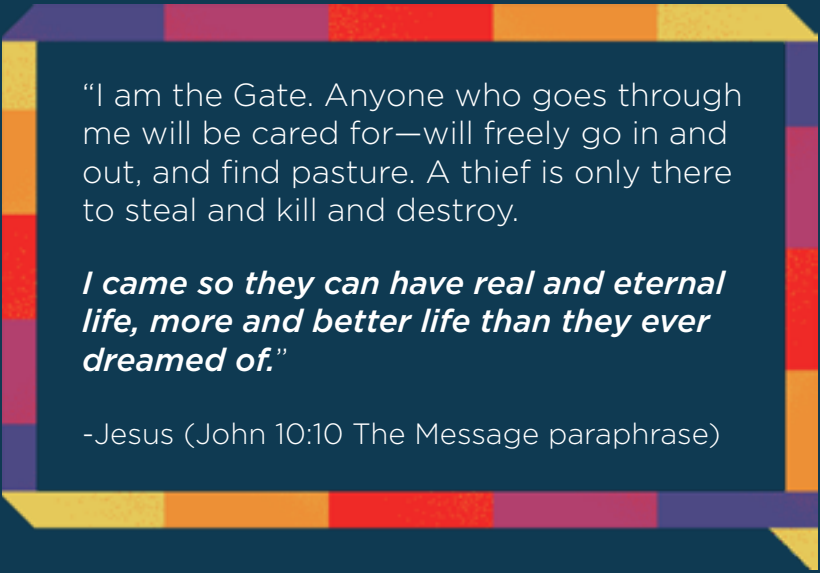
/ BUILDING THE LIFE YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED /

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:

PHONE:

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“I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy.

I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

-Jesus (John 10:10 The Message paraphrase)

INTRODUCTION

Listen to Jesus' invitation. Do you want that kind of life? Would you like to move toward Jesus in the next few weeks and get a taste of this real and better life?

As we spend time with Jesus, we will learn more about his way of life—life that is better and more real than anything we could do on our own.

One definition of discipleship (following the way of Jesus) is three-fold:

Be with Jesus.

Become like Jesus.

Do what Jesus did.

Throughout the group experience and time on your own, we will use these prompts to keep us focused on him. Use this experience and this book to take notes, try some spiritual practices, and let Jesus be the one to guide you through.



SCAN ME

There are several video links throughout the book. To watch them, you'll need to sign up for a FREE RightNow Media account at wschurch.org/RNM.

“If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is ‘thank you’ that would suffice.”

- Meister Eckhart

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.”

- Melody Beattie

gratitude

[grat-i-tude] (n.)

Thankfulness that is realized, felt or expressed

WORSHIP NOTES

Gratitude | Sunday, January 29

Write down words, phrases, scriptures, or anything that stands out to you from the worship service and message this week.

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP SESSION 1

Opening Questions (15 minutes)

Tell us your name and one of the highlight experiences of your life so far.

Why did you sign up for this group experience? What are you hoping for?

Activity (10 minutes)

Write down your answers to the following prompts and share with your group:

- I think Jesus invites me to a life where _____
_____.
- I want more _____ in my life
and less _____.
- The life I've always wanted is _____
_____.

Scripture (10 minutes)

Read Philippians 4:6-7 *slowly*. If possible, read it from several different translations.

What do you notice in these verses?

What would it look like to practice this? (Get specific.)

Group Logistics (10 minutes)

- Read through and fill out the *Small Group Values and Goals* and *schedule* on the following pages!
- Ensure every group member knows how to look up Bible verses. Talk about the free YouVersion Bible app; demonstrate how to use it and read from different Bible translations.
- Look ahead at *This Week's Practice: REST*. Read through the list of suggestions, circling the one you plan to do. Write down the day you'll do it.
- Look through the *Time with Jesus This Week* section. These will include weekly gratitude practices, RightNow Media videos, Bible reading and reflection, and prayer prompts. Take simple notes and come ready to discuss next week.
- Take notes during the worship service each week.
- Come ready to do calendar coordination next week for the Hospitality Experience (Group Session 5).

Pray (5 minutes)

The leader prays for the group. (Spend a moment in stillness and prayer before praying out loud.)

