

GROWING IN THE HABITS OF A DISCIPLE

“... walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God ”
- Colossians 1:10 (CSB)

“Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time ... ”
- Ephesians 5:15–16 (CSB)

These are uncertain and challenging times. It feels as if our very world has turned upside down. Yet, even in the midst of this, we know that our mission as a church has not changed: **Following the Holy Spirit, we exist to create a movement of disciple-making disciples, in RDU and around the world.**

As we love and care for each other, our city, and our world, we know God has called us to grow as disciple-making disciples and deepen our dependence on him. As we say often around here, “The gospel is not just the diving board; it’s the pool.” We believe God is at work in this season in many ways, but we know one of them is for us to go deeper into that pool. We want to use this time well. We don’t want to waste this moment; rather, we want to trust that God will redeem it.

God wants each of us to increase in our knowledge of him, even in this season. In light of this call, we want to take five weeks and focus our church family in growing deeper in essential habits of being a disciple of Jesus. For five weeks, we will focus on five essential habits for disciples of Jesus. We will discuss them in our small groups, challenge each other to grow in them, and provide resources for those that are led to dig even deeper.

Visit summitchurch.com for our weekly Growing in the Habits of a Disciple guide.

Week Three: The Habit of Daily Prayer

Perhaps no singular habit in the Christian life is as powerful or transformative as the habit of daily prayer. Prayer is simply conversation with God. The Bible shows us repeatedly that God hears the cries of his people (Exodus 3:7; 22:23; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Nehemiah 9:9, 27; Psalm 34:7; 106:44; 145:19).

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And when his people pray, God moves. God knows our needs and says he will respond when we ask in Jesus' name (Matthew 6:8; 7:7–11; Luke 7:9–13; James 4:2). Prayer also cultivates a posture of dependence in the hearts of God's people. Prayer is our way of expressing to God that we are powerless and all the power to fulfill the Christian life and ministry is found in him and him alone.

In addition to teaching us *why* we should pray, the Scriptures also teach us *how* to pray. The power in prayer doesn't come from our words but from God's Word; so it is important that we learn how to incorporate God's Word into our prayer life. One model for praying the Bible is the acronym ACTS, which stands for four categories or types of prayer—**a**doration, **c**onfession, **t**hanksgiving, **s**upplication. We consistently see these types of statements in the prayers of God's people throughout the Scriptures. The Psalms and the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) would be just a few of the many examples. This week's discussion will encourage us to take practical steps to grow in our ability to commune with God in prayer by using the ACTS model.

Our Next Step

Each week's study will lead us to one outcome, one habit, to develop as disciples of Jesus. To cultivate a habit of daily prayer, our next step is to *pray for at least five minutes each day this week using the ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication) model as a guide.*

Before Your Small Group Meeting

- Listen to the weekend message from May 2/3.
- Read Psalm 23.
- Be ready to split up into smaller prayer groups at the end of this week's small group meeting.

Questions for Group Reflection and Discussion

Ask your group to open their Bibles and invite them to open up any sermon notes from the weekend message. Pray together and ask God to speak to your group by the power of his Spirit and through his Word as you discuss the following questions.

Discuss the Weekend Message

1. In the past few weeks, we've talked a lot about prayer as a church. We've heard multiple sermons focused on prayer, attended campus-based prayer nights, and participated in a church-wide call for

unbroken prayer before Easter. So why are we focusing on prayer again in our weekend message *and* in our small groups?

2. The weekend message taught us four main points from Luke 11:1–9. Jesus' parable calls God's people to pray with (1) persistence, (2) desperation, (3) boldness, and (4) trust. Which one of these points is God calling *you* to focus on this season in your prayer life? Why?

About This Week's Study

Instead of studying more about *why* we should pray, this week's guide will lead us in the practice of praying the Bible using the ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication) model as a guide. In our time together, we will practice praying through one passage of Scripture: Psalm 23. Our group time will provide us with opportunities to (1) identify prayer points in the text and (2) pray—with a special focus on praying prayers saturated with God's Word.

The Psalms are a perfect place to learn how to pray, as they were the songs, laments, and prayers of God's people. When we pray through the Psalms, we are being guided in our prayers by people who knew God intimately, people like David, Moses, and others. The Psalms praise God for his beauty, describe his wonderful attributes, and recount his good works on behalf of his people. If you want to know God's character in a deeper way, look to the Psalms. When we pray through the Psalms, we also join our voices together with God's people through the centuries, in all parts of the globe, who have prayed from these same passages. Psalm 23, in particular, reminds us that God provides comfort and restoration.

This week, move through the following exercises as a whole group to help each other build a prayer time from Psalm 23. **Each member should have a pen and paper (or a device)** and complete the following exercises to develop the prayer points for the Respond in Prayer section below.

Read and Pray Psalm 23

Begin by reading Psalm 23 out loud as a group.

Adoration

1. OBSERVATION

When we pray to God in adoration, we remember God's character traits and praise him for how wonderful he is. What do we learn about God's character from Psalm 23? Sometimes aspects of God's character will be obvious and explicit (e.g., God is our shepherd in verse 1), and other aspects will be implied (e.g., God is righteous in verse 3).

Give each member of your group 60 seconds to make a list of words or phrases that reveal God's character.

2. DISCUSSION

Now, let's take our list of observations about God's character and turn them into prayer prompts. Invite at least two or three group members to verbally share one observation from the text about God's character and how they might turn that word or phrase into a one-sentence prayer of adoration. Some might even consider starting their sentence with "God, I adore you because you are _____." Or, "God, we praise you because you have done _____."

