

# Cross Training

GROW AS A DISCIPLE

***"If anyone would come after me,  
let him deny himself and take up  
his cross daily and follow me."***

*– Luke 9:23 –*



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# Introduction

TRAIN AS CHRIST'S DISCIPLE ALL YEAR  
(LUKE 6:40)

The 52 studies in this booklet focus on developing as Christ's disciples, imitating Christ. What is a disciple? Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). As we train to be like Christ, we take up our crosses each day and follow him (Luke 9:23), aspiring to continually say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

We'll kick off our studies, talking about the four **Discipleship Dimensions** in detail in the first four weeks. And then, for the rest of the year, we'll work on twelve **Marks of the Master**, spending four weeks exploring foundational elements of each one. These Marks include Faith, Dedication, Servanthood, Joy, Reverence, Mercy, Integrity, Watchfulness, Fruitfulness, Endurance, Leadership, and Lifelong Learning.

Each week, we'll tackle a different area for spiritual growth, taking our cues from Jesus. We invite you to commit to taking on the five **Through the Week Challenges** with each lesson, as we try to maximize our progress. These challenges follow a formula designed to address our mind, heart, behavior, and relationships. (Do them on the suggested day or some other time in the week.) You'll find them at the bottom of each lesson, in boxes that look like this:

THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> A few passages to help build your knowledge of the lesson's focus.	<b>REFLECT</b> An introspective prompt to ask yourself about the lesson's focus.	<b>REQUEST</b> A prayer you can bring before God to help you grow in the area of focus.	<b>RESPOND</b> A small but specific step you can take to take that turns your belief into action.	<b>REACH OUT</b> A discussion to have with those you meet, to help you engage the subject with others.
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

***May you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord through this journey (2 Peter 3:18).***

## Four Aspects of Our Growth in Christ

# Discipleship Dimensions

HOW THE LORD SHAPES OUR LIVES

- **Truth** – The Lord's teachings shape our thinking.
- **Heart** – The Lord's values shape our affections.
- **Action** – The Lord's actions shape our behavior.
- **Community** – Our connection to Christ shapes our relationships.

# The More You Know

## CROSS TRAINING | DISCIPLESHIP DIMENSION #1: TRUTH

Classic TV programming in the '80s and '90s really wanted us to *know* things. Remember phrases like, "The more you know" from NBC's public service announcements? How about "Knowing is half the battle" from G.I. Joe? Or "Take a look, it's in a book" from Reading Rainbow? Let's focus on what we know, considering the first of four dimensions of discipleship: Truth.

### What You Need to Know

When Jesus went on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, Pilate asked him if he was a king. Jesus said, *"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."* So Pilate asked, *"What is truth?"* (John 18:37-38). He didn't wait for an answer before leaving, but it's the kind of rhetorical, half-whispered question many of us might find ourselves wondering. What's the real story about life? Are there answers worth building my life upon? What is truth?

Christ sets the guiding lines of a Christian's life like a cornerstone sets a building's angles. We *"are ... members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"* (Eph. 2:18-22). Jesus sent apostles to represent him, carrying his authority and proclaiming his message (cf. Mark 3:13-19; Acts 1:21-26). Prophets also uttered God's words (2 Peter 1:19-21). The apostle Paul said, *"When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery ... revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit"* (Eph. 3:4-5). The apostles and prophets reveal Christ, elaborating and explaining his life and teaching. When we trust these words and obey them, we build on the apostles' and prophets' foundation.

A lot of folks go through life without a guiding "cornerstone" or a definite "foundation." How about you? Before we can mature as disciples, we need to know that all scripture comes from God's breath (2 Tim. 3:15-17). These writings are inspired, authoritative, and trustworthy (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 14:37-38; John 16:13; 17:17).

### What You Need to Do

We sometimes settle for a shaky foundation, built with the faulty materials of a worldview shaped by the world. But we need to rebuild our lives on Christ's words and example, and what his apostles and prophets taught. Examine your assumptions and align your thinking with the Lord's. It's not enough to embrace *some* of the teaching, trying to make do with a half-installed, faulty foundation. Search out the Lord's answers to your questions and settle into genuine faith.

*You can know the truth (John 8:31-32). It's up to you, and it begins with hearing (Rom. 10:9-10) or reading (Eph. 3:3-4) the words. What we believe shapes our lives. And knowing the truth is step one on the road to becoming like Jesus.*

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>RESPOND</b>	<b>REACH OUT</b>
Matt. 4:1-11 John 8:31-32; 17:17 2 Tim. 3:15-17 1 Cor. 2:12-13	What influences shape my worldview? Does my view match the way the Lord sees things?	"Lord, teach me what I ought to know. Bless me as I listen to your words."	List five things you know are true. Make a list of questions you want to answer.	What do you think are life's most important questions? What answers have you found?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Because He Loves It

## CROSS TRAINING | DISCIPLESHIP DIMENSION #2: HEART

When I was little, I loved watching Westerns with my dad. He loved them, so I loved them. We wore cowboy boots, and it brought us closer together. Now, my kids love to share the things I love too. On football Saturdays, we all dress up in our Buckeye gear and watch College Football Gameday together. My daughter even made a drawing of Brutus the Buckeye she hangs next to the TV each Saturday. They don't know much about football, really, but they love it because I love it, and it's something we can share.

As we follow Jesus and seek to grow closer to him, we want to bond with him by sharing the things he loves, delighting in his delights. Roy Masters said, "Loving what is right is different than hating what is wrong and feeling right about it." If knowing the truth is the first dimension of discipleship, what comes next in Cross Training to be Jesus' disciple? We need to let the Lord direct our affections so that what Jesus values shapes our whole inner life.

### What You Need to Know

When the Bible talks about the "heart" it refers to the "center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition" (Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich). So it includes our emotions, but also our thoughts and will.

When King David was a young nobody, God sent Samuel to anoint the next king. As each of David's brothers came before Samuel, he thought, "ah, here's the one, I'm looking at the next king of Israel!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart*" (1 Sam. 16:7). After doing that song and dance seven times, Samuel asked, "Is this everybody?" And they sent for the youngest, who was out tending the sheep. When David ran up, the Lord said, "*Arise, anoint him, for this is he*" (1 Sam. 16:12). God called David "*a man after my heart, who will do all my will*" (Acts 13:22). Why did God so value a person "after" his heart? Why does he ignore what we tend to value and look "on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7)?

Your life flows from your heart. "*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life*" (Prov. 4:23). Like a fountain, your heart bubbles up and spills out into the world (Luke 6:45). It's no wonder God cares about your heart more than all the stuff which occupies most people's time.

### What You Need to Do

Jesus' disciