

2025 - 2026



GROW GROUPS



RICHLAND CREEK
COMMUNITY CHURCH



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WELCOME

I am so excited that you have chosen to explore the joy of walking with Jesus alongside your brothers and sisters through a Grow Group. I am commonly asked, what do we hope that Grow Groups accomplish for our people and our church?

In general, my hope is that these groups help nurture a culture of honest love and encouragement at our church. Don't get me wrong; I believe such a thing already exists across much of our fellowship. But our love for one another can always be deeper, our encouragement more ready, our fellowship sweeter as we help each other walk in holiness and love.

I also hope that the daily time in the Word that will be so encouraged and celebrated in Grow Groups leads to us being a wiser and more discerning church. There is so much deception in our world today about who Christ is and what He has done. I pray that these groups ground us more deeply in the Word of God.

I further hope you truly enjoy the chance to be a disciple who is helping make other disciples. I want you to see Grow Groups as an opportunity to join with God as His Spirit works in hearts and minds. I hope you rejoice in being a part of God's work of sanctification in the lives of other believers.

I pray that you learn to value the Word, prayer, and the fellowship of other believers as central tools that God uses to grow the fruit of obedience in your life. Whether you've been walking with God for five days or 50 years, I know you can still grow in your appreciation of how the Spirit uses these means to draw us to Himself. I hope you grow to enjoy God in His Word even more through Grow Groups.

Thank you for taking this step of faith by joining a Grow Group. Please know that I am praying for you and am always available to help and encourage you however I can.

Yours in Christ,



Pastor Jason

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THIS GUIDEBOOK IS FOR

One of our central desires for Grow Groups at Richland Creek is that they would be guided by commitment more than curriculum. What we mean is that Grow Groups aren't just a series of lessons to be learned or worksheets to fill out. Rather, we want Grow Groups to help our people establish the basic rhythms of Word, prayer, and honesty in their lives, both daily in their time with God and weekly in our meetings with each other, and to establish these rhythms for a lifetime.

But this does not mean that our commitment is devoid of content. We do not meet aimlessly but rather prioritize regular time in the Word and prayer and regular accountability as we grow and learn together. The purpose of this guidebook is to provide resources and references for you as a Grow Group member, facilitator, or coach.

In **Section 1**, you'll find information outlining the background of Grow Groups—the goals, commitments, and expectations that come with being a part of one. We would encourage you to read this information as you begin the Grow Group journey, as it will provide important context for you as you continue in one.

In **Section 2**, you'll find more helpful resources to guide and equip you for your time in a Grow Group. These include Bible reading plan options, an annual meeting calendar, accountability questions, and other similar items that you will refer to regularly throughout the year.

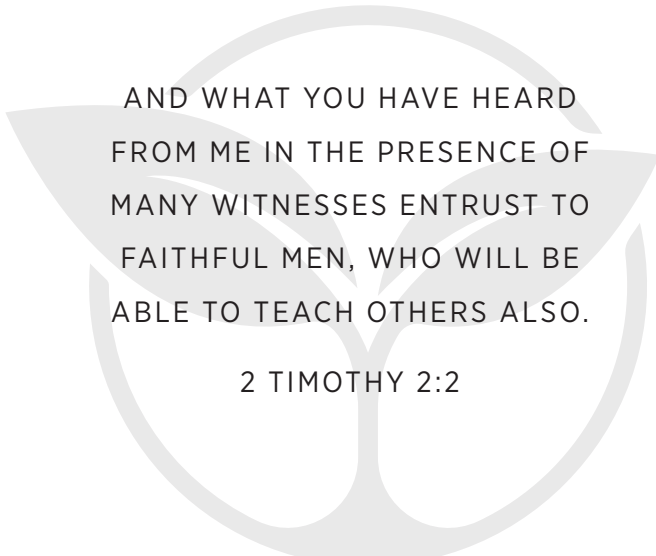
Section 3 is the appendices, where we have included information and articles that you might find valuable as you continue in a Grow Group. These are explanations of a typical Grow Group meeting time, more details about time in the Word and in prayer, samples and descriptions for the habits of engaging the Word, prayer, journaling, memorization, and more.



Section 1

GOALS, COMMITMENT, AND EXPECTATIONS

In this section, we will flesh out why Grow Groups exist and what it means to participate as a member of a Grow Group.



AND WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD
FROM ME IN THE PRESENCE OF
MANY WITNESSES ENTRUST TO
FAITHFUL MEN, WHO WILL BE
ABLE TO TEACH OTHERS ALSO.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

... Grow as Disciples of Jesus ...

GOALS

As you participate in a Grow Group at Richland Creek, you should keep two primary goals in mind.

Goal 1: Strengthen Commitment

The first goal of Grow Groups is that you should be strengthened in your commitment to God and other believers. The concept of commitment is critical; we'll explore it in more detail in a moment. For now, let's summarize this goal by remembering that we are saved for a purpose.

1 Corinthians 6:19b–20

**“...You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.
So glorify God in your body.”**

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”

When Paul wrote the verses above, he was speaking primarily about how we handle ourselves in terms of sexual purity, but the larger point applies to everything we do. God saved us so that we would glorify Him in mind, body, and soul by being made into His image, day by day. This means that Christians have committed to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, so that we will do what He says. Grow Groups aim to be one way in which we can strengthen this commitment to God as believers.

Notice this goal also encourages us to fulfill our commitment to other believers, specifically our commitment to love, pray for, and encourage others. Did you know that by some estimates, there are more than 100 “one another” commands in the New Testament? At the very least, this implies that we need each other in order to obey God properly. Without other Christians in my life to talk with and help, I cannot do much of what God’s Word tells me to do.

How, exactly, will Grow Groups help you strengthen your commitment? In two ways: Weekly gatherings to encourage and challenge one another and daily engagement with Christ through His Word and prayer.

Weekly gatherings help us maintain a consistent rhythm of encouraging and loving other believers. Of course, there are many

ways in which Christians, in general, can love each other, and we at Richland Creek encourage and serve one another in many ways. Grow Groups are not the only way we do this, but they are an important way, specifically when it comes to an intimate atmosphere designed for accountability and help in our spiritual walks.

Daily engagement with Christ through His Word and prayer means that Grow Groups help each of us in our basic spiritual habits. Our Grow Groups will do this by providing a framework for daily time with the Lord in the form of a Bible reading and prayer plan; a schedule for memorizing the Word of God; and help actually carrying out these practices over time.

So, let's restate the first of our two Grow Group goals:

Grow Groups will strengthen members in their commitment to God and each other by holding weekly gatherings to encourage and challenge one another and by providing tools for engaging daily with Christ through His Word and prayer.

Goal 2: Ongoing Disciple-Making

Our second goal for Grow Groups is that they are places where ongoing disciple-making is planned for and accomplished. Each member of a Grow Group should be consistently challenged to remember two things: There is no finish line to discipling within Grow Groups, and each person can make other disciples through Grow Groups.

By “no finish line,” we are primarily saying that Grow Groups are not driven by a particular discipleship curriculum or timeframe. That's not to say that a workbook or curriculum-based approach to discipleship is bad or wrong. Many churches use such an approach to training in discipleship, and we have contexts at Richland Creek, like Life Groups and classes, that use a particular curriculum. What we are trying to communicate here is that there is no “graduating” from a Grow Group program.

*Grow Groups are for
brand-new believers
as well as mature,
seasoned believers,
and everyone
in between.*

Grow Groups are for brand-new believers as well as mature, seasoned believers, and everyone in between. This contributes to ongoing disciple-making by helping us remember that there will always be more opportunities to grow and learn in Grow Groups.

Within Grow Groups, everyone can contribute to the disciple-making process by spending time in the Word and actively praying for and encouraging other members of the group. There are many contexts within the church where we feel somewhat passive when it comes to disciple-making: Not all of us are teachers or pastors or leaders everywhere we go. But in Grow Groups, everyone can contribute, and everyone can bless everyone else just by reading the Word, talking about what you have read, holding each other accountable, and praying for one another. Again, this is true for both new and mature Christians.

Grow Groups at Richland Creek will unapologetically celebrate multiplying disciples, because each member of a Grow Group will be challenged to consider how they can, sooner or later, start their own Grow Group and get even more people involved in disciple-making. Grow Groups are not meant to consist of the same handful of people for years and years and years. Such relationships are valuable, and there's nothing wrong with that. But Grow Groups will be challenged to multiply, at least annually and perhaps even more often, depending on God's direction and the leadership capacity within the group.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

The power of multiplying discipleship is well known in some circles, but it's worth repeating here in case you have never considered it. What if God blessed you so that you were able to share the Gospel with one person every day this year, and see them come to Christ? That would be wonderful, and at the end of the year 365 people will be new Christians. If you kept up that pace, after 10 years there would be 3,650 people professing faith in Jesus.

But what if you decided to invest in three other people this year as part of a Grow Group, helping them learn to read the Bible, share their faith, and be more like Jesus? And what if each of those people decided to keep doing that every year as well? After one year, you would only have impacted three. But within three years, because of

the multiplying growth of each disciple, you would have impacted 27 people. After 10 years, that number reaches 59,049. After 15 years of intentional investment in three other people a year, and teaching them to do the same thing, that equals nearly 14.5 million disciples! The is not to pit evangelism and discipleship against one another. They are part of the same process, and evangelism is a discipline of growth! But the point is that discipleship means investment and teaching, and Grow Groups want to have a plan for that consistent multiplication.

So, let's restate the second of our Grow Group goals:

Grow Groups will be a place where ongoing disciple-making is planned for and accomplished, while each member will be challenged to consider two things: There is no finish line to discipling within Grow Groups, and each person can make other disciples through Grow Groups.



COMMITMENT

The Importance of Commitment

Commitment is at the heart of the Grow Groups ministry. When you join a Grow Group, what are you being asked to commit to?

First and foremost, you are committing to put time and effort into your relationships with God and other people. Practically, this means spending time in the Word and in prayer, but not because of a “checklist” mentality in which we engage in spiritual practices just so we can say we did. Rather, we spend time in the Word and in prayer because we love God and want to hear from Him, know Him, and speak to Him. Also, we gather weekly in our Grow Group meetings so that we have an opportunity to encourage others as well as be encouraged by them. The regular practice of personal time in the Word and in prayer is driven by love for God and others and by wanting to be equipped to encourage and strengthen our brothers and sisters.

Practically speaking, committing to a Grow Group means...

1. **Showing up** every week at the Grow Group meetings, unless you're sick or out of town. If you're not present, it's hard to encourage or be encouraged.

2. **Participating** in those meetings by sharing what you've learned and sharing prayer requests.
3. **Spending** time in God's Word daily, as guided by one of our Grow Group Reading Plans. This is a lofty goal, and you may miss some days as life becomes hectic and schedules crowded. Our reading plans are actually put together with some make-up days built in. But you'll be surprised at how consistent your time with the Lord becomes when you commit to the habit.
4. **Journaling** about God's Word as you read. Journaling helps you recall key details about the Scripture as well as aids in meditation.
5. **Spending** time in prayer daily. The goal is the same as above; it's lofty but worthy. Aim high, not low.
6. **Memorizing** the Word according to a Grow Group Memory Plan. You may be someone who struggles with Scripture memory, but that's okay. The Lord is glorified by your effort, even if the results aren't always word-perfect.
7. **Being accountable** to others in your Grow Group. f

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Even if you are a new believer, or have been a believer for awhile but haven't been consistent in Word and prayer, you can be a part of a Grow Group. Making a commitment doesn't mean you're perfect; it means you're willing to try and you want others around to help you. Commitment can actually lead to the consistency we strive for as Christians.