SMALL GROUP VALUES AND GOALS

RELATIONSHIPS:

While prayer and discussion are important elements of any group, the driving force behind the group is the building of relationships in community.

AUTHENTICITY:

The atmosphere of a group should encourage openness and transparency among members.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues discussed with the group will be treated with care and sensitivity.

RESPECT:

Group members should avoid saying anything that embarrasses another member of the group.

PRIORITIZE:

Group members will make group meetings and homework a priority. The meetings are essential, and the homework is important to be able to participate in conversation.

SCHEDULE

The group will meet on the dates and times below:

WEEK 1 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

WEEK 2 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

WEEK 3 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

WEEK 4 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

WEEK 5 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

WEEK 6 - DATE: _____ **TIME:** ____ - ____

I commit to these values, goals, and schedule.

SIGNATURE: _____



**“Only in stopping, really
stopping, do we teach our hearts
and souls that we are loved apart
from what we do.”**

- Lynne Baab

rest

[rest] (v.)

To become deliberately inactive, ceasing work and movement, in order to refresh and reinvigorate one's activity.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: REST

Circle the practice you intend to try this week. Write down which day you'll do it.

- Take a nap. Experience rest in your body.
- Get up early and go to a place where you can be quiet and alone. Rest from noise and busyness.
- Choose one day to pause from all work and use it to rest. Enjoy God's good gifts in life and be present to the people in your life. Follow God's example and command to take a day of rest.
- Read Psalm 4:8. Pray a short prayer before bed. Entrust any concerns or unfinished tasks to God's care as you surrender to rest.
- Share a meal with friends or family after church that is free from technology.

Reflection questions after you practice:

How would you describe your experience of rest this week?

How might Jesus be inviting you into a life that includes regular rest?

TIME WITH JESUS THIS WEEK

Gratitude opens us up to God's good gifts in our everyday lives. Make a list of the good things you experience and want to thank God for this week:



If spending time with God on your own is new for you, watch **“Session 1: Encounter”** from *Be Still: A Simple Guide to Quiet Times* on RightNow Media (10 minutes).

SCAN ME

DAY 1

Be with Jesus as you read Matthew 11:28-30.

Read it in the following translations: NIV, NLT, The Message paraphrase, CSB and NASB. (You can view different translations on the YouVersion Bible app or on biblegateway.com.)

As you read Jesus' invitation, what words describe what you want most?

What do you want to say to Jesus about it?

DAY 2

Most of us are busier than we wish we were. Some of us might even be proud of how busy we are. What if the way of Jesus is different?



Watch or listen to **“Session 1: The Case for An Unhurried Life”** from John Mark Comer’s *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* on RNM (11 minutes).

SCAN ME

Even if you’ve already watched this before, watch or listen to it again.

Do you notice in yourself any of the symptoms of “hurry sickness” that he described?

What do you do to rest?

What would you do if you had time to rest?

DAY 3

Do what Jesus did: look back at *This Week's Practice: REST*.

Have you tried it yet? If not, what is holding you back? When can you plan to complete one? (Even a baby step or small attempt counts!)

If you have tried it, how was it? How did you sense Jesus with you in the practice?

Bonus: Read Matthew 8:23-27 to see one moment in Jesus' story when he picked an interesting time to rest.

DAY 4

Take 2-10 minutes to be still and ***be with Jesus*** in silence. Set a timer if needed. Your mind will likely drift to thinking about other things, but whenever it does, turn your attention back to Jesus' presence and love.

Read the following scriptures. As you do, write down words or phrases in the margins that stand out to you:

- Genesis 2:2-3
- Psalm 116:7
- Isaiah 30:15
- Mark 6:30-31
- Psalm 127:1-2
- Psalm 62:1
- Hebrews 4:7-11

Take a moment to rest, knowing that God is with you. Relax your body, take a deep breath, and after some silence, say, "Amen."

DAY 5

Read Jeremiah 6:16. This verse is a prophetic word to God's people in the Old Testament, but it also has a reminder to step back and evaluate our path.

Pray this:

"God, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,

you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word,

you let me catch my breath

and send me in the right direction."

Psalms 23:1 (The Message paraphrase)

WORSHIP NOTES

Rest | Sunday, February 5

Write down words, phrases, scriptures, or anything that stands out to you from the worship service and message this week.