Confession

1. OBSERVATION

Confession is simply admitting to God where we have sinned. Confession may often involve where we have not followed God's commands or lived a life that reflects his character. While Psalm 23 may not give us direct statements of confession from the psalmist, these Scriptures can still convict us of sin and lead us to pray prayers of confession.

One way to look for prayer prompts in this category is to ask, "What does this passage say about a life that honors God, and do we live that way?" For example, Psalm 23:4 says "I fear no danger." But if we're honest, we *do* fear danger, at least sometimes! In that way, verse 4 could lead us to confess our fears and worries to God.

Give your group 60 seconds to read back through Psalm 23 silently and make a list of words or phrases that could prompt further prayers of confession.

2. DISCUSSION

Like the adoration section, let's take our list of observations and turn them into statements of confession. Invite at least two or three group members to verbally share one observation from the text and how they might turn that word or phrase into a brief prayer of confession. Some might even consider saying, "God, Psalm 23 says _____. I confess that I'm tempted to doubt those truths." Another idea could be to say, "God, your Word tells us that we should _____. I confess that I have not obeyed your commands. I have _____."

Thanksgiving

1. OBSERVATION

The Scriptures remind us of countless ways that we can express our thanksgiving for God and his impact on our lives. What words or phrases from Psalm 23 describe what God has done for us throughout our lives? Or, how do words or phrases from Psalm 23 remind you of God's provision in your own life recently?

Give your group 60 seconds to read back through Psalm 23 silently and make a list of words or phrases that spark feelings of gratitude and thankfulness.

2. DISCUSSION

Let's take our list of observations and turn them into statements of thanksgiving. Invite at least two or three group members to verbally share one observation from the text and how they might turn that word or phrase into a one-sentence prayer of thanksgiving. Consider starting your prayers with "God, I thank you for _____."

Supplication

1. OBSERVATION

Supplication is a fancy way of saying that we make our requests known to God. Prayers of supplication, then, are the needs, desires, or requests that we want to bring before God. But as we consider prayers of supplication, it's important to let the Bible shape our requests. Supplication is often where our God, through his Word, meets our circumstances. How does the text of Scripture inform your request? Are there words or phrases from Psalm 23 that prompt you to ask God for something? Psalm 23:1 says that in the Lord our Shepherd we have what we need. From this verse, we might ask God to provide for certain physical needs, or we might ask him to allow our souls to be satisfied in him!

Give your group 60 seconds to read back through Psalm 23 silently and make a list of words or phrases that could prompt further prayers of supplication.

2. DISCUSSION

Let's take our list of observations and turn them into prayers of supplication. Invite at least two or three group members to verbally share one observation from the text and how they might turn that word or phrase into a one-sentence prayer of supplication. Some might start by saying, "God, because of who you are, we ask you to _____."

Share Our Next Step

This week, we are asking every group member to commit to practicing our next step together:

Pray for at least five minutes each day this week using the ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication) model as a guide.

If your small group is larger than six people, we ask that you divide your group into even smaller groups of four to six people for a more intimate environment that encourages more participation in prayer.

- Some platforms like Zoom Pro feature ways to break your call into smaller sections.
- You could also choose to wrap up the larger call together and spend the remainder of your group time on separate calls in your smaller groups of four to six.

Remember, we want everyone to *pray for at least five minutes each day this week using the ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication) model as a guide*. The instructions below are intended to help each group member **practice praying with the ACTS model and cultivate the habit of daily prayer**.

Dig Deeper

God is calling each of us to grow in our knowledge of him. If praying for at least five minutes each day this week using the ACTS model is not a challenge for you, check out the Dig Deeper section on daily prayer in our Growing in the Habits of a Disciple guide at summitchurch.com. We also invite everyone to join the Summit for an all-church virtual prayer night on May 7. For details, visit summitchurch.com.

Respond in Prayer

In your smaller groups of four to six, return to the prayer points that each of you have observed and written from Psalm 23. Invite everyone in your group to keep their Bibles open to Psalm 23.

Adoration: Invite two or three group members to voice prayers of adoration. Adoration points that may add to what you have already discussed:

- Declare that God alone is the good Shepherd and the only shepherd you will follow (v. 1, 4).
- Praise God for being righteous and for granting that righteousness to his sheep (v. 3).
- Praise God for being the eternal One, whose life and light last forever (v. 6).

Confession: Ask your group to take 60 seconds and write out their own individual prayer of confession to God. Consider these confession prompts in addition to what you've already discussed:

- Confess to God how you have let fears cause you to doubt his promises to provide for you. Be specific (v. 4).
- Confess to God how you have chosen to do or say things that do not fit with goodness and mercy (v. 5). Be specific.

Thanksgiving: Have everyone in the group pray a short, one-sentence prayer of thanksgiving. It can be something specific from their lives or something directly from Psalm 23. Take turns, but allow time for everyone to pray at least twice. Some examples might be along these lines:

- Thank God for the ways he has restored your soul (v. 3). (Perhaps it was when you became a Christian or sometime during the current quarantine.) Be specific with how you have experienced God's restoration.
- Thank God for his provision for you during the times of quarantine (vv. 2, 5). How has he kept your family going in times of tragedy?

- Thank God for giving us eternal hope, that even if our current suffering lasts for a long time, that it is only temporary, and our place at his table is eternal (v. 6).

Supplication: Ask every member in your smaller group to voice one prayer of supplication. How are you asking God to move on your behalf this week? If your group still needs ideas, consider the following prompts:

- Ask God to help you overcome any fears that you are currently experiencing.
- Where do you need God's comfort and restoration right now? Be specific about your needs and ask God to give you what you think you need. But also trust that God will not leave you in need (v. 1).