Commitment leads to consistency. If you desire to be more faithful in your walk with Christ and time spent in His Word, being a part of a Grow Group is living proof of that desire. The best way to pursue consistency is through commitment.

Consistency encourages accountability. When we are consistent in our time in the Word and in prayer, we invite others around us to help us. We are also open with our struggles and failures, which helps us

avoid the “mask-wearing” that can plague our church relationships.

Accountability leads to community. Genuine fellowship comes from being open and honest about our successes and failures. Pastor and author Paul Tripp has said, “Intrusive questions which require humble self-disclosure are where the Redeemer does his good work in discipleship relationships.” We build trust when we open ourselves up to others.

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations are a Tool for Consistency

The basic expectations of committing to a Grow Group – engaging the Word, prayer, and joyful accountability in honest relationships – are a key part of moving from commitment (I want to do it) to consistency (I’m actually doing it) to accountability (others are helping me, and I’m helping them) to community (genuine relationships of trust and openness). Let’s make one small change to the graphic we showed earlier:



This graphic reminds us that consistency in spiritual disciplines — a quiet time, daily prayer, meeting with other believers, accountability, and so forth – are not the goal, but a means to accomplish the goal. The goal is genuine community and love between believers which brings honor and glory to Jesus Christ. As pastor and author David Mathis wrote in his book *Habits of Grace*,

“The final joy in any truly Christian discipline or practice or rhythm of life is, in the words of the apostle, ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’ (Phil. 3:8). ‘This is eternal life,’ and this is the goal of the means of grace: ‘that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (John 17:3).”

Scripture Engagement

In many ways, Scripture engagement is the foundational expectation of Grow Groups. It will often be the habit that drives other habits, and it is where we will spend most of our group time together.

Psalms 1 contains a beautifully poetic picture of the value of engaging with God's Word. The blessed man, the psalmist writes, is one who "delights" in God's Word to the point that he "meditates" on it "day and night." The next stanza describes the results of this delight and meditation on the life of the blessed man:

Psalm 1:3

He is like a tree, planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Firmness, fruitfulness, and prosperity are all words that describe a life lived in obedience to and love for the Word of God. We do not value daily engagement with God's Word as a wooden, robotic method devoid of relationship, but as a joyful habit growing out of love for God and His grace. As described above, those who commit to Grow Groups are committing to three practices that align with Scripture engagement: Daily Bible reading, daily journaling about that Bible reading, and Bible memorization.

In the United States, we are embarrassingly blessed by access to the Word of God—both its easy accessibility and clarity through multiple translations. No habit is more foundational to discipleship growth than time spent reading the Bible, and daily Bible reading is essential to our Grow Group plan. As a tool to aid in daily Bible reading, we will follow a Bible Reading Plan. Reading plans foster greater consistency in reading and help provide necessary context when trying to understand what we read. For our Grow Groups, reading plans also ensure that everyone reads and studies together.

Journaling is a discipline that aids in Bible meditation by forcing us to slow down and engage the Word of God to understand its meaning and significance.

By journaling, we are giving the Holy Spirit one more tool to ingrain the Word in our hearts. Journaling also records our daily thoughts so that we can recall them later. This is essential when we gather to encourage one another in the Word since we will discuss texts and ideas we meditated on for several days. For every day that Grow Group members engage the Word by reading, they engage

the Word by journaling. The two practices go together in the Grow Group ecosystem.

Journaling does not need to be a lengthy discipline. A paragraph or two is fine. Some will do more, but the basic practice does not need to be long and involved. We share more about the details of journaling, especially for those who have never done it, in the resource section. We will memorize the Bible together in Grow Groups. Not only does the Bible itself commend this practice, but generations of Christians have found that memorizing the Bible is a key spiritual discipline.

Pastor Andy Davis, in his excellent book *How to Memorize Scripture for Life*, says,

“The word of God must enter us through our minds—through our understanding—in order to change our hearts. Thus, we are to meditate deeply on Scripture in order to understand it better, so that our hearts may be changed. ...There is no more useful discipline to this careful process of scriptural meditation than memorization.”

To aid in this inspiring but sometimes difficult habit, we will offer Bible Memory Plans. Like Bible Reading Plans, these memory plans will help us stay on track together. Our desire is to offer plans that are accessible to a wide variety of people.

Genuine Prayer

Prayer, alongside Bible reading, is the fundamental spiritual discipline for Christians. We are commanded to pray, Jesus modeled prayer, and every genuine believer experiences God’s faithfulness to hear us when we pray. What’s more, Jesus teaches us that persistent, regular prayer is especially beneficial to our walk.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow, a woman whose dogged determination to find justice finally leads to her victory in court. It’s her daily refusal to quit that sets her apart, and leads to her being a figurative example of how, as Jesus says, we “ought always to pray and never lose heart.”

The rhythm of daily prayer—for ourselves, other believers, and God's will to be done—is as foundational to Grow Groups as Scripture engagement. In fact, as we practice prayer we should be meditating on Scripture, and as we read Scripture we should be praying for insight and understanding. In his book *Deeper*, author Dane Ortlund likens the practices of prayer and Bible reading to breathing; that is, we breathe in through our reading of the Word, and we breathe out in prayerful response to God. This in and out rhythm—read and pray, read and pray—gives us a simple and effective pattern for not only our quiet times, but our daily walk with God in general.

As a member of a Grow Group, plan every day to pray. Prayer will also be a vital part of our weekly Grow Group gatherings, as we pray for each other.

Honest Relationships

The Bible commands us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). Beside the Bible's direct command, putting away sin and cultivating righteousness in our lives is virtually impossible without the help of others. Sin thrives in the darkness of our shame and guilt, but it dies when dragged out into the light of repentance and faith. Grow Groups should aim to nurture an atmosphere of openness and honesty about our struggles, including struggles with sin.

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How will we do this? Through the practice of regular accountability. While an environment of complete openness will take time to develop, part of committing to a Grow Group is committing to trust others in the group. One of the reasons that groups meet as frequently as they do is to help nurture this atmosphere of trust, and our basic tool for nurturing this atmosphere is a list of basic accountability questions.

Every Grow Group will work from the same basic questions, largely related to our habits as believers and to what Jesus commanded His followers. The questions, printed in this guidebook, will help every member know what to expect as we gather and practice accountability.

Opening ourselves up to others and being genuine about both our struggles and our successes can be intimidating. Our desire is to cultivate within our church a culture of transparent reality. We don't want to perpetuate the myth that real Christians are perfect, or that in order to please Jesus we must be pastors or missionaries. Ordinary, everyday people please God with their faith and obedience, and we want to celebrate obedience while helping people deal with sin.

To dispel fear, here are a few things to keep in mind about accountability within Grow Groups:

- We're not trying to force a false sense of intimacy within the group. You may be very close friends with people in your group, or you may be getting to know some of them for the first time. But because of our shared commitment to fight sin together, we can be honest with one another about struggles and find help and encouragement.
- We're not the sin police. While we'll be honest with each other, we don't want to play the role of judge and jury. Shame and guilt are powerful enough without the piling on of a Grow Group.
- Accountability time should be encouraging, not discouraging. While we do not celebrate our sin, we do rejoice in forgiveness and thank God that we can kill sin together in our lives. Encouragement, not judgment, is the proper tone.
- Confidentiality is key. We do not gossip or share with others the things that people share in Grow Groups. We have to know that we can trust each other in order to drop our masks and be transparent about our struggles and sins.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section of the guidebook was to give you an overview of what Grow Groups are for (goals) and why genuine commitment based on real expectations is so vital to the success of these groups. We hope these basic principles guide us as we grow together.

Colossians 3:16

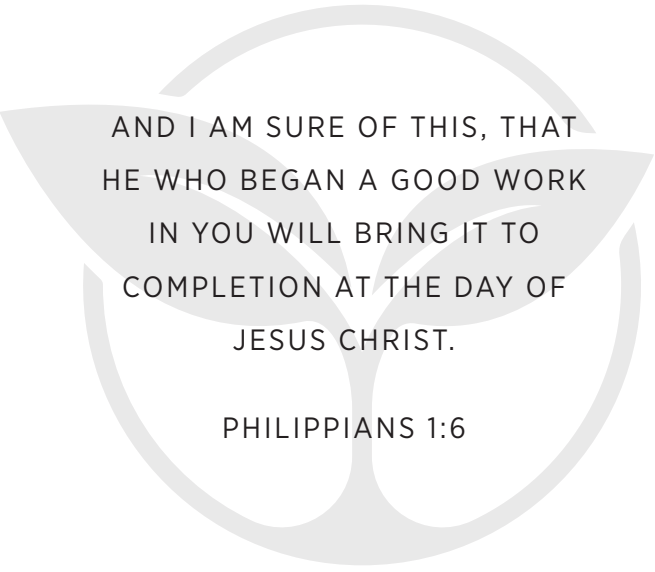
**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching
and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with
thankfulness in your hearts to God.**



Section 2

SCHEDULES AND QUESTIONS

These are some of the basic tools you will reference regularly throughout the year.



AND I AM SURE OF THIS, THAT
HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK
IN YOU WILL BRING IT TO
COMPLETION AT THE DAY OF
JESUS CHRIST.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

... Grow as Disciples of Jesus ...

SCHEDULE

2025-2026 Grow Groups Meeting Schedule

*This schedule is for groups that meet on **Sunday nights at the church** in conjunction with our Creek Kids, Creek Special Needs, and Creek Students. If your group meets on a different day and time, you can adjust your meeting schedule accordingly.*

FALL 2025

September 7 - *Launch Night*

September 14

September 21

September 28

October 5

October 12

October 19

October 26

November 2

November 9

November 16

November 23

*November 30 - January 4
Holiday Break*

SPRING 2026

January 11

January 18

January 25

February 1

February 8 - *No Meeting*

February 15

February 22

March 1

March 8

March 15 - *No Meeting*

March 22

March 29

April 5 - *No Meeting (Easter)*

April 12

April 19

April 26

May 3 - *Final Meeting*

READING PLANS

We have two primary reading plan options for the **2025-2026 Grow Group year**. These reading plans keep our groups on the same page, allowing us to progress together in our understanding of the Word and our habits in Scripture engagement. The following plans are outlined on the next few pages:

- Life Group Study Reading Plan
- Ephesians, Wisdom Literature, Hebrews and John's Letters Reading Plan

Groups could also choose a faster-paced plan from The Navigators, that can be downloaded from our website at **richlandcreek.com/growgroups**.

This plan moves much more quickly through Scripture. It is actually a “through the Bible in a year” plan, with the reader reading different passages of Scripture each day. This plan is widely used as a tool for consistent Bible reading.





Life Group Study Reading Plan

This reading plan will generally follow theme passages from the Life Group study schedule, which uses The Gospel Project from LifeWay. **In the fall of 2025 and winter/spring of 2026**, The Gospel Project will finish its chronological journey through the Old Testament and then begin a study of Jesus' life from the Gospels. This is a medium-paced reading plan.

