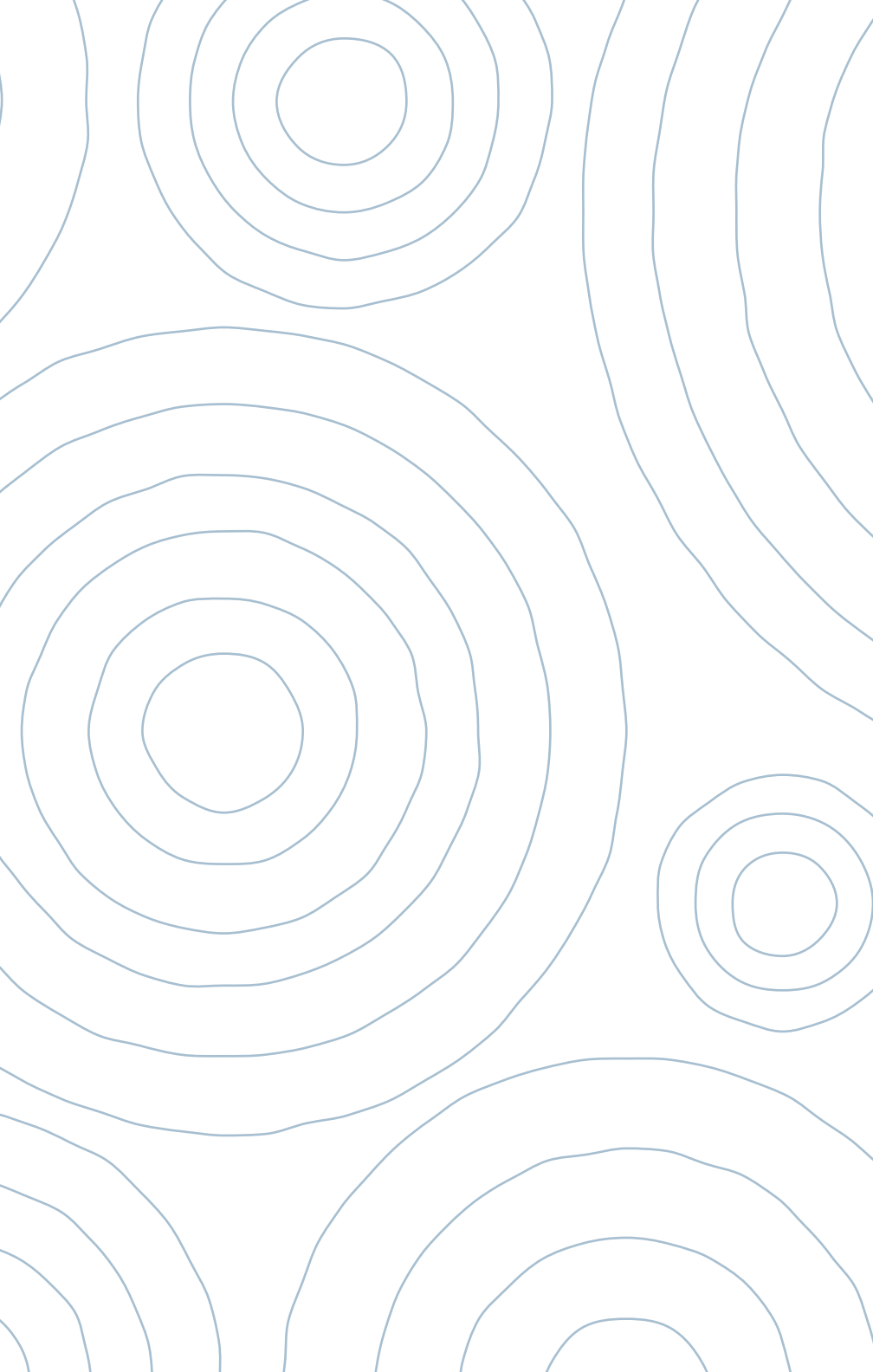