SMALL GROUP SESSION 2 GUIDE

Opening Questions (10 minutes)

What is your favorite thing you wrote down in your gratitude list this week?

In 5 words or less, what was the best part of your week? What was the worst?

Debrief of the week (20 minutes)

What stood out to you from the past week (especially from the Sunday teaching, time practicing on your own, and notes from your book)? What challenged you? What comforted you?

Scripture (25 minutes)

Read Exodus 20:8-11.

This is part of the 10 commandments that God gave his people, and it points back to the very beginning of the Bible's story when God modeled resting as part of his creative work. *Do you think of his command to rest as part of these core commands? Why/why not?*

Have you ever practiced Sabbath? Do you have any resistance (internal pushback, barriers, etc.) toward practicing a day of rest? Why is that?

You might be wondering if this is only something for God's people in the Old Testament, before Jesus arrived. Jesus and his disciples were often criticized for breaking some of the strict Sabbath laws. Does God want this for us today?

Read Mark 2:23-28.

What do you notice in these verses?

What questions do you have?

Activity (15 minutes)

Take a moment to ask this next question and give them a moment to write down the answer. Then, invite them to share as they're willing.

Do you sense God inviting you into a way of life that values rest? What might that look like?

Logistics (10 minutes)

- Look ahead at *This Week's Practice: HONOR*. Read through the list of suggestions, circling the one you plan to do. Write down the day you'll do it.
- Look through the *Time with Jesus This Week* section. Note the weekly gratitude practice and recommit to doing the daily work this week.
- Take notes during worship and the sermon each week.
- Calendar coordination for the Hospitality Experience: Most groups will use their normal meeting time, but arrange a different time if needed. Start planning the location (a home) and menu (potluck, diet restrictions, etc.).

Prayer (5 minutes)

Have someone read Isaiah 40:28-31 out loud as the prayer to close your group time. (Spend a moment in stillness or silent prayer before praying out loud.)

**“Whenever we are sure that
we are among the righteous,
we immediately find ourselves
among the arrogant.”**

- Fleming Rutledge

**“Contempt closes off; honor
opens up.”**

- Jon Tyson

honor

[hon-or] (v.)

To recognize the value someone or something possesses, and to esteem that person or thing accordingly.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: HONOR

Circle the practice you intend to try this week. Write down which day you'll do it.

- **Sit with and listen to someone.**

Ask someone this: "What is the biggest thing impacting you right now? How are you feeling about it?"

Give them your full attention. Avoid judging or interpreting. Step into their shoes and feel what they feel. Don't offer advice or your own experience, instead offer a simple, "Thank you for sharing that with me."

"Incarnational Listening: to listen at a heart level with empathy, attuned to the words and nonverbal communication of another person so that the other person feels felt by you." (*Emotionally Healthy Relationships* – Peter and Geri Scazzero)

- **Watch or read the news as a prompt to pray and feel compassion.**

If you regularly consume news content, pay attention to how you respond to it internally and externally. Choose a time to go to your typical news source, and when you see a story or article, pause to use it as a prompt to pray. Ask God to help you view this situation through his eyes, seeing the people involved as his beloved children. Confess and repent for times you have not responded to news through these perspectives.

If you need a simple prayer of confession, read Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Are there words or phrases from those prayers that you can use to talk to God honestly and humbly?

- **Practice forgiveness.**

Think of someone you have treated with contempt (either in your thoughts or actions). Talk to God or write out a confession. Ask him to show you that person through his eyes. Ask God for forgiveness, remember that He is full of grace and compassion, and let his peace reassure you.

- **Encourage someone who might not receive many positive words.**

Is there a person or role in the community that is often overlooked or has a “thankless” job? Think of a way to show them tangible encouragement and appreciation this week. Write a note, take a simple gift, and let them know that they are seen and valued by you.

Reflection questions after you practice:

How would you describe your experience of showing honor this week?

TIME WITH JESUS THIS WEEK

Gratitude opens us up to God’s good gifts in our everyday lives. Make a list of the good things you experience and want to thank God for this week:

DAY 1

Be with Jesus as you read Ephesians 4:1-6. Read it in the following translations: NIV, NLT, The Message paraphrase, CSB, NASB. (You can view different translations on the YouVersion Bible app or on biblegateway.com.)

As you read Paul's notes to the church in Ephesus, what words describe what you want most?

What do you want to say to Jesus about it?

DAY 2

Whether we realize it or not, fear can often be an obstacle to treating our neighbors with honor and respect.



Watch or listen to **“Session 3: Overcoming Fear”** from *The Art of Neighboring* on RNM (9 minutes).

SCAN ME

What stood out to you from this teaching and from the example of two neighbors interacting?

*How can you **become like Jesus** in how you interact with people, even those who are unlike you or who may not like you?*

DAY 3

Do what Jesus did: look back at *This Week's Practice: HONOR*.

Have you tried it yet? If not, what is holding you back? When can you plan to complete one? (Even a baby step or small attempt counts!)

If you have tried it, how was it? How did you sense Jesus with you in the practice?

Bonus: Read Luke 19:1-10 to see one moment in Jesus' story where he noticed someone and moved toward them.

DAY 4

Take 2-10 minutes to be still and ***be with Jesus*** in silence. Set a timer if needed. Your mind will likely drift to thinking about other things, but whenever it does, turn your attention back to Jesus' presence and love.

Read the following scriptures. As you do, write down in the margins words or phrases that stand out to you:

- Exodus 20:12
- 1 Samuel 2:8
- Matthew 5:43-48
- John 13:34-35
- Romans 12:10
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- 1 Peter 4:8

Take a moment to rest, knowing that God is with you. Relax your body, take a deep breath, and after some silence, say, "Amen."

DAY 5

Read Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus was being challenged to choose which of God's laws were the most important. He brilliantly sums it all up in two clear priorities.

Pray by asking God to show you how to take these core priorities and apply them to your life. Talk to God honestly.

WORSHIP NOTES

Honor | Sunday, February 12

Write down words, phrases, scriptures, or anything that stands out to you from the worship service and message this week.

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP SESSION 3 GUIDE

Opening Questions (10 minutes)

What is your favorite thing you wrote down in your gratitude list this week?

Who is one of the most important people in your life?

How do you show them that they matter to you?

Debrief of the week (20 minutes)

What stood out to you from the past week (especially from the Sunday teaching, time practicing on your own and notes from your book)? What challenged you? What comforted you?

Scripture (25 minutes)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:18-27.

These verses compare the people who make up the church to the different parts of the body. Are there people or roles that come to your mind when you read this passage?

How does this description of how we should view and treat one another differ from what happens normally in our everyday lives? (Does your work or family or social group operate this way?)

How could we practice showing honor to people? What questions or resistance do you have as you reflect on this passage?

The passage we just looked at focused on how we should view other Christ-followers. Let's read some verses now that talk about how we should view and treat people outside of the church.

Read Colossians 4:5-6 & 1 Peter 3:13-17.

How do those verses challenge you?

Activity (15 minutes)

Take a moment to ask this next question and give them a moment to write down the answer. Then, invite them to share as they're willing.

Do you sense God inviting you to a way of life that is different than what you've experienced when it comes to how you view and act toward other people? What might that look like?

Logistics (10 minutes)

- Look ahead at *This Week's Practice: SACRIFICE*. Read through the list of suggestions, circling the one you plan to do. Write down the day you'll do it.
- Look through the *Time with Jesus This Week* section. Note the weekly gratitude practice and recommit to doing the daily work this week.
- Take notes during worship and the sermon each week.
- Talk about plans for the Hospitality Experience, especially the location and menu.
- Next week, come ready to talk about future group plans.

Prayer (5 minutes)

Brainstorm a list of people (groups of people and specific people, using their first names) that you want to pray for together. Then, ask if one of the group members would be willing to pray for the group out loud. (Spend a moment in stillness or silent prayer before praying out loud.)

“Our greatest fulfillment lies in giving ourselves to others.”

- Henri Nouwen

sacrifice

[sac-ri-fice] (v.)

To release one's rights, privileges, opportunities or resources for the sake of another.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: SELF-SACRIFICE

Circle the practice you intend to try this week. Write down which day you'll do it.