As with all of our plans this year, Week 1 is from Monday, Sept. 8, through Sunday, Sept. 14. If your Grow Group meets on a different day of the week than Sunday, you can adjust your reading days accordingly.

WK 1 • Sept. 8-14

1 Kings 12:25-33
Proverbs 4:1-9
Exodus 32:1-14
1 Kings 13:1-10
1 Kings 14:1-28

WK 5 • Oct. 6-12

Jonah 1:1-6
Jonah 1:7-16
Jonah 1:17-2:10
Jonah 3:1-10
Jonah 4:1-11

WK 9 • Nov. 3-9

Micah 5:1-15
Micah 6:1-8
Micah 6:9-16
Micah 7:1-17
Micah 7:18-20

WK 2 • Sept. 15-21

1 Kings 17:1-16
1 Kings 17:17-24
1 Kings 18:1-19
1 Kings 18:20-40
1 Kings 18:41-46

WK 6 • Oct. 13-19

Hosea 1:1-11
Hosea 2:1-13
Hosea 2:14-3:5
Hosea 11:1-12:1
Hosea 14:1-9

WK 10 • Nov. 10-16

Jeremiah 17:1-13
Jeremiah 30:1-9
Jeremiah 30:10-24
Jeremiah 31:1-30
Jeremiah 31:31-40

WK 3 • Sept. 22-28

1 Kings 21:1-16
1 Kings 21:17-24
1 Kings 21:25-29
1 Kings 22:1-12
1 Kings 22:29-40

WK 7 • Oct. 20-26

2 Kings 17:1-6
2 Kings 17:7-23
2 Kings 17:24-41
Deut. 28:15-35
Deut. 30:15-20

WK 11 • Nov. 17-23

2 Chron. 35:1-19
2 Chron. 35:30-27
2 Chron. 36:1-16
2 Chron. 36:17-21
2 Chron. 36:22-23

WK 4 • Sept. 29-Oct. 5

2 Kings 4:1-7
2 Kings 4:8-17
2 Kings 4:18-37
2 Kings 4:38-44
2 Kings 5:1-14

WK 8 • Oct. 27-Nov. 2

2 Kings 18:1-37
2 Kings 19:1-37
2 Kings 22:1-20
2 Kings 23:1-20
2 Kings 23:21-27

WK 12 • Nov. 24-30

Ezekiel 36:1-15
Ezekiel 36:16-21
Ezekiel 36:22-38
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Ezekiel 37:15-28

WK 13 • Dec. 1-7

Daniel 1:1-7
Daniel 1:8-16
Daniel 1:17-21
Daniel 2:1-16
Daniel 2:17-30

WK 14 • Dec. 8-14

Daniel 2:31-49
Daniel 3:1-7
Daniel 3:8-25
Daniel 3:26-4:3
Daniel 4:4-18

WK 15 • Dec. 15-21

Daniel 4:19-27
Daniel 4:28-37
Daniel 5:1-12
Daniel 5:13-30
Daniel 6:1-28

WK 16 • Dec. 22-28

Daniel 7:1-8
Daniel 7:9-12
Daniel 7:13-14
Daniel 7:15-28
Daniel 9:1-19

WK 17 • Dec. 29-Jan. 4

Ezra 1:1-11
Ezra 3:1-7
Ezra 3:8-13
Ezra 4:1-16
Ezra 4:17-24

WK 18 • Jan. 5-11

Ezra 5:1-5
Ezra 5:6-17
Ezra 6:1-12
Ezra 6:13-22
Ezra 7:1-28

WK 19 • Jan. 12-18

Zechariah 8:1-23
Zechariah 9:1-8
Zechariah 9:9-13
Zechariah 9:14-17
Zechariah 10:1-12

WK 20 • Jan. 19-25

Esther 1:1-2:23
Esther 3:14:17
Esther 5:1-6:13
Esther 6:14-8:17
Esther 9:1-10:3

WK 21 • Jan. 26-Feb. 1

Nehemiah 1:1-2:8
Nehemiah 2:9-20
Nehemiah 4:1-23
Nehemiah 5:1-19
Nehemiah 6:1-14

WK 22 • Feb. 2-8

Nehemiah 6:15-7:4
Nehemiah 8:1-8
Nehemiah 8:9-12
Nehemiah 8:13-18
Leviticus 23:33-44

WK 23 • Feb. 9-15

Nehemiah 9:1-15
Nehemiah 9:16-31
Nehemiah 9:32-38
Nehemiah 10:28-39
Nehemiah 12:27-43

WK 24 • Feb. 16-22

Malachi 1:1-14
Malachi 2:1-9
Malachi 2:10-17
Malachi 3:1-15
Malachi 3:16-4:6

WK 25 • Feb. 23-Mar. 1

Luke 1:1-25
Luke 1:26-38
Luke 1:39-45
Luke 1:46-56
1 Samuel 2:1-10

WK 26 • Mar. 2-8

Luke 1:57-66
Luke 1:67-80
Luke 2:1-7
Luke 2:8-21
Isaiah 9:1-7

WK 27 • Mar. 9-15

Luke 2:22-32
Luke 2:33-38
Psalm 98:1-9
Isaiah 42:5-9
Isaiah 52:1-12

WK 28 • Mar. 16-22

Matthew 1:18-24
Matthew 2:1-6
Matthew 2:7-12
Matthew 2:13-18
Ezekiel 34:11-16

WK 29 • Mar. 23-29

Matthew 2:19-23
Luke 2:39-40
Luke 2:41-47
Luke 2:48-52
Psalm 119:9-16

WK 30 • Mar. 30-April 5

Luke 3:1-9
Matthew 3:1-6
Mathew 3:7-12
Isaiah 40:1-5
Isaiah 40:6-8

WK 31 • April 6-12

Mark 1:1-11

Luke 3:10-22

Matthew 3:13-17

Isaiah 42:1-5

Colossians 1:15-20

WK 32 • April 13-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 4:12-17

Mark 1:12-15

Luke 4:1-13

Luke 4:14-30

WK 33 • April 20-26

Luke 5:1-11

Matthew 4:18-25

Mark 1:16-20

John 1:29-42

John 1:43-51

**WK 34 • April 27-
May 3**

Luke 5:33-39

John 2:1-12

Mark 2:18-22

Mark 2:23-28

Mark 3:1-12



Ephesians, Wisdom Literature, Hebrews and John's Letters Reading Plan

This medium-paced reading plan works through several New Testament letters and a sampling of Old Testament wisdom literature from Psalms and Proverbs over the course of our Grow Group year.

As with all of our plans this year, Week 1 runs from Sept. 8 through Sept. 14. If your Grow Group meets on a different day of the week than Sunday, you can adjust your reading days accordingly.

WK 1 • Sept. 8-14

Ephesians 1:1-6
Ephesians 1:7-10
Ephesians 1:11-14
Ephesians 1:15-18
Ephesians 1:19-23

WK 5 • Oct. 6-12

Ephesians 5:1-5
Ephesians 5:6-14
Ephesians 5:15-21
Ephesians 5:22-24
Ephesians 5:25-33

WK 9 • Nov. 3-9

Proverbs 5:1-14
Proverbs 5:15-23
Proverbs 6:1-11
Proverbs 6:12-19
Proverbs 6:20-35

WK 2 • Sept. 15-21

Ephesians 2:1-3
Ephesians 2:4-10
Ephesians 2:11-13
Ephesians 2:14-18
Ephesians 2:19-22

WK 6 • Oct. 13-19

Ephesians 6:1-4
Ephesians 6:5-9
Ephesians 6:10-13
Ephesians 6:14-20
Ephesians 6:21-24

WK 10 • Nov. 10-16

Proverbs 7:1-20
Proverbs 7:21-27
Proverbs 8:1-11
Proverbs 8:12-21
Proverbs 8:22-36

WK 3 • Sept. 22-28

Ephesians 3:1-6
Ephesians 3:7-10
Ephesians 3:11-13
Ephesians 3:14-19
Ephesians 3:20-21

WK 7 • Oct. 20-26

Proverbs 1:1-7
Proverbs 1:8-19
Proverbs 1:20-33
Proverbs 2:1-15
Proverbs 2:16-22

WK 11 • Nov. 17-23

Proverbs 9:1-12
Proverbs 9:13-18
Proverbs 31:1-9
Proverbs 31:10-23
Proverbs 31:24-31

WK 4 • Sept. 29-Oct. 5

Ephesians 4:1-6
Ephesians 4:7-13
Ephesians 4:14-16
Ephesians 4:17-24
Ephesians 4:25-32

WK 8 • Oct. 27-Nov. 2

Proverbs 3:1-12
Proverbs 3:13-26
Proverbs 3:27-35
Proverbs 4:1-9
Proverbs 4:10-27

WK 12 • Nov. 24-30

Psalms 100
Psalms 136
Psalms 103:1-12
Psalms 103:13-22
Psalms 30

WK 13 • Dec. 1-7

Psalm 34:1-10
 Psalm 34:11-22
 Psalm 27
 Psalm 111
 Psalm 148

WK 14 • Dec. 8-14

Psalm 23
 Psalm 91
 Psalm 121
 Psalm 62
 Psalm 131

WK 15 • Dec. 15-21

Psalm 2
 Psalm 8
 Psalm 16
 Psalm 22:1-15
 Psalm 22:16-31

WK 16 • Dec. 22-28

Psalm 110
 Psalm 112
 Psalm 89:1-18
 Psalm 89:19-37
 Psalm 89:38-52

WK 17 • Dec. 29-Jan. 4

Psalm 126
 Psalm 130
 Psalm 133
 Psalm 10
 Psalms 42-43

WK 18 • Jan. 5-11

Psalm 1
 Psalm 19
 Psalm 119:1-16
 Psalm 119:17-32
 Psalm 119:97-112

WK 19 • Jan. 12-18

Hebrews 1:1-4
 Hebrews 1:5-14
 Hebrews 2:1-4
 Hebrews 2:5-9
 Hebrews 2:10-18

WK 20 • Jan. 19-25

Hebrews 3:1-6
 Hebrews 3:7-19
 Hebrews 4:1-10
 Hebrews 4:11-13
 Hebrews 4:14-16

WK 21 • Jan. 26-Feb. 1

Hebrews 5:1-10
 Hebrews 5:11-14
 Hebrews 6:1-8
 Hebrews 6:9-12
 Hebrews 6:13-20

WK 22 • Feb. 2-8

Hebrews 7:1-10
 Hebrews 7:11-22
 Hebrews 7:23-28
 Hebrews 8:1-7
 Hebrews 8:8-13

WK 23 • Feb. 9-15

Hebrews 9:1-5
 Hebrews 9:6-10
 Hebrews 9:11-14
 Hebrews 9:15-22
 Hebrews 9:23-28

WK 24 • Feb. 16-22

Hebrews 10:1-10
 Hebrews 10:11-18
 Hebrews 10:19-25
 Hebrews 10:26-31
 Hebrews 10:32-39

WK 25 • Feb. 23-Mar. 1

Hebrews 11:1-7
 Hebrews 11:8-16
 Hebrews 11:17-22
 Hebrews 11:23-31
 Hebrews 11:32-40

WK 26 • Mar. 2-8

Hebrews 12:1-2
 Hebrews 12:3-11
 Hebrews 12:12-17
 Hebrews 12:18-24
 Hebrews 12:25-29

WK 27 • Mar. 9-15

Hebrews 13:1-6
 Hebrews 13:7-12
 Hebrews 13:13-16
 Hebrews 13:17-19
 Hebrews 13:20-25

WK 28 • Mar. 16-22

1 John 1:1-4
 1 John 1:5-10
 1 John 2:1-6
 1 John 2:7-11
 1 John 2:12-14

WK 29 • Mar. 23-29

1 John 2:15-17
 1 John 2:18-25
 1 John 2:26-29
 1 John 3:1-3
 1 John 3:4-10

**WK 30 • Mar. 30-
April 5**

1 John 3:11-18
1 John 3:19-24
1 John 4:1-6
1 John 4:7-12
1 John 4:13-21

WK 31 • April 6-12

1 John 5:1-5
1 John 5:6-12
1 John 5:13-21
2 John
3 John

WK 32 • April 13-19

Revelation 1:1-3
Revelation 1:4-8
Revelation 1:9-11
Revelation 1:12-16
Revelation 1:17-20

WK 33 • April 20-26

Revelation 2:1-7
Revelation 2:8-17
Revelation 2:18-29
Revelation 3:1-13
Revelation 3:14-22

**WK 34 • April 27-
May 3**

Revelation 4:1-5
Revelation 4:6-11
Revelation 5:1-5
Revelation 5:6-10
Revelation 5:11-14





MEMORIZATION

Bible Memory Plan: **Ephesians 1:3-14**

This plan works through memorizing **Ephesians 1:3-14**, encouraging us to remember that our salvation is eternally secure in Christ. This plan works at a slower pace, memorizing a verse every two weeks on average with plenty of review weeks thrown in.

This plan begins with Week 1 as September 8-13, so you would recite your first verse on September 21. If you meet on a different day than Sunday, you can adjust your memory schedule appropriately.

Weeks 1-2
Ephesians 1:3

Weeks 25-26
Ephesians 1:3-11

Weeks 3-4
Ephesians 1:3-5

Weeks 27-28
Ephesians 1:3-12

Weeks 5-6
Ephesians 1:3-6

Week 29
Review Week

Weeks 7-8
Review Week

Weeks 30-31
Ephesians 1:3-13

Weeks 9-11
Ephesians 1:3-7

Weeks 32-33
Ephesians 1:3-14

Weeks 12-17
Review Weeks
(Holiday Break)

Week 34
Review Week

Weeks 18-19
Ephesians 1:3-8

Weeks 20-21
Ephesians 1:3-9

Week 22
Review Week

Weeks 23-24
Ephesians 1:3-10



MEMORIZATION

Bible Memory Plan: Basic Doctrine

This plan involves memorizing key Bible verses on basic Christian doctrine. It works at a faster pace, memorizing a verse on average every week, with review weeks during Christmas break. ***This plan broadly tracks with our Sunday evening Creek Kids curriculum, the New City Catechism, so it may be especially helpful for parents with elementary and preschool children.***

This plan begins with Week 1 on September 8-14, so you would finish reciting your first verse on September 14. If you meet on a different day than Sunday, you can adjust your memory schedule appropriately.

WK 1 • Sept. 8-14

Romans 14:8

WK 2 • Sept. 15-21

Psalms 86:15

WK 3 • Sept. 22-28

2 Corinthians 13:14

WK 4 • Sept. 29-

Oct. 5

Genesis 1:26-27

WK 5 • Oct. 6-12

Review Week

WK 6 • Oct. 13-19

Deuteronomy 11:1

WK 7 • Oct. 20-26

Matthew 22:37-38

WK 8 • Oct. 27-

Nov. 2

Exodus 20:2-3

WK 9 • Nov. 3-9

Romans 3:10-12

WK 10 • Nov. 10-16

Romans 3:20

WK 11 • Nov. 17-23

1 John 3:4

WEEKS 12-17 •

Nov. 24 - Jan. 4

Review Weeks

(Holiday Break)

WK 18 • Jan. 5-11

Romans 1:22-23

WK 19 • Jan. 12-18

Ephesians 5:5

WK 20 • Jan. 19-25

John 1:14

WK 21 • Jan. 26-

Feb. 1

Colossians 1:21-22

WK 22 • Feb. 2-8

Review Week

WK 23 • Feb. 9-15

2 Corinthians 5:21

WK 24 • Feb. 16-22

John 3:16

WK 25 • Feb. 23-

Mar. 1

Ephesians 2:8-9

WK 26 • Mar. 2-8

Galatians 2:20

WK 27 • Mar. 9-15

Galatians 2:16

WK 28 • Mar. 16-22

1 Peter 2:9

WK 29 • Mar. 23-29

Titus 3:4-5

WK 30 • Mar. 30-

April 5

Review Week

WK 31 • April 6-12

John 14:16-17

WK 32 • April 13-19

Psalm 62:8

WK 33 • April 20-26

2 Timothy 3:16-17

WK 34 • April 27-

May 3

Matthew 28:19



QUESTIONS

Accountability Questions

These questions will guide our accountability time in Grow Groups. While you should not feel overwhelming pressure to cover every question, every week, you should also not consistently skip the same question so as to avoid a particular area. Also, do not feel as if every question needs a long and detailed response. If you are doing well, a simple “yes” will often suffice.

One final thing: If there is an area of struggle or sin that falls outside of these questions, don’t be afraid to bring it up to the group, to ask for prayer or further accountability.

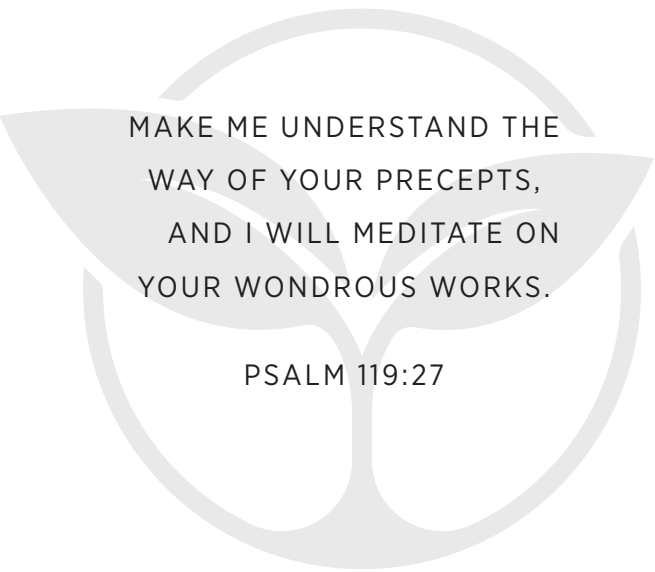
1. Have you spent time in the Word and in prayer?
2. Have you neglected opportunities to worship, learn, or serve with the church?
3. Have you sought opportunities to serve or love your family?
4. Have you demonstrated selfish thoughts, attitudes, or actions in your use of time or money?
5. Have you prayed for and then looked for opportunities to share the Gospel with an unbeliever this week?
6. Have you struggled with impure thoughts, motives, or actions (bitterness, resentment, lust, or viewing sexually explicit material, pride, jealousy, covetousness, racism, etc.)?
7. As far as it is possible, do you have integrity in all of your personal and financial dealings and have you consistently spoken the truth (including social media)?
8. What successes or joys in your fight with sin and personal walk can you report for the group to rejoice in?



Section 3

HELPFUL RESOURCES

*These are valuable discussions to aid you as you engage in
Grow Group expectations and practices.*



MAKE ME UNDERSTAND THE
WAY OF YOUR PRECEPTS,
AND I WILL MEDITATE ON
YOUR WONDROUS WORKS.

PSALM 119:27

... Grow as Disciples of Jesus ...



RESOURCE

THE MEETING TIME

What will you actually be doing when you meet with your Grow Group? While particular details may vary, most weeks will be pretty similar. Here are the elements that will be included in each meeting time.

Note: This schedule assumes a 75-minute meeting, which will be our standard for Sunday night groups. If you meet on a different day and time and have a different length, your facilitator may adjust accordingly.

OPEN WITH PRAYER

The main focus is on asking the Lord to watch over and guide your interaction to His glory. Take 2-3 minutes for this.

DIRECTED CONVERSATION

Review any concerns or prayer requests the group had from last week's meeting. This isn't an accountability time but just a review of the week. Take no more than 10 minutes.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION AND JOURNALS

This is where you will spend the majority of your meeting time. Discuss the Scriptures you have been reading and reflecting on that week, using journal entries to refresh your memory. The conversation should revolve around meaning and application. What fresh insights about God and His Word were awakened throughout the week? How were members convicted or challenged? What changes did you all resolve to make?

One of our Grow Groups rules is that everyone talks and everyone listens. Based on the group's expectations and our relational commitment, every member should come ready to participate in the discussion, with no one person dominating it.

Take about 30 minutes for this.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Each person in the group should recite the verses they have been working on. Depending on the size of the circle, you could pair up for this. It should take no more than 5 minutes.

ACCOUNTABILITY DISCUSSION

Using the provided questions as a guide, give God the glory for ways you have been obedient and be honest about confession, asking for help.

Again, everyone talks and everyone listens. At the same time, be patient with one another. Some people will take longer to open up, so don't force it. Also remember: Encouragement, not judgment, is the proper tone. And recall that group discussions should be kept confidential. Take about 15 minutes for this.

PRAYER

Based on your accountability discussion, pray for each other, particularly for each other's growth in Christlikeness. This should be an encouraging, uplifting time. Take about 15 minutes for this and make sure everyone is prayed for.





THE QUIET POWER OF ORDINARY DEVOTIONS

By Scott Hubbard
Managing Director, Desiring God

**The following article was reprinted from desiringGod.org.*

As Christians, we are not interested in merely reading our Bibles. We want to be moved, inspired, changed by what we read. We do not wake up early simply to pass our eyes over the pages of Scripture. We come to meet God (1 Samuel 3:21). We come to taste honey and gather gold (Psalm 19:10). We come to “rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8). That means days of ordinary devotions, as we’ve all experienced, can be all the more disappointing.

As any faithful Bible reader knows, many devotional times come and go without fireworks. We may get alone, ask for God’s help, read attentively, and then rise up feeling — normal. Our time in the living, active, inspired word of God has felt spectacularly ordinary.

Sometimes, the ordinariness comes as a result of our lingering blindness to glory. I, for one, feel a kinship with those disciples on the Emmaus road, to whom Jesus said, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). God save us from foolish minds and slow hearts, which so often close our eyes to the light of his revelation.

Yet the cause does not always lie in us. If we are reading our Bibles rightly, in fact, we should expect many mornings of ordinary devotions: devotions that do not sparkle with insight or direct-to-life application, but that nevertheless do us good. Just as most meals are ordinary, but still nourish, and just as most conversations with friends are ordinary, but still deepen affection, so most devotions are ordinary, but still grow us in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

SATURATED WITH SCRIPTURE

As a new Christian in college, I carried in my pocket a packet of Scripture-memory cards from the Navigators. On one of the first

cards, I found 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” I believed Paul’s words readily, having felt firsthand the profit of books like John and Romans, Philippians and James. Scarcely did I realize then, however, that Paul would have thought first of passages quite different from these — passages from which I struggled then (and still do now) to find the same kind of encouragement.