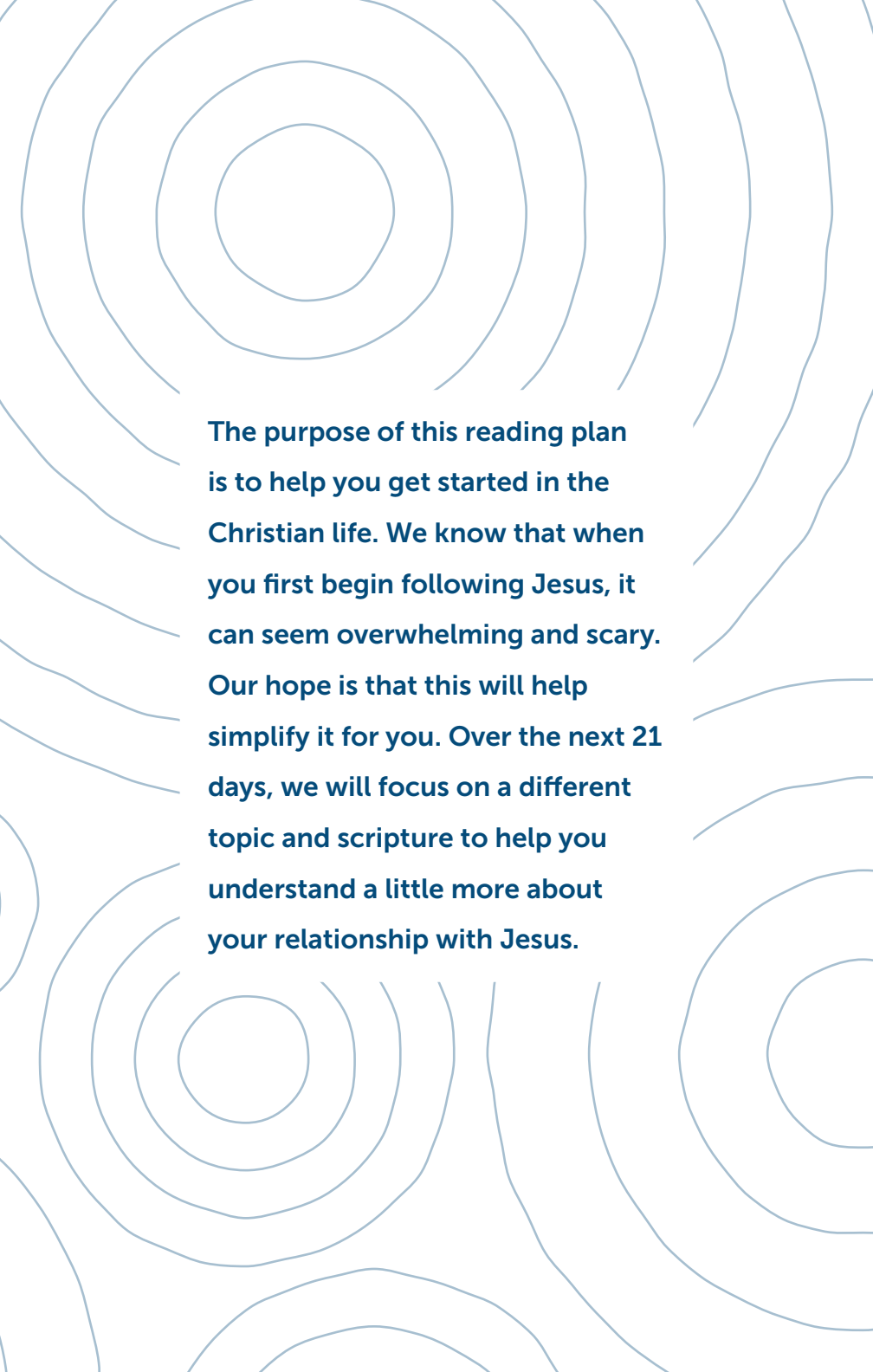