- Deny yourself by fasting this week. Choose to eliminate something for a set time (a meal, 24 hours, etc.) this week so that you can **be with Jesus** and **do what Jesus did**. Fasting in the Bible is going without food as a way of denying physical appetite and increasing our desire to be with God. (For some, there are medical reasons that fasting from food may not be advisable.) You can also fast from other things, like spending money, technology, entertainment, and more. Read Matthew 6:16-18.
- Get rid of something as a reminder that you do not need things to be satisfied in life. Read Matthew 6:19-21.
- Is there a place or role in your life where you have an important or prestigious position? How could you step outside of your privilege, humble yourself, and serve someone else this week? Read Luke 22:24-30.

Reflection questions after you practice:

How would you describe your experience of practicing sacrifice?

How might Jesus be inviting you to let go and live selflessly? Get practical.

TIME WITH JESUS THIS WEEK

Gratitude opens us up to God's good gifts in our everyday lives. Make a list of the good things you experience and want to thank God for this week:

DAY 1

Be with Jesus as you read Philippians 2:3-11. Read it in the following translations: NIV, NLT, The Message paraphrase, CSB, NASB. (You can view different translations on the YouVersion Bible app or on biblegateway.com.)

As you read this invitation to follow the model of Jesus' attitude and self-sacrificial actions, what stands out to you?

What kind of attitude do you want to have?

What do you want to say to Jesus about this?

DAY 2



Watch or listen to **“Session 3: Cruciformity Manifested in Christ”** from *Philippians* by Michael DeFazio on RNM (15 minutes).

SCAN ME

Cruciformity is a big word. Write down your own definition based on the video’s teaching:

In what ways are you most likely to feel or act selfishly?

How could you reflect the attitude and model of Jesus in those situations?

DAY 3

Do what Jesus did: look back at *This Week’s Practice: SELF-SACRIFICE*.

Have you tried it yet? If not, what is holding you back? When can you plan to complete one? (Even a baby step or small attempt counts!)

If you have tried it, how was it? How did you sense Jesus with you in the practice?

Bonus: Read Matthew 26:36-46 to see a story of Jesus wrestling with God about giving up his life on the cross.

DAY 4

Take 2-10 minutes to be still and ***be with Jesus*** in silence. Set a timer if needed. Your mind will likely drift to thinking about other things, but whenever it does, turn your attention back to Jesus' presence and love.

Read the following Scriptures. As you do, write down in the margins words or phrases that stand out to you:

- Matthew 10:38
- Mark 12:29-31
- John 12:24-25
- Romans 12:1-2
- Philippians 3:10
- 2 Timothy 2:11
- 1 John 3:16-18

Take a moment to rest, knowing that God is with you. Relax your body, take a deep breath, and after some silence, say, "Amen."

DAY 5

Philippians 2:12-18.

Pray using a physical posture. Stand with your arms stretched out open, in the shape of a cross. Hold that posture for several minutes in silence, and then talk to God about his call to follow Jesus' example of surrender.

WORSHIP NOTES

Sacrifice | Sunday, February 19

Write down words, phrases, scriptures, or anything that stands out to you from the worship service and message this week.

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP SESSION 4 GUIDE

Opening Questions (10 minutes)

What is your favorite thing you wrote down in your gratitude list this week?

Who is one of the most selfless people you know or have known? Why do they come to your mind as an example?

Debrief of the week (20 minutes)

What stood out to you from the past week (especially from the Sunday teaching, time practicing on your own and notes from your book)? What challenged you? What comforted you?

Scripture (25 minutes)

Read Matthew 16:21-26.

If possible, read it from several different translations. Jesus' words about his own fate were disturbing to Peter. Jesus not only strongly rejects Peter's attempt at correction, but he also connects what is about to happen to him to the way that his followers need to view their lives.

What might it look like not to cling to your life, but to follow Jesus' example of self-sacrifice?

What questions or hesitation do you have as you reflect on this teaching and example of Jesus?

Activity (15 minutes)

Take a moment to ask this next question and give everyone a moment to write down their responses. Then, invite people to share as they're willing.

Do you sense God inviting you to a different way of life, practicing self-sacrifice over self-indulgence? What might that look like (get practical)?