Consider, for example, some of the God-breathed, profitable Scripture Paul had in mind as he wrote 2 Timothy:

- Solomon’s discussion of wisdom in Proverbs 2:6
(2 Timothy 2:7)
- Isaiah’s prophecy of the cornerstone in Isaiah 28:16
(2 Timothy 2:19)
- The story of Korah’s rebellion in Numbers 16
(2 Timothy 2:19)
- The account of the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7–9
(2 Timothy 3:8)

Few of us would dip into these passages for immediate edification. Few of us would offer them as our first illustrations of God-breathed, profitable Scriptures. Many of us, after stumbling through such pages of God’s word, emerge on the other side feeling unchanged, uninspired — ordinary.

We can strive to avoid such experiences, of course, by staying safely in those parts of Scripture where we have felt God’s breath most powerfully. And yet, if we want a soul not merely sprinkled but saturated with God’s words, our only option is to carry on a long, patient acquaintance with passages that seem obscure. With passages that, upon first, second, or even fifth reading, leave us feeling quite ordinary afterward, but that slowly reveal the scope of God’s glory and make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

DEVOTIONS WITHOUT A DEVOTIONAL

Perhaps our impatience with days of ordinary devotions comes from the expectation that daily devotions should be like devotionals. A devotional gathers perhaps a month’s or a year’s worth of daily readings, each designed to give a boost toward Godward thinking and living. And the best of them do so quite well.

Daily devotionals have a place in the Christian life. (I would have to ditch Charles Spurgeon's Morning and Evening if I thought otherwise.) Yet we do well to remember that, in giving us Scripture, God did not intend to give us a typical daily devotional. If he had, the chronicler might have spared us his genealogies, Ezekiel might have skipped his extended temple vision, and the author of Hebrews might have left out Melchizedek.

If a daily devotional is like a photo album, with each page offering a self-contained snapshot of glory, Scripture itself is like a mural, with each day's reading comprising only a centimeter of the whole. Some days, we happen upon a centimeter bright with glory, perhaps Psalm 23 or Romans 8. Other days, a dark image appears before us, as when we read prophecies or stories of judgment. Still other days, we find a section that simply mystifies us, the kind that we would never find in a daily devotional.

Over time, though, we begin to grasp a glory in this mural that a snapshot could never give: a swirl of brightness and darkness, clarity and obscurity that coalesces into a masterpiece. And on those days, we will not wish that we had stayed safely within the snapshots of glory.

GRACE LIKE DEW

We can rarely judge the value of our daily devotions, then, by considering any day in itself. In fact, initial impressions can deceive. High-octane devotions do not always lead to spiritual growth, and ordinary devotions often yield more fruit than we expect. J.C. Ryle once preached,

Do not think you are getting no good from the Bible, merely because you do not see that good day by day. The greatest effects are by no means those which make the most noise, and are the most easily observed. The greatest effects are often silent, quiet, and hard to detect at the time they are being produced. Think of the influence of the moon upon the earth, and of the air upon the human lungs. Remember how silently the dew falls, and how imperceptibly the grass grows. There may be far more doing than you think in your soul by your Bible-reading.

The grace of God sometimes lands on us like lighting, and sometimes falls like dew. During some devotions, God places us in the cleft of the rock and lets us catch the trailing edge of his glory as he passes

by (Exodus 33:18–23). During others, he shrouds us in darkness so that we cannot see (Isaiah 50:10). Yet if we read patiently and faithfully, not trusting in our wisdom but crying out for God's, then the grace of God, though perhaps hidden in the moment, will in due time reveal its silent working.

Sometimes, then, we do well to ask of our morning devotions not “What were my feelings?” but “What, over time, are the effects?” Regardless of what I feel on any given morning, am I coming to treasure more of Christ's multifaceted glories? Is God's word making me a more holy husband, wife, brother, sister, friend? Am I growing in my readiness for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17)?

MANNA AND MILK

Ordinary devotions, of course, are not the ideal. We do not hope to come to our Bibles and walk away unmoved — or, worse, confused. We hope rather to “behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18) and walk away full of praise. And when this hope is deferred, it too can make the heart sick.

Yet neither are ordinary devotions the enemy. Like the manna in the wilderness, they too are from God. They too nourish and sustain us, even if imperceptibly. If we will patiently, faithfully eat the food God provides, ordinary days will give way to the milk and honey we long to taste again.

And in the meantime, how good it is for us to be thrown back on God, knowing more deeply than ever that if we are to see at all, he must give us sight. How good to sing with the psalmist, “As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us” (Psalm 123:2). In God's good time, if we do not give up, the unfolding of his words will give light (Psalm 119:130).



A (NOT SO) REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY FOR GREAT QUIET TIMES

By Heather Pace

**The following article was reprinted from thegospelcoalition.org*

Bible reading and prayer are undeniable staples in the Christian diet. Yet as universal as the daily “quiet time” is, it’s interesting to note how few people feel successful in the endeavor.

Just ask a room full of Christians how many minutes they spent in concentrated prayer last week—and listen to the room fall silent. Ask how engaged they were in Bible reading, Bible memorization, or any type of Bible study—and prepare to hear the crickets chirp.

So many Christians live with the nagging feeling that time with God doesn’t hold the priority it should in their lives. They want to make progress, but they just can’t seem to master the art of quality quiet times. Worse, many start to think of their quiet time as the enemy they can’t conquer, instead of the life-giving friend it is.

REAL STRUGGLE

Why are quiet times such war? Perhaps it’s because of unrealistic expectations or lack of diligence. Maybe it’s because the quiet times others post on social media make ours look subpar.

Or what if we’re making the whole thing more complicated than it needs to be?

Angst about quiet times is often connected to barely having them. Imagine how successful you’d feel if you spent a little time in God’s Word and prayer every day for the next year. What if you didn’t let the busyness of life undermine your time at Jesus’s feet (Luke 10:38–42)? Without even speaking of “quality time,” a legitimate quantity would make a massive difference.

Besides, merely “checking the box” quickly moves beyond that motivation. God’s Word is so good, and prayer is so profitable that if we just commit to these practices, results will follow. A momentum will develop. Faithfulness will lead not only to built-in routine, but also to life-changing habit.

Here are three reasons why mere faithfulness works.

1. God's Word Will Change You

The Bible has a way of convicting our hearts, correcting our thoughts, awakening our spirits, and changing our lives (Heb. 4:12). Psalm 19 says God's Word revives our soul, brings wisdom, rejoices our heart, enlightens our eyes, and, of course, keeps us from sin (Ps. 19:7–11).

If you want to have great quiet times, you need to just start having quiet times.

Scripture doesn't shy away from declaring its greatness—and for good reason. In the words of the old Sunday school song, if we can find ourselves in this Book every day, we will inevitably grow, grow, grow.

2. Prayer Will Affect You

In 1 John 5:14–15, the apostle writes:

“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

At first glance, it's hard to believe we always “have the requests we have asked of him.” When we rightly pray, however, we are relinquishing our will and wanting God's instead—which is what he always says “yes” to.

Prayer, then, reminds us to want God's will above our own. If we left our quiet time with this benefit alone, it would be worth the time.

Prayer is also the act of coming before the throne of grace to ask for help (Heb. 4:16). We enter prayer with concerns, and we leave with confidence in God's sovereign grip over all things. What more could you ask for during a quiet time?

3. You Will Want More

Spiritual disciplines are a little like a healthy diet. Pieces of fruit don't always look appealing when you stare at them. But if you take the plunge and bite into a juicy apple, you'll think,

that tastes good. I think I'll take another bite. So it is with God's Word and prayer—only exponentially more so.

Quantity will lead to inherent quality, which will invariably lead to more quantity of better quality.

The Psalms tell us God's Word is desirable, sweeter than honey to the mouth (Ps. 119:103). Tasting Scripture's goodness will create an appetite for more. You'll want to dig deeper and engage further. Faithful prayer has the same effect. The more you talk to God in faith, the more you will see him answer (Matt. 7:7–11), which will result in wanting to talk to him more.

In short, quantity will lead to inherent quality, which will invariably lead to more quantity of better quality. It's a beautiful cycle.

START THE CYCLE

This revolutionary strategy is hardly revolutionary; in fact, it's entirely basic. But it's also entirely true—if you want to have great quiet times, you need to just start having quiet times. Much of the battle is won by simply sitting in the chair, opening up the Bible, and taking time to talk to God.

It's okay if your quiet time doesn't "feel" a certain way. It doesn't need to be Instagram-worthy. The goal is to be faithful. Do it today, and wake up tomorrow and do it again. As you stick with it, you will be well on your way to a lifetime of solid quiet times.





WHY JOURNAL?

By Pastor Jason Hall

Journaling is an important part of Grow Group rhythms for two primary reasons: It helps us meditate, and it helps us recall.

JOURNALING HELPS US MEDITATE

As we've already stated elsewhere in our guidebook, journaling is beneficial to our individual spiritual lives because it forces us to slow down and think more deeply about the truths of God's Word. Author and pastor Donald Whitney says this:

Let's make clear that Jesus did not live and die for sinners to turn us into journal-keepers. He came to make us right with God. But once we are right with God through repentance and faith in who Jesus is and what He has done, a journal can be, as millions of those right with God throughout history have found, a great tool for thinking about and applying the life and death of Jesus.

Most people write slower than we think. The very physical act of writing (or typing, if you prefer) makes us keep our thoughts in our brains longer than we would normally keep them, which makes us simmer on them for at least a little while. When our thoughts are driven to the Word of God, and we linger on those thoughts as we write, we create more time and space for the Holy Spirit to press God's Word ever more deeply into our souls.

Author David Mathis has also called journaling a "handmaid" to Bible reading and prayer, in that it can provide a bridge between the two. Writing down what we see in Scripture can be a powerful basis for praying God's Word back to Him. Conversely, writing down prayers to God can be an excellent way to articulate our thoughts. All that and more can be part of the journaling experience. Mathis writes,

Journaling has the appeal of mingling the motions of our lives with the mind of God. Permeated with prayer, and saturated with God's word, it can be a powerful way of hearing God's voice in the Scriptures and making known

to him our requests. Think of it as a subdiscipline of Bible intake and prayer. Let a spirit of prayer pervade, and let God's word inspire, shape, and direct what you ponder and pen.

JOURNALING HELPS US RECALL

In addition to its benefits for our individual spiritual growth and habits, journaling also has a very practical benefit to our Grow Group meeting times, in that it helps us remember what we've learned so that we can share it with others.

We all live busy lives, and have many things running through our minds throughout the day and the week. When we gather weekly to share with each other what God is teaching us, it will be very difficult to recall what we learned and meditated on in our quiet times four or five days ago if we haven't written things down. Without the benefit of a journal, we would have to re-read the Scriptures we've studied, try to remember what we prayed about, etc. That would drain time and energy out of our meeting times. But when we have a journal, we just need to glance at what we wrote, even reading our own words to our group, as we recall what the Spirit has done through the Word and prayer in our lives.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

For these two primary reasons and more, journaling is a central rhythm of our Grow Group commitments. Here are a few more things to keep in mind:

- Journaling doesn't have to be long. You don't have to fill several pages with complex thoughts in order to meditate and recall. Keep it simple, especially if you're just starting out with journaling.
- What journal you use doesn't matter. Some might prefer a simple spiral notebook, while others will cherish a decorative journal. The most important thing isn't the style, but the substance.
- Ask for help. Don't be afraid to ask others how they journal, what method they use, and so forth. You might gain some critical insights from others in your Grow Group.