THE BEST IS YET TO COME

21 DAY READING PLAN





The purpose of this reading plan is to help you get started in the Christian life. We know that when you first begin following Jesus, it can seem overwhelming and scary. Our hope is that this will help simplify it for you. Over the next 21 days, we will focus on a different topic and scripture to help you understand a little more about your relationship with Jesus.

Clarity

Reading: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 3:1-19

Devotion: In the beginning, God created us to be image bearers. To walk in relationship with Him and reflect Him to others. That is what it means to be an image bearer. However, when sin entered into the world in Genesis 3:1-19, it messed everything up. Sin separated us from a relationship with God and because of that we could no longer accomplish our purpose of reflecting Him to others. The good news of the gospel is that God has made a way for us to be reconciled back into a relationship with God. What does this mean for us? It means now that we have been saved, we can walk in a relationship with God and effectively be an image bearer of Christ to those around us. One of the greatest things about salvation is that it brings clarity into our lives. We no longer have to wander through life aimlessly. We can wake up everyday with confidence that we are who God created us to be and doing what God created us to do. Today, live your life in this clarity.

Understanding Salvation

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotion: Before you received Christ as Lord, you were like all of us, spiritually dead in your sin. But by God's grace (unmerited favor), you were made alive in Christ in an instant. What that means is that you are now alive spiritually. You now have access to a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit now lives in you. You have been raised from the dead spiritually. You will begin to experience some changes, which is perfectly normal. Those changes are taking place because of new spiritual life that is alive in you. It is important to understand that salvation is a work of God. It is not something that you did. When we surrender our life to Jesus and put our faith in His finished work on the cross, we are saved. At that moment, God's view of you changed. You are no longer a sinner that deserves eternal punishment. Now, you have been made right with God. In God's eyes, you are holy, blameless, and free from all accusation, not because you've done anything, but because of Jesus and his work on the cross. Now, that is amazing grace. Today, focus on what Christ has done for you and the new identity that He's given you! It changes everything!

Saved For A Purpose

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotion: So many times Christians don't understand that God saved us on purpose for a purpose. That purpose is to walk in a relationship with Him and fill the earth with His glory. In verse 10, God tells us that we are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. How awesome is that? This is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. This means that God has big plans for your life. It is easy to get caught up thinking about what those good works are, but if God would have wanted us to know, he would have told us. God wants us to simplify our focus. Jesus gave us two things to focus on in Mark 12:30-31: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." So many times we overcomplicate the Christian life. God designed it to be simple. Love Him and love others. Today, simplify your focus and trust the promise that God has prepared works for you to walk in.

The New Creation

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ezekiel 36:24-27

Devotion: Most people have an incomplete view of salvation. They think it is just a prayer at the end of a church service or a decision they make to get out of hell and into heaven. Although those are a part of it, salvation is a big deal! God tells us that we become a new person. Ezekiel 36:26-27 gives us great insight into what truly happens when we surrender our lives to Christ. It says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Wow! How awesome is that? At the moment of salvation, God gives us a new heart and the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. The same Spirit that lived inside of Jesus when he walked the earth now lives inside of us. This Spirit brings new desires and new motivations. Our Christian growth is largely about getting to know this Spirit better and learning how to follow its leading. The biggest thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit brings the desires of Jesus. The more we get to know Jesus through His Word, the better we will be able to recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Reconciliation

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Devotion: When God rescued us, we became members of his rescue team. In verses 18-21, we find out that we have been entrusted with a ministry. It is referred to as the ministry of reconciliation. We were saved so that we could help others be saved. The word “reconciliation” refers to enemies being restored into a right relationship. This is what happened when we were saved. We were enemies of God; we were a part of the wrong team. When we were saved, our relationship with God was restored. We become friends of God; we were traded to God’s team. Now, He wants to use us to help others do the same. How cool is that? God wants to use us to introduce others to the fact that they can be in a relationship with the God that created them. In verse 20, we are told that we are Christ’s ambassadors. That means that we are His representatives in a foreign place. It means that Jesus wants to use us to reveal himself to others. Simply, it means that God wants us to live our lives in such a way that people see Him in us. Today, be reminded that God has a purpose for your life. He wants to use you to reveal Himself to others and introduce them to the greatest relationship they can ever have.