Logistics (10 minutes)

- Look ahead at *This Week's Practice: HOSPITALITY*. Read through the list of suggestions, circling the one you plan to do. Write down the day you'll do it.
- Get back on track with the *Time with Jesus This Week* section. Don't miss the gratitude practice!
- Take notes during worship and the sermon each week.
- Go over any final reminders about the Hospitality Experience next week.
- Spend time talking about future group plans. Use the handout to talk about if there's a NEXT STEP for your group (Rooted, becoming a Small Group, etc.).

Prayer (5 minutes)

Invite everyone to close their eyes and open their hands in a palms-up position. Let that simple posture of open-handed surrender be a time of silent prayer (without words). Then, have one person pray a simple prayer to close your time.

“In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”

- Robert Karris

“The practice of hospitality cannot depend on shared views or values. When we impose or imply such conditions, we are offering entertainment rather than Christian hospitality. We must learn to value the strangeness of the stranger.”

- Marjorie J. Thompson

hospitality

[hos-pi-tal-it-y] (n.)

The welcoming of another into one’s own emotional and/or physical space.

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: HOSPITALITY

Circle the practice you intend to try this week. Write down which day you'll do it.

Even though you'll be sharing a meal with your group next week, try to choose a simple act of hospitality to practice this week on your own.

- **Reach out to someone** that you've recently met and schedule a time to meet up with them to get to know them more. When you're with them, ask them questions and try to learn as much about them and their experience as you can. Be mindful to listen well.
- **Take a note and a small gift to one of your neighbors.** If you've not interacted with them much, introduce yourself and offer to share contact info with them.
- **Decide to engage in conversation** (especially asking questions and listening) with strangers this week (people in shops or restaurants, people you meet in public, or others you see along the way, etc.). Focus on seeing them, rather than impressing them or entertaining them.
- **Help set up a simple gathering** for people who might need help being with others (children, people with mobility concerns, the elderly, etc.). Let your act of hospitality be a blessing to make it possible and easy for them to be with others.

Reflection questions after you practice:

How would you describe your experience of practicing hospitality this week?

How might Jesus be inviting you to a life that includes regular hospitality?

TIME WITH JESUS THIS WEEK

Gratitude opens us up to God's good gifts in our everyday lives. Make a list of the good things you experience and want to thank God for this week:

DAY 1

Be with Jesus as you read Matthew 25:34-46. Read it in the following translations: NIV, NLT, The Message paraphrase, CSB and NASB. (You can view different translations on the YouVersion Bible app or on biblegateway.com.)

Who are the people that you are tempted to view as "other" or unlike you?

Are there people that you have an inward reaction against or find yourself staying away from or ignoring?

What do you want to say to Jesus about this teaching and what you've noticed in yourself?

DAY 2

Eating meals with people was a regular practice for Jesus—and for his early followers. The Last Supper they shared together before his death is a milestone moment, that also points to a future celebration in heaven. It is also a spiritual practice that we can implement today.



Watch or listen to **Episode 14 - “Session 7: The Last Supper, For Now”** from *Table Talks* by Bianca Juarez Olthoff on RNM (7 minutes).

SCAN ME

Do you think of sharing meals in homes as a spiritual practice?

Do you like the idea of this practice, or do you resist it? Why?

DAY 3

Do what Jesus did: look back at *This Week's Practice: HOSPITALITY*.

Have you tried it yet? If not, what is holding you back? When can you plan to complete one? (Even a baby step or small attempt counts!)

If you have tried it, how was it? How did you sense Jesus with you in the practice?

Bonus: Read Luke 7:36-50 to see Jesus navigate an awkward dinner party.

DAY 4

Take 2-10 minutes to be still and ***be with Jesus*** in silence. Set a timer if needed. Your mind will likely drift to thinking about other things, but whenever it does, turn your attention back to Jesus' presence and love.

Read the following scriptures. As you do, write down in the margins words or phrases that stand out to you:

- Leviticus 19:33-34
- Isaiah 58:6-7
- Luke 14:7-14
- Acts 16:33-34
- Romans 15:7
- 1 Peter 4:8-9
- 1 John 4:20

Take a moment to rest, knowing that God is with you. Relax your body, take a deep breath, and after some silence, say, "Amen."