If you've never journaled before, don't be intimidated. In this guidebook, we have several examples of journaling strategies that have been tried and tested. Even if you have your own method of journaling, that's fine. As long as you are concentrating on what the text means in its original context, its significance for your life right now, and how the Spirit is leading you to apply God's Word, I'm confident you'll find journaling to be a worthy pursuit.





RESOURCE:

SAMPLE JOURNALING METHODS

In the next several pages, we'll describe several popular methods of journaling about Scripture and then include examples of each. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but these are strategies that leaders and teachers at Richland Creek have found helpful and effective.

We'll begin with a simple method called the Grow Method, which we developed specifically for our Grow Groups ministry. Unlike some other methods, it doesn't have an acronym to remember. It just uses the analogy of growing, soil, and seeds to prompt some very basic and straightforward journaling habits.

THE GROW METHOD & SAMPLE ENTRY

THE SOAP METHOD & SAMPLE ENTRY

THE HEAR METHOD & SAMPLE ENTRY

THE BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET



THE GROW METHOD

This simple, four-step journaling method prompts our minds using the metaphor of planting seeds of truth in the soil of our hearts to grow over time.

To begin: Write your *Scripture reference* and the *date* at the top of the page. After reading your passage for the day, proceed with these four steps.

1. Prepare the soil:

Pray for God to soften your heart. In your journal, you can write out a brief prayer or prompt.

2. Plant the seeds:

Read and journal “seeds” of truth you observe. Use these categories, for example: Seeds of truth about God, seeds of truth about His Word, seeds of truth about people’s response to God, and so forth. These “seeds” are your observations about what God’s Word says and what it means. You can write these in paragraph form, in bullet points, or whatever works for you.

3. Water the seeds:

Write a prayer of response in your journal. How can you praise and thank God for what you’ve learned? What sin should you confess? What needs do you need to bring before Him?

4. Bear Fruit:

Journal action points of how you can respond in obedience to the Word. You can have categories for this, too, such as the popular head/heart/hands motif: How do you need to renew your mind/change your thinking (head)? What fruits of the Spirit do you need to cultivate in your heart? What actions should follow suit (hands)?



SAMPLE ENTRY

THE GROW METHOD:

Text: *Genesis 28:10-22*

Date: August 31, 2024

Prepare the soil.

Father, "open my eyes to see wonderful things" in your word (Ps. 119:18), "satisfy me...with your steadfast love" (Ps. 90:14), and "incline my heart to perform your statutes forever..." (Ps. 119:112).

Plant the seeds of truth.

What I see about God: God appears to Jacob in a dream with a ladder or stairway from earth to heaven. In John 1:51, Jesus says he is this connection between God and man. God came to us through Jesus. God also repeats the promise that he made to Abraham, to give Jacob land and descendants and to bless the whole world through Jesus. God also promises to be with Jacob on this journey and to bring him safely back home, to the land of promise.

What I see about man's response: Jacob recognizes that he has been with God, and promises that "if" God keeps his promise, he will make his father and grandfather's God his God too, and will give God a "house" and a tenth of all he gains. Jacob is open to listening and watching what God might do, but he still lacks faith. It seems that Jacob should know far more about God than Abraham did, yet his response to God is far more reluctant than Abraham's was.

Water the seeds.

Father, thank you for coming to us to save us from our sins, knowing that we could never earn our way to you. Thank you that through Jesus, the offspring of promise, you have indeed blessed all the nations of the world. All of God's promises are yes and amen in Jesus!

Bear fruit.

Text my friend who is in a tough situation and encourage her that God will never leave nor forsake her and that I am praying for her. Find a time to go to coffee or drop off a meal or flowers.

Confession: God, I am blessed to know so much more about you than Abraham or even Jacob knew. Yet my faithful obedience is often so lacking. Please forgive me and help me to truly trust you and obey, especially in



THE SOAP METHOD

This method is simple and popular, and you can find lots of different writers online who recommend and practice their own version of this method. It's flexible and adaptable, based on the acronym SOAP: *Scripture-Observation-Application-Prayer*.

S – Scripture: Write down the Bible passage you are studying for the day. Some people recommend writing out the whole passage, but that's not often feasible, so I recommend copying down a particular verse that jumps out to you.

O – Observations: This is a list of what you see in the passage. It can be very basic things about who wrote the text, what seems interesting or unusual, what things in the passage are repeated, emphasized, or contrasted, and so forth.

A – Applications: Write about how God is moving you to do something about what you see in the Scripture. What specific changes will you make? Are you being led to repent of a sin, change your thinking, etc.?

P – Prayer: Respond to God's Word with your own words. Write out a prayer of praise to God for what you've learned of Him, a confession of sin, thanksgiving for His mercy and blessings, or all of the above!





THE SOAP METHOD

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Date: August 31, 2024

S - Scripture

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

O - Observations

Paul described in verses 1 through 6 that God had allowed him to see amazing visions of heaven. And we see in today's verses that God allowed Paul to be given a "thorn" in the flesh in order that he would not be conceited because of these amazing revelations. We do not know exactly what this thorn was, but based on what he calls it, it appears to be something painful, maybe a physical affliction. But there are some other things we know. Satan was the one doing the harassing, not God. However, we also see that Paul had prayed ("pleaded") three times for God to remove it. So we know that God had the power to remove this pain, but chose not to so that Paul would not become conceited and so Paul's weakness would more fully display the power and grace of God in his life.

A - Applications

The normal human response to pain and suffering is to avoid it or remove it if possible. There is nothing wrong with praying for God to heal us or to remove pain or sickness from our lives. I do need to pray for these things. But am I content to accept "No" as an answer? To let God's power show through my weakness? Not always. This means I need to continue to renew my mind. To see the redemptive nature of suffering, not only in my own life but in others.

P - Prayer

Father, I praise you that you are sovereign over my pain. You can remove it if you want, and I believe you are able! But if you don't, help me to be content with weakness and pain, knowing that your power is made perfect in me through weakness. Give me the grace to get through this day and whatever challenges it will bring. May others see your power shining through me as I speak your praises and show your love. Thank you that your grace is sufficient.



THE HEAR METHOD

The HEAR Method was developed and is used by Robby Gallaty and Replicate Ministries. The following description is adapted from the replicate.org website.

How To Complete a H.E.A.R. Journal: Before reading the text, pause to sincerely ask God to speak to you. It may seem trite, but it is absolutely imperative that we seek God's guidance in order to understand His Word.

H – Highlight: After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, open your notebook or journal, and at the top left-hand corner, write the letter H. This exercise will remind you to read with a purpose. In the course of your reading, one or two verses will usually stand out and speak to you. After reading the passage of Scripture, highlight each verse that speaks to you by copying it under the letter "H". Write out the name of the book, the passage of Scripture, the chapter and verse numbers that especially speak to you, and a title to describe the passage

E – Explain: After you have highlighted the passage in your journal, write the letter "E" under the previous entry. At this stage, you will explain what the text means. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse. Here are a few questions to keep in mind:

- Why was this written?
- To whom was it originally written?
- How does it fit with the verses before and after it?
- Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?
- What is He intending to communicate through this text?

At this point, you are beginning the process of discovering the specific and personal word that God has for you from His Word. What is important is that you are engaging the text and wrestling with its meaning.

A – Apply: After writing a short summary of what you think the text means, write the letter “A” below the letter “E”. This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, answer a series of questions to uncover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

- What does this mean to the original audience?
- What does this mean today?
- What would the application of this verse look like in my life?
- What is God saying to me?

As you complete your journal, these questions bridge the gap between the ancient world and your world today. They provide a way for God to speak to you from the specific passage or verse. Challenge yourself to write between two and five sentences about how the text applies to your life.

R – Respond: Finally, below the first three entries in your HEAR Journal, write the letter “R” for Respond. This is the last part of journal. Your response to the passage may take on many forms. You may write a call to action. You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word. You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned. You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous in your giving. Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read.



THE HEAR METHOD

Text: *Philippians 4:10-13*

Date: *August 31, 2024*

Title: *Secret of Contentment*

H - HIGHLIGHT

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

E - EXPLAIN

Paul was telling the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment. No matter the situation in Paul's life, he realized that Christ was all he needed, and Christ was the one who strengthened him to persevere through difficult times.

A - APPLY

In my life, I will experience many ups and downs. My contentment is not found in circumstances. Rather, it is based on my relationship with Jesus Christ. Only Jesus gives me the strength I need to be content in every circumstance of life.

R - RESPOND

Lord Jesus, please help me as I strive to be content in You. Through Your strength, I can make it through any situation I must face.





BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

The following worksheet, put together by Pastor Tony Donato for use in the Creek Counseling Ministry, is a step up in time and effort from the journaling methods.

If you're comfortable with a more involved method that follows closely to a traditional Bible study pattern, then something like this might be valuable to you.

If you'd like, you can download an electronic fillable form version of this worksheet at richlandcreek.com/growgroups.

Record the Scripture passage and date at the top of the page, then proceed with the following steps:

1. Read through the passage **twice**, noting what you think the author's main point is about.

2. Next, examine **study notes** from a study Bible, commentaries, and a good Bible dictionary, looking up **definitions** of important words (even if you are familiar with them) and words for which you are unsure of the complete definition. Write in your journal any key words and their definitions.

3. Before you read through the passage a third time, think about the following questions:

- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there an error to avoid?
- Is there a sin to forsake?
- Is there a promise or truth to claim?
- Is there a new thought about God?
- Is there a deeper understanding of the sacrifice Jesus made?

4. Read through the passage a third time, and write in your journal any answers to the questions above.

- 5.** Go back and examine your answer to #1 to see if it has now changed, and if so, change it accordingly.
- 6.** Looking back over the passage, what was the most meaningful word, phrase, or verse you read today, or thought that came to mind?
- 7.** Reword the most meaningful word, phrase, verse, or thought into a prayer of response to God.
- 8.** Write in your journal what you believe God wants you to do in a specific or practical way as a result of your study.





MATURING CHRISTIANS DEVELOP ONGOING SCRIPTURE MEDITATION AND MEMORIZATION

By Andy Davis
Pastor, First Baptist Church of Durham

**This article was reprinted from twojourneys.org and is an excerpt from Dr. Davis's book An Infinite Journey.*

HOW CAN I GET GOD'S WORD TO STICK?

Psalm 119:148, John 15:7

George Mueller gave a poignant testimony to the value of deep meditation on Scripture, and how it flowed into prayer for him. His goal in his daily time in the word and in prayer was to strengthen his inner man, and to get into a happy state in which he could serve the Lord with gladness:

I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.

The most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental, communion with the Lord. I began therefore, to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning.

As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.

(George Mueller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealing with George Mueller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Mueller Complete and Unabridged, vol. 1 [Muskegon, MI: Dust and Ashes, 2003], 271-272.)