Spending Time With God

Reading: John 15:1-17

Devotion: Spending time with God everyday is the most important thing we can do as a Christian. In verse 5, Jesus says, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” Think about how a branch and vine function. A branch receives all of its nutrients from the main vine. If a branch is cut off from the vine it shrivels up and dies. Our relationship with God is the same way. When we are connected to God, we bear fruit. When we are disconnected from God, we can do nothing. Spending time with God is how we stay connected to Him. So, how do we spend time with God? Remember three things: get alone, God’s Word, and prayer. Getting alone is important because it creates a personal and distraction free environment. God’s Word is essential because it is how God reveals himself to us. This is what renews our minds and teaches us who God is, who we are, and what our purpose is. Prayer is simply how we talk to God. It is how we open the line of communication with Him. There is no right or wrong way to pray. It is simply talking to God. Don’t overcomplicate spending time with God. Ask God to open your heart and speak to you through His Word. Here are 5 questions to ask as you read God’s Word:

- Who is God?
- Who am I?
- What has God done?
- Who have I become?
- What is my purpose?

God's Word

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Devotion: Many people see the Bible as just another book. But, it is far from that. It is the actual living and breathing Word of God. That means that God inspired it. He used human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit to create a book to reveal Himself to us. This is why it is so essential to us as Christians. It is how we know God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God is living and active and that it does a work in our hearts. Romans 12:2 tells us that the Word of God renews our minds from our old ways of thinking. 2 Peter 1:19-21 tells us that the Word of God is completely reliable and is as sure as the actual audible voice of God that Peter had heard before. The best way to approach the Bible is to read it as if you were hearing the voice of God. When we do that, our hearts receive it differently. It is not a book of suggestions but the words of a loving Father that wants to help us, protect us, and lead us. Look at verses 16-17 again in 2 Timothy 3. They give us instruction on what we should look to God's Word for: teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. This will help you as you begin to read God's Word more and more. Don't get overwhelmed! We have the rest of our lives to read, study, and pray through this incredible book. Take your time and know that God is going to transform your life as you continue to get to know Him through His Word.

Reading: Matthew 6:9-13

Devotion: To a Christian, praying should be as natural as breathing. Prayer is just the way we communicate with God. It comes as an overflow as we learn to depend on Him in every area of our life. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus gives us a few instructions about prayer. He tells us that prayer is personal. He wants it to be a one-on-one conversation as if we were talking with a friend. He teaches us that it is not about trying to impress God or people with many words. He wants you to talk to Him like a normal person. Then, He gives us a model prayer. Rather than memorizing this exact prayer, I want you to see that it includes 4 components: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It is easy to remember in the acronym: ACTS. First, Jesus adores God for who He is and what He's done. Next, He teaches us to confess our sin and ask for forgiveness. Next, He thanks God for His provision and blessing. He ends with supplication. Supplication just means to bring your wants to God. Jesus asks God to align Him to His will, lead Him away from temptation, and deliver Him from the evil one. Don't overcomplicate prayer! Just talk to God! Tell Him what is on your heart! You will learn quickly that He hears you and that prayer is a powerful weapon that He has given us. Also, try writing down your prayers in a journal (there is some space in the back for this). This will be very helpful for you!