DAY 5

Read Hebrews 13:1-3.

Pray by writing down the names of the people you will see or have seen today. Ask God to help you see them with his eyes.

WORSHIP NOTES

Hospitality | Sunday, February 26

Write down words, phrases, scriptures, or anything that stands out to you from the worship service and message this week.

[illegible]

SMALL GROUP SESSION 5 GUIDE

HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE

This week, instead of a regular small group gathering, you'll practice hospitality together! Plan to share a meal together, ideally in a home. Does your group have families with kids? Great! Plan for kids to be included in the meal and time together. (Kids impact the dynamic of a gathering, but this is an opportunity to practice hospitality by including them!)

Preparation:

- Are there any dietary restrictions?
- Will kids be present?
- Work together to provide the food and paper products, and to guide through the experience. Get creative using the gifts of your group members.
- If your group prefers not to cook, you can keep things simple by letting people bring their own meals (from home or take out from a restaurant) and eat them together in a home.
- This meal can be very simple, we are not trying to impress anyone. Remember that hospitality is not the same as entertaining.

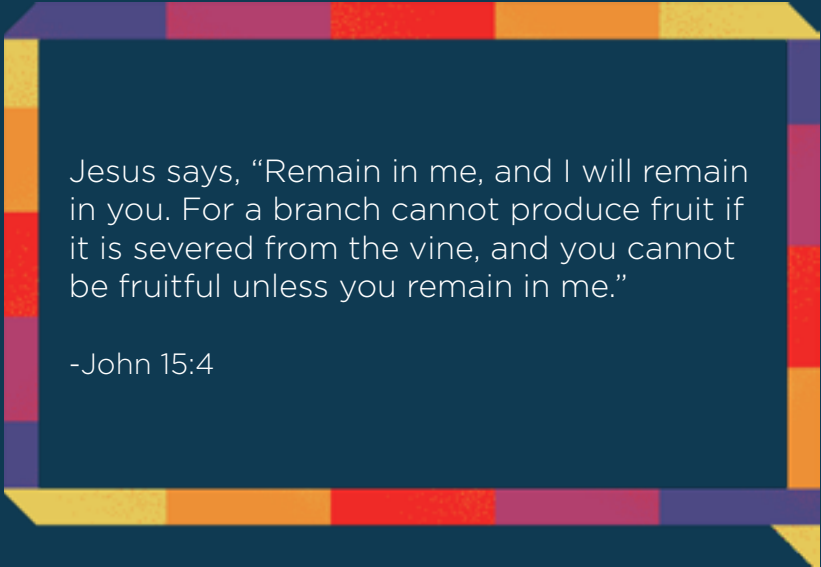
Agenda:

- Have someone pray for the meal, blessing the food and the time together.
- During your time together, ask questions, listen and don't be afraid to share meaningful conversation. At the same time, view small talk as a form of hospitality, of creating room for one another. Just focus on loving your group with this practice.
- A simple question everyone can answer: *What's one of the best, most-memorable meals you've ever had? Why?*

- Invite people to share (briefly) something God has been teaching them lately.
- Close your time together by singing a worship song together or praying for one another.

**“Ask me not where I live
or what I like to eat...
Ask me what I am living for
and what I think is keeping me
from living fully for that.”**

- Thomas Merton



Jesus says, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.”

-John 15:4

THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: REFLECTING WITH GRATITUDE

Circle the practice you intend to try this week. Write down which day you'll do it.

As we move toward the conclusion of this experience, we're coming back to the practice of gratitude and adding some reflection to it. We want to savor the good things God has shown us in the past weeks and then look ahead to what's next on our journey.

- Set a timer (for 5-10 minutes) and try to fill the whole time saying out loud ways that you are grateful to God. Rather than write them (like you've done in your book), say them out loud as a prayer. "Thank you, God, for _____."
- While you've been keeping a small list of gratitude items each week, make a list of things that you are grateful for through this series and group experience.
- Look back over your notes in this booklet and highlight or circle things that were especially meaningful and significant to you.
- Write a note of appreciation to one or two of the people from your small group. Tell them specifically what makes them a blessing to you and to your group.
- Is there a weekly theme or practice that you want to explore more? Go back to that week's material and write down your questions.