Meditation on Scripture is essential to gaining a deep understanding of the truth of its words. Without meditation, the words of our daily reading can flow through our minds like water in a pipe and make no impact. But by means of meditation, we give the word a chance to settle in our minds and do its work.

Psalm 119 is a potent manual on scriptural meditation, producing ever-increasing insight and understanding. My favorite prayer for insight when coming to the Bible every day for my quiet time is Psalm 119:18: “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” The “seeing of wonderful things” in God’s law is a mental “sight” which can be called “illumination,” and it is the special work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But these moments of illumination don’t come without labor on our part. So, meditation on God’s word is essential to attaining the deeper knowledge, insight, and understanding we crave. Psalm 119 contains almost half of all the references to meditation in the Bible and is therefore the primary handbook for learning how to meditate on Scripture to gain insight. I found a fascinating couplet of verses in that magnificent psalm. Let me put them side by side so you can see the full impact:

Psalm 119:99

**I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.**

Psalm 119:27

**Let me understand the teaching of your precepts;
then I will meditate on your wonders.**

Verse 99 teaches something we would expect: “I meditate; therefore, I have insight.” Verse 27 reverses the order and therefore surprises us: “I understand; therefore, I meditate.” Verse 27, because it was surprising to me, was worth some meditation in its own right. “Why does the psalmist ask God for understanding in order that he might meditate?” Then it hit me: meditation on Scripture is hard work (see Psalm 119:148, “My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises”), and we probably won’t keep doing it if we get nothing from it!

An illustration may help us understand. Suppose you had an eccentric old uncle in Arizona who died and, in his will, left you an abandoned silver mine. Let’s say you flew out there to investigate your new property. You went to the nearby town and told the townsfolk about the will, and they laughed. They said, “That old mine

has been abandoned for years . . . no one has been up there even to look around . . . and as far as we know, no silver ever came out of that hole in the ground.” Let’s say you rent a pick-up truck, drive to the base of the mountain, climb up to the entrance and past the old plywood and 2x4s blocking the entrance . . . you poke around for two hours with a flashlight. Now, let’s say you find nothing but spiders and dust. Will you be motivated to ever go back in that hole again? No, you will try to sell the mountain and get something for your trouble.

But let’s say after ninety minutes, you suddenly notice a small tunnel leading off the main tunnel, and it seems different than the others. So, you crawl in about a hundred feet, and suddenly your flashlight shines on some shiny substance on the wall; your heart beats faster, you take your trowel and, with building excitement, dig some of the shiny rocks into your bucket. You take the rocks to the assay office in town, and with a look of amazement, the assayer says, “This is silver, my friend.”

Now let me ask the same question again: will you be motivated to ever go back in that hole again? Once you start discovering new things through meditation, you will go down into the tunnel again and again for more silver. By the hard work of careful Bible meditation, you will mine out the building blocks of a new civilization within your heart—a City of Truth built over the years.

**Memorization
is one of the
simplest ways
to ensure
long term
meditation.**

Memorization is one of the simplest ways to ensure long term meditation. By memorization, we hide God’s Word in our hearts so we will not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11). I think it is only by memorization that we can practically meet Christ’s condition in John 15:7: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” How can Jesus’ words remain constantly in us if we don’t memorize them?



RESOURCE

MEMORIZING THE BIBLE

When introducing his discussion of Bible memorization in his classic book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney writes the following:

“Many Christians consider the spiritual discipline of memorizing God’s Word as something tantamount to modern-day martyrdom. Ask them to memorize Bible verses and they react with about as much eagerness as a request for volunteers to face Nero’s lions. How come? Perhaps because many associate all memorization with the memory efforts required of them in school. It was work, and most of it was uninteresting and of limited value. Frequently heard, also, is the excuse of having a bad memory. But what if I offered you one thousand dollars for every verse you could memorize in the next seven days? Do you think your attitude toward Scripture memory and your ability to memorize would improve? Any financial reward would be minimal when compared to the accumulating value of the treasure of God’s Word deposited within your mind.”

Yes, Bible memory is hard, but the payoff is incredible. If you’re looking for help and motivation to memorize the Word of God, the following resources may be helpful for you.

BOOKS

The best book on Bible memorization is also one of the shortest and most accessible: *How to Memorize Scripture for Life* by Andy Davis (Crossway). Dr. Davis is well-known for his writings on Scripture memory, and his book provides an easy-to-follow plan for memorizing, as its subtitle says, one verse or even entire books.

The book quoted above, Donald Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (NavPress) is also a good resource for Bible memorization, though it tackles many other topics as well.

APPS

If technology is something you find interesting and helpful, the following apps dedicated to Scripture memory may be helpful to you.

Verses

Verses has several quick memory games that are helpful for memorization. The benefit of Verses is its flexibility: You can quickly and easily add any verse, or verses, you want. The app is free, but you can subscribe for a few dollars a year to add new translations (KJV and ESV are included in the free version). The drawback of Verses is that it doesn't have any automatic settings to prompt review, though it does track your progress in memorizing a verse.

Fighter Verses

Fighter Verses is a free app produced by Truth78, a ministry that grew out of John Piper's Bethlehem Baptist Church. It's completely free, and you can choose from multiple translations. It also has a great review system and prods you to keep reviewing verses you've memorized. Its memory games are similar to those used in other apps.

The only drawback of this app is the fact that the Fighter Verses memory verses program, for which the app is named, is deeply integrated into the app. So if you're not using that program, it's less helpful. But you can add your own verses and just ignore the Fighter Verses program if you'd like.

TIPS FOR MEMORIZING

The books above offer good step-by-step instructions for staying current on memory verses, but if you're not planning on getting any books we can offer the following advice from John Collin, president of Word of Life Ministries:

Start Small

Commit five minutes a day to learn and to review your verse during your daily routine. This could be on your commute to work, while exercising, or when waiting in line. We all have time every day we can claim to make this work. What is your time?

To Learn—Read, Repeat, Read, Repeat

Everyone remembers those things they repeat often. Here is what taking a verse through the learning process would look like:

Learning

Day 1: say the verse 25 times

Day 2: say the verse 20 times

Day 3: say the verse 15 times

Day 4: say the verse 10 times

Day 5: say the verse 5 times

Once the learning process is complete, you will move each verse to daily review.

SET UP A REVIEW SYSTEM

Having a simple review system will keep these verses fresh for the rest of your life. That would look like the following:

Daily Review

Daily review these verses, saying them once a day for 60 days. Once complete move it to weekly review.

Weekly Review

Here, simply place verses evenly throughout the seven days of a week with the goal of reviewing each verse, saying them once a week for 10 weeks.

- **Monday review**
- **Tuesday review**
- **Wednesday review**
- **Thursday review**
- **Friday review**
- **Saturday review**
- **Sunday review**

Monthly Review

Review the verse, saying it once a month for life by dividing them in your monthly review of 1-28 days and evenly separating verses throughout the month. If at any time the verse needs refreshing, you can simply start it back further in the system.

From a small start of just 5 minutes invested each day, you may see this grow to 7 to 10 minutes once your system grows to 100-200 verses. Think about the incredible resource this will be in your life as you begin small and allow this to grow into a spiritual powerhouse over a few years.

SUMMARY

Author Jerry Bridges reminds us that

“...each of us is living on a continuum of influence between society around us and the Word of God. There simply is no better way to move toward the ‘Word of God’ end of the continuum than through the discipline of Scripture memorization. I know it requires work and is sometimes discouraging when we can’t recall accurately a verse we have worked hard to memorize. The truth is, however, all forms of discipline require work and are often discouraging. But the person who perseveres in any discipline, despite the hard work and discouraging times, reaps the reward the discipline is intended to produce” (*The Discipline of Grace*).



RESOURCE

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

For generations, Christians have recognized prayer as the “chief exercise of faith,” where the rubber meets the road, so to speak, when it comes to actually practicing what we say we believe. If God is real, and is as powerful and good as we claim to believe, then surely we’ll speak to Him regularly and passionately, right? Yet so many of us struggle with this most basic expression of our faith.

Growing together in prayer is one of our main desires in Creek Grow Groups, so let’s consider some resources that may help us in this endeavor.

BOOKS

There are many great books on prayer, and we have listed several more in our Recommended Books section of this Guidebook. But three quick reads on prayer might be particularly helpful to you.

One is ***Enjoy Your Prayer Life*** by Michael Reeves (10Publishing). This very short book (only about 50 pages) will bless you because it is so straightforward and encouraging. Reeves meets us where we are, in our relative lack of prayer, and challenges us as he reminds us of all the ways that God loves us in, and in spite of, our prayer lives.

Another longer but still encouraging book is ***A Praying Life*** by Paul Miller (NavPress). Miller shares his own journey of growth through prayerfulness, providing powerful testimonies and helpful tips along the way.

Donald Whitney’s ***Praying the Bible*** (Crossway) is a short but powerful book that has transformed many a Christian’s prayer life. Whitney offers practical reasons to pray Scripture and a time-tested method for doing it effectively. If you’ve ever struggled to wed your Bible reading with your prayer life, then this is a great book for you.

APPS

You might find that your smartphone is actually anathema to a vibrant prayer life, but if you have the self-control to involve your phone in your prayer habit, there are a couple of apps that you may find useful.

Echo (Prayer)

Echo is an app that encourages and enables prayer with both reminders and prayer prompts from the Scripture. The basic version is free and lets you record your own prayers, set reminders to pray, access some pre-built prayers and prayer prompts, and more. It's also a very well-designed app. There is a paid version that allows you to create groups and share prayer requests among the group within the app. Echo has a wide community of users, so there are also public feeds of prayer prompts created by churches and ministries you can subscribe to.

Five Psalms

The Five Psalms app is a simple interface created for those who use Don Whitney's Five Psalms a Day approach to prayer, described in his book *Praying the Bible*. The app just loads the five psalms for that particular day, plus a chapter in Proverbs. You really need to read the book or have someone describe the method to use the app well. But it can be a really helpful supplement if you do.

PRAYER ACROSTICS

The two methods described below are really helpful tools for remembering what to pray since recalling what to pray is often a significant barrier to our prayer. Both of them are loosely based on the themes of the Lord's Prayer, and as such, are nothing more than a way to organize your thoughts to stay focused in prayer.

PRAY

PAUSE, REJOICE, ASK, YIELD

The following explanation is taken from navigators.org.

PAUSE

Jesus said . . . , "When you pray, . . ."

To start we must stop. To move forward we must pause. This is the first step: Put down your wish list and wait. Sit quietly. "Be still and know that I am God." Become fully present in place and time so that your scattered senses can recenter themselves on God's eternal presence. Stillness and silence prepare your mind and prime your heart to pray from a place of greater peace, faith, and adoration. In fact, these are themselves important forms of prayer.

REJOICE

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.

The Lord's Prayer begins with an invitation to adoration: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name." Having paused to be still at the start of a prayer time, the most natural and appropriate response to God's presence is reverence. Try not to skip this. Hallowing the Father's name is the most important and enjoyable dimension of prayer. Linger here, rejoicing in God's blessings before asking for more.

ASK

Your kingdom come, your will be done. . . . Give us today our daily bread.