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Reading: John 14:15-21; 15:26-27

Devotion: When we become a Christian, we are given the best gift on earth. That gift is the Holy Spirit. This is God living inside of us. In Scripture, we see that the Holy Spirit functions in a few different ways. Here are a few of those functions: Counselor; Helper; Encourager; Comforter; Advocate; Teacher. To have the Holy Spirit is to have God Himself inside of us as believers. The Holy Spirit teaches us the Word and guides us into truth. He reminds us of what Jesus has taught so that we can depend on His Word in the difficult times of life. The Spirit works in us to give us His peace, His love, and His joy. He comforts our hearts and minds in a troubled world. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to live by the Spirit and “not gratify the desires of the sinful flesh.” The Spirit can then produce His fruit in our lives so that we can reflect Jesus to those around us. The Holy Spirit is a “game changer.” He makes all the difference in the world. He is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and He lives in you. To grow as a Christian is to learn to depend on Him to change you from the inside out. Today, focus on depending on the Holy Spirit in everything: when you read Scripture, when you pray, when you love others, when you sin, when you get frustrated. Ask the Holy Spirit for Help. The quicker we learn to live every second of everyday this way, the more God will work in and through our lives!

Spiritual Warfare

Reading: John 10:10; Ephesians 6:10-20

Devotion: When we become a Christian, we enter into a war for the rest of our lives. In John 10:10, we are introduced to our opponent. Jesus tells us that He came to give abundant life, but Satan (our enemy) came to steal, kill, and destroy us. This may sound cheesy but this is no joke. It is serious business. Satan is real and he wants to destroy you now that you are a part of the kingdom of God. In Ephesians 6:10-20, we are taught how to fight against the devil's schemes. We are instructed to put on the "Full Armor of God" so that we can stand our ground when the day of evil comes. It consists of 5 components: Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Gospel of Peace, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit. The Bible instructs us to be aware of Satan's schemes. His schemes are spiritual. Most of them take place in our minds. Jesus refers to Satan as the great liar, accuser, tempter, and condemner. Those are his only tactics. However, as a Christian, we fight from victory not for victory. Jesus has already won the battle for us! We just have to know God's Truth, claim it, and live in it. Get familiar with the Armor of God! You will need it everyday to fight off Satan's attacks.

Walking By The Holy Spirit

Reading: Galatians 5:13-26

Devotion: The normal Christian life is a battle. In Galatians 5:13-26, we are introduced to the truth that two different desires are at work inside of every Christian. One desire is called our flesh. The flesh is referred to as your old self. Its desire is selfish and sinful. Basically, this desire says, “I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it.” The other desire is called the Spirit. This is the Holy Spirit inside of you. His desires match the desires of Christ. Namely, His desire is to please God. These two desires are direct opposites and they are at work in every believer. This is the daily battle of being a Christian. Walking by the Spirit is a daily decision we have to make. Romans 8 tells us to walk by the Spirit is to set our minds on what the Spirit desires. Basically, it is a mental battle. One of the greatest things we can learn to do as a Christian is to make time for things that fix our minds on God. This includes: prayer, worship music, reading and memorizing Scripture, community, generosity, etc.—with the focus of fixing our minds on Christ. Today and everyday, intentionally make the choice to walk by the Spirit. Ask God to help you!

Reading: Acts 2:42-47

Devotion: God didn't create us to walk through life alone. This is why He created the Church. We all need community! Isolation is the worst enemy of a growing believer. Isolation is the devil's playground. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us, "To be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Think about it. A lion always preys on another animal in isolation. As a Christian, we need community! Community encourages us when we are discouraged! Community teaches us how to love God and others! Community provides accountability for us when we wander off! Most of all, community allows us to tangibly see God in others. In Acts 2:42-47, we are introduced to the type of community that we are created to live in. As you read this passage, what do you notice about this group of people?