TIME WITH JESUS THIS WEEK

Gratitude opens us up to God's good gifts in our everyday lives. Make a list of the good things you experience and want to thank God for this week:

DAY 1

Be with Jesus as you read John 15:1-17.

Read it in the following translations: NIV, NLT, The Message paraphrase, CSB and NASB. (You can view different translations on the YouVersion Bible app or on biblegateway.com.)

What has helped you stay connected to Jesus in different moments of your life?

What has been helpful in the past 5 weeks?

What do you want to say to Jesus about this?

DAY 2

While it may be a concept that is talked about frequently in church, it is a mysterious and miraculous truth that Jesus invites us to live in him and that he will do the same in us.



Watch or listen to **“Session 4: Abiding in Christ” from Francis Chan’s, *Jesus’s Farewell Message*** (13 minutes).

SCAN ME

What needs to be added to your life in order for you to abide (live) more in Jesus and him in you?

In order to make room for that, what needs to be removed?

John 15:11 says when this happens we will overflow with joy. What might that look like?

DAY 3

Do what Jesus did: look back at *This Week's Practice: REFLECTING WITH GRATITUDE*.

Have you tried it yet? If not, what is holding you back? When can you plan to complete one? (Even a baby step or small attempt counts!)

If you have tried it, how was it? How did you sense Jesus with you in the practice?

Bonus: Read Luke 24:13-34 to see an example of Jesus walking with and reflecting with some of his followers (who didn't recognize him at first).

DAY 4

Take 2-10 minutes to be still and ***be with Jesus*** in silence. Set a timer if needed. Your mind will likely drift to thinking about other things, but whenever it does, turn your attention back to Jesus' presence and love.

Read the following scriptures. As you do, write down in the margins words or phrases that stand out to you:

- Deuteronomy 30:15-16, 19-20
- 1 Samuel 12:24
- Psalm 34:1
- Psalm 89:1-2
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 23-24
- James 1:17

Take a moment to rest, knowing that God is with you. Relax your body, take a deep breath, and after some silence, say, "Amen."

DAY 5

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

These are Jesus' parting words to his followers before he ascended to heaven.

Pray by talking to God:

What is he calling you to do next?

What does he want you to remember?

SMALL GROUP SESSION 6 GUIDE

Opening Questions (10 minutes)

What is your favorite thing you wrote down in your gratitude list this week?

What has been the most memorable part of this series and group experience? Why?

Debrief of the week (20 minutes)

What stood out to you from the past week (especially from the Sunday teaching, time practicing on your own and notes from your book)? What challenged you? What comforted you?

Activity (45 minutes):

Give everyone about 20-30 minutes of quiet to go through the following reflection on their own. Spread out throughout the space and don't talk to one another until you come back together. (Group leader: Choose a cue to bring everyone back, like playing a song or standing up and walking back to the seating area.)

Spend a moment being quiet with God. Then, read through Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Romans 12. What phrases stand out to you?

Romans 12 (The Message paraphrase)

¹⁻² *So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

³ *I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.*

⁴⁻⁶ *In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a*

chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

⁶⁻⁸ If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

⁹⁻¹⁰ Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

¹¹⁻¹³ Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

²⁰⁻²¹ Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Write down your response to the following questions.
Don't overthink it; write down what comes to your mind.

Whom do I want to be?

How do I want to live?

Next, start noticing and naming some of your current ways of connecting with God and what might be next as you continue growing and maturing.

What are some of the daily and weekly ways that you stay connected to Jesus?

What are some people, places, and activities that you engage with seasonally to help you connect and grow?

Where is God calling me to stretch outside of my comfort zone?

What is my next step?

Discussion (15 minutes)

Debrief the activity from Romans 12 and the reflection questions.

Make sure everyone gets to share their answers to the question, “What is my next step?”

Review your plan for what’s next for your group (using the *Small Group Roadmap*).

Prayer (5 minutes)

Offer time for anyone who would like to pray out loud to do so. Thank God for the blessings that have been mentioned in your discussion and thank God for this shared experience.

Thanks for joining us for this series!
Learn more about upcoming group
and connection opportunities at
wschurch.org/Groups.

West Side Christian Church
wschurch.org

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