Prayer means many things to many people, but at its simplest and most immediate, it means asking God for help. It's a soldier begging for courage, a mother alone in a hospital chapel. The Lord's Prayer invites us to ask God for everything from "daily bread" to the "kingdom come," for ourselves (petition) and for others (intercession).

YIELD

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. . . . Amen.

The final step of prayer is surrender. It's a clenched fist slowly opening or a field of California poppies turning to the sun. We yield to God's presence "on earth as in heaven" through contemplative prayer and by listening to His Word, which is "our daily bread." We yield to God's holiness through confession and reconciliation, praying, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." And we yield to His power in spiritual warfare, asking our Father to "deliver us from evil." It's by surrendering to God that we overcome, by emptying ourselves that we are filled, and by yielding our lives in prayer that our lives themselves become a prayer—the Lord's Prayer—in the end.

ACTS:

ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING, SUPPLICATION

The following explanation is taken from ligonier.org.

ADORATION

The first element of prayer should be adoration, or praise. The Psalms, which are inspired samples of godly prayer, are heavily weighted on the side of adoration. I've noticed over many years that as we grow in the discipline and in the delight of prayer, it seems that we naturally spend more and more of our time on this first element.

CONFESSION

Second, prayer should include confession of our sin; as we remember who we are when we come into God's presence, we see that we have come short of His holiness and have need of His forgiveness.

THANKSGIVING

Third, when we pray, we should always give thanks, remembering the grace and mercy God has shown toward us.

SUPPLICATION

Fourth, prayer rightly includes supplication or petition, bringing our requests for the needs of others and ourselves to God.

I think this is a helpful acrostic for remembering both the elements and the priorities of prayer. Unfortunately, we often spell our prayer life something like S.C.A.T., because we start with supplication and spend very little time, if any, on adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.

ACTS IN THE LORD'S PRAYER

When we look at the Lord's Prayer, we see adoration at least implied in the petition "Hallowed be Your name." Jesus acknowledged that God's name is holy. We certainly see confession in the petition "Forgive us our debts." And there are supplications. However, it seems that the T is conspicuously absent. Where in the Lord's Prayer do we find any overt expression of gratitude to God? It's not there. That's strange, for as the Apostle Paul taught, thanksgiving should always be included in our prayers: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6, emphasis added).

Even though thanksgiving is not explicitly mentioned in the Lord's Prayer, I think it is implied in the petition: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). My reason for making this assertion is simple: we are to be alert not only to the need that we have daily for food, but to the reality of God's daily provision for our needs. That realization, of course, should induce us to an attitude of thanksgiving.

PRAYER CALENDAR

Many people have found it helpful to develop a prayer calendar to organize their prayer lives. There are many different approaches to organizing a prayer calendar, and any approach can be customized to match your personality and rhythms.

The following two approaches to organizing a prayer calendar are not mutually exclusive. Use them or adapt them if they are helpful to you.

WEEKLY PRAYER CALENDAR

A weekly prayer calendar can be organized so that you are prompted to pray mainly for a different group of people or a particular recurring request for each day of the week. You could do this in five- or seven-day increments.

For example, you could have on your prayer calendar to always pray for your immediate family members on **Monday**, your church and pastors on **Tuesday**, members of your Grow Group on **Wednesday**, lost friends and family on **Thursday**, and so forth. You get the idea. You could, of course, double up on some days and include almost anything you wanted. The goal of this approach is

to provide prompts to pray for important things regularly.

Of course, you could combine this approach with one of the acrostic methods above or with praying the Bible.

MONTHLY PRAYER CALENDAR

Another approach to a prayer calendar focuses more on particular people you want to keep in prayer. With this approach, you would take a piece of paper (probably in your journal) and number it 1-30. Beside each number, write a name or two of people you want to be regularly praying for—friends, family members, Grow Group members, etc.

Then, on any particular day of the month, you will be prompted to pray specifically for that person(s). You can even reach out to the people you're praying for that day to ask for prayer requests. This is an especially helpful method for keeping in touch with people you may not see on a regular basis.

Again, this approach can be combined with other prayer strategies to keep your prayer life fresh and engaging. However you pray, do it on purpose and know that God is with you!





THE BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

By Pastor Jason Hall

For years, I shied away from using the word “accountability” when teaching or leading because it seemed to be such a profoundly negative term. In our larger society, we often use the term to refer to our criminal justice system or when people who do bad things get their comeuppance. So, it’s not surprising that we can sometimes carry those negative connotations over when using the term “accountability” in our Christian relationships.

Unfortunately, I have not found a good substitute word, so accountability it is. But as a part of our Grow Groups, accountability is not a negative, but a profoundly positive thing. In fact, I believe mutual accountability will ultimately be the thing that God will most use to transform the culture of our church using our Grow Group structure.

That said, accountability is not without its pitfalls, so I thought it would be wise to take a few minutes and write down some basic benefits and dangers of accountability as we embark on this Grow Group journey together.

Full disclosure: The categories I use below are adapted from a blog post on Andy Naselli’s website, andynaselli.com. The thoughts and development of the categories are mine.

BENEFITS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Motivation: At its most straightforward, accountability motivates us toward godliness by providing another reason to pursue holiness.

Safety: Accountability doesn’t always keep us from sin, but it may often keep us from regular, repeated sin over the long haul, which is often where sin does major damage in our relationships. Catch and deal with it early, rather than hiding sin and letting it grow.

Consistency: By being accountable specifically to spiritual disciplines, it encourages but does not guarantee spiritual growth.

Specificity: Accountability questions require specific answers in specific areas. This is more helpful than the vague, “how are you doing?” that passes for accountability for many of us. It’s easy to give general answers to vague questions, but specific questions get at our hearts.

Thoroughness: Accountability in multiple areas challenges us to pursue Christ in all of our lives.

Community: Being vulnerable and truthful with other believers helps us establish a long-term habit of openness and trust, which blesses our lives with deeper relationships.

Encouraging consistent accountability is undoubtedly beneficial. There are multiple Scriptures that would encourage us to seek accountability (Hebrews 3:12-14; James 5:16; Galatians 6:1; and Hebrews 10:24-25). But accountability is not a magic pill that automatically keeps us from sin. Oddly enough, it is possible to use accountability as a smokescreen to hide our sin from others. Here are a few dangers to avoid in accountability.

DANGERS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Heartless participation: We could approach accountability as just a box to check, a requirement to submit to, rather than joyfully embracing it for our good.

Impressing God: We could pat ourselves on the back and think that a good report from our accountability partners means we’re good Christians and that God is especially pleased with us. This kind of thinking leads to works righteousness and is deadly for believers.

Impressing ourselves: If we’re doing well, it could quite frankly lead to pride and exalting ourselves in our own minds. We must remind ourselves that we are where we are by God’s grace.

Impressing each other: Accountability time could become an opportunity for us to boast and impress each other, all in the name of “coming clean.”

Comparing ourselves to each other: This is a common problem. It's easy in our accountability time to listen to others and think, "well, at least I didn't do that." We give ourselves a pass on sin because we move the standard from Jesus to other people around me. Being like Jesus, not like other Grow Group members, is the goal.

Lying: We are tempted to lie because our sin is embarrassing and stupid. But swallowing our pride and being honest with ourselves is critical to genuine relationships.

Lack of transparency: This is kind of the little brother of lying. We might not outright lie, but in answer to one of the accountability questions, we may hold back details that we know would lead us to repent. Let your conscience be your guide in this regard.

Fearing man: Ultimately, accountability is about honesty and killing sin before God, not impressing others or improving what others think of us. Keep the focus where it should be, on the Lord and on His Word, and don't let your desire to perform before other Christians get you off track.

Brothers and sisters, please know that I am praying for you (and myself) as we navigate together through our own sins and build strong, trusting relationships within our church. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it!







RECOMMENDED BOOKS

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but if you'd like to do more reading on discipleship, spiritual disciplines, and the like, these recently published titles might be helpful.

GENERAL DISCIPLESHIP

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Touchstone.

Bridges, Jerry. *The Discipline of Grace*. NavPress.

Coleman, Robert. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Spire.

Davis, Andrew. *An Infinite Journey*. Ambassador International.

Dever, Mark. *Discipling*. Crossway.

Gallaty, Robby, and Chris Swain. *Replicate*. Moody.

Kruger, Melissa. *Growing Together*. Crossway.

Lawless, Chuck. *Disciple*. Tyndale.

Liederbach, Mark. *Chasing Infinity*. Cru Press.

Miller, Paul. *J Curve*. Crossway.

Ortlund, Dane. *Deeper*. Crossway.

Putman, Jim, and Bobby Harrington. *DiscipleShift*. Zondervan.

Smith, J. Josh. *The Titus Ten*. B&H.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Hughes, Kent. *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Crossway.

Mathis, David. *Habits of Grace*. Crossway.

Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*
NavPress.

READING THE BIBLE

Guthrie, George. *A Short Guide to Reading the Bible Better*. B&H.

Kostenberger, Andreas, and Richard Fuhr. *Inductive Bible Study*.
B&H.

Harmon, Matthew. *Asking the Right Questions*. Crossway.

Hendricks, Howard, and William Hendricks. *Living by the Book*. Moody.

Plummer, Robert. *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*. Kregel.

Smethurst, Matt. *Before You Open Your Bible*. 10Publishing.

Wilkin, Jen. *Women of the Word*. Crossway.

PRAYER

Greear, J.D. *Just Ask*. The Good Book Company.

Keller, Timothy. *Prayer*. Penguin.

Miller, Paul. *A Praying Life*. NavPress.

Reeves, Michael. *Enjoy Your Prayer Life*. 10Publishing.

EVANGELISM

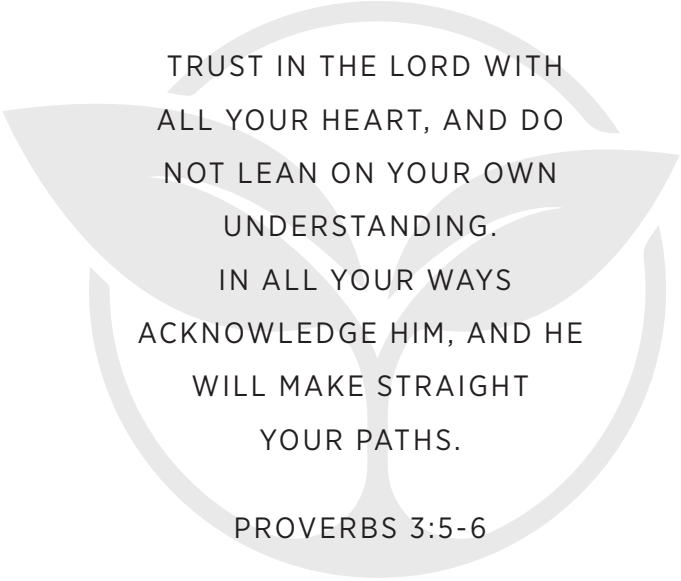
Dever, Mark. *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*. Crossway.

Newman, Randy. *Questioning Evangelism*. Kregel.

Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. IVP.

Stiles, Mack. *Evangelism*. Crossway.





TRUST IN THE LORD WITH
ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO
NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN
UNDERSTANDING.
IN ALL YOUR WAYS
ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE
WILL MAKE STRAIGHT
YOUR PATHS.

PROVERBS 3:5-6