Serving

Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Devotion: Greatness in the kingdom of God is to be a servant. In Philippians 2:3-11, we are introduced to the mindset of Christ, who was the greatest servant that ever walked this earth. God's goal for us as a Christian is to reflect Him to those around us. It is impossible to reflect Christ without serving. In Mark 10:35-45, Jesus addresses his disciples who were arguing about who would be greater in the kingdom of God. He makes this mind blowing statement: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." This is exactly opposite to what we learn in the world. To be great in our society is to be first. To win a competition is to be first. Jesus turns this mindset on its head. In the kingdom of God, serving is the pathway to greatness. Serving is how we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Serving is how we show others the love of Christ. Serving is the lifestyle of a Christian. Jesus is our example. Today, who can you show the love of Christ to through serving?

Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Devotion: Nothing explains the heart of God better than generosity. Nothing we do shows the love of God quite like generosity. It is impossible to be growing in our relationship with God and not becoming more generous with our time and money. In John 3:16, Jesus shows us a link between love and giving. “For God so loved the world that He gave...” God loved the world so He gave. When we truly love something or someone, it is impossible not to be generous towards it. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Paul encourages us to be generous. He teaches us that it is more blessed to give than receive. He teaches us that God doesn’t want us to give reluctantly but cheerfully. The only way we can do this is if our hearts match God’s heart. Today, examine this connection between your heart and generosity. Does God have your heart in this area of your life? What can you do today to show someone the love of God through generosity?

The Mission

Reading: Matthew 28:18-20

Devotion: Right before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He left us with one command. He told us to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” This is the purpose of God’s Church. His Church is not a building. It is a group of people empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish this mission. What does it mean to make disciples? First, a disciple is a follower. A disciple of Jesus is someone that follows Jesus. To make a disciple is to go, baptize, and teach. It starts with us going and meeting people where they are with the message of Christ. Next, we lead them to Jesus. Baptism is the first step people take after they have been saved. Finally, we teach them what it looks like to follow Jesus. This involves us walking along side of them and teaching them everything that we have learned as a follower of Jesus: how to pray, how to spend time with God, why community is important. When we become a Christian, reaching other people and investing our life into them becomes our central focus. There is nothing more rewarding than to see people around us experience the same salvation and joy that we have. Today, examine your life. Who in your life is someone that you could begin building a relationship with and helping them become a disciple of Christ?

Reading: John 14:15-21

Devotion: The best way to define obedience is this: listen to God and do what He says. As a Christian, the greatest thing we can ever learn to do is hear from God through His Word and do what He tells us to do. This involves two major things: learning to hear from God and intentionally doing what He says. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus tells us that everyone who hears His words and puts them into practice is a wise man. Psalm 119 tells us that God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light on my path. If we want to hear the voice of God, look no further than the Bible. It is God's Words to us. In John 14:15-21, Jesus tells us that our obedience is compelled by love. This is important to remember. This is not about following rules. This is about learning to walk in a relationship with God himself. He is a loving Father that wants to work in you and through you to do great things for His kingdom. Today and forever, make obedience to God your highest priority and God will do abundantly more than you could ever ask or imagine in and through you.

BACKGROUND

1 John

Over the next 5 days, we will be walking through the book of 1 John together. My hope is that you will not become dependent on this devotional but will be able to read God's Word and hear from Him on your own. So, we will spend the remaining days learning how to do that. As you start reading any book of the Bible, it is important to understand the context of the book. 1 John is a letter written by John to a group of churches. For more background information, go here:

www.bible.com/videos/3119

Reading: 1 John 1

Devotion: This chapter is incredible and has the ability to make a profound impact on your life and spiritual journey. If you can really grasp the magnitude and importance of this passage, I believe you will continually experience what it means to walk in true freedom. We were saved for a purpose, and one of those purposes is to walk in light. As you read in the text, God is light; in him, there is no darkness at all. But unfortunately, as you very well know, we all have darkness within us. Every single individual on the planet was born into sin. We believers all carry a sinful past that has dark areas or dark struggles that everyone may not see. We all are still prone to walk in darkness. In fact, one of the thoughts you may be wrestling with as a new believer is this: “Why am I still struggling with sin?” Welcome to the club! Because we are now in Christ does not at all mean that we won’t struggle with sin. In fact, the author of 1 John says that “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”. We will always fight sin until the day we pass. Well how do we walk in light, if in fact we do struggle with sin and darkness? Read verse 9 again carefully. It reads, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” We were saved to walk in light. Walking in light doesn’t mean we don’t have any sin; walking in light means we confess our sin. We walk in continual confession and repentance. Walk in light today and experience true freedom.

1 John

Reading: 1 John 2

Devotion: How can we know that we have been saved? This chapter does a great job helping us answer this question. Obedience is the number one proof of true salvation. In verse 6, John tells us that our lives will begin to look like the life of Jesus. His life was characterized by love for God and love for others. In verse 15, we are instructed to not fall in love with this world. Love for the world is defined in three ways: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. When we become a Christian, we no longer try to build our best life now because this world is passing away. God tells us to focus on doing His will because it will benefit us for eternity. Lastly, John warns us against the enemy and the spirit of the Antichrist. He says that there will be people (false teachers) in these last days that try to lead us astray by lying to us and turning our attention from Jesus. However, we have a secret weapon. God has put His anointing (The Holy Spirit) inside of us to remind us of the truth. Today, take these words to heart. Examine your life. Ask God to show you areas of your life that don't look like Jesus. Then, ask for forgiveness and for God to help you change! This is called repentance and is the way God works in our hearts to grow us to be more like Jesus!

Reading: 1 John 3

Devotion: What does it mean to be a child of God? When we get saved, we become a child of God. What an incredible privilege! This is where our hope, confidence, and assurance come from! When someone messes with us, they mess with God. God is for us not against us. All the desires that a good father has for their kids are the desires that God has for you. John then moves on to tell us that children of God are expected to act a certain way. In verse 6-9, he tells us that our relationship with sin changes. We can no longer continue in it. In verses 11-18, he tells us that our relationship with others changes. We begin to treat people the way Jesus did. In verses 19-24, he tells us our relationship with God changes. We now see things through his lens and not ours. This is what the Spirit does in us. As a Christian, you have been made new. You have a new identity. You are a child of God! Remember that! There is no greater truth!

1 John

Reading: 1 John 4

Devotion: As a Christian, we have a real enemy. There are two spirits at work in this world. One is from God, and the other is from Satan. We must learn to differentiate them. Every spirit that makes much of Jesus is from God. Every Spirit that denies or belittles Jesus is not. It sounds simple but Satan is crafty. Scripture tells us to be aware of Satan's scheming and that he masquerades as an angel of light. He wants to lead you astray and deceive you anyway he can. Be alert at all times. If you are growing in your relationship with God, Satan does not like that and will be attacking. The good news is that the Holy Spirit in you is greater than Satan. Lean on him to help you differentiate. Trust him for the power to overcome. John finishes up this chapter reminding us again that we ought to love one another. It is a big deal to God that his Church loves one another because that is how we reflect Him to a lost world. This type of love and unity only comes from the Holy Spirit and a heart that is fixed on the love God has for us. Today, go to war with the enemy! Love people in a way that reflects Jesus because the truth is, you may be the only Jesus they see.

Reading: 1 John 5

Devotion: Love for God results in obeying God's commands. This is the central theme in the book of 1 John. To the Christian, God's commands are not burdensome. They are life. In verse 12, John makes a profound statement, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever doesn't have the Son does not have life." Think about this truth in regards to all the people in your life that do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It says that they are missing out on life. As we end this reading plan today, allow that truth to drive you to share Jesus with others. Every person on this earth is looking for life. Most are just looking in all the wrong places. God's plan is to use you to take this life to the ends of the earth. Let's get after it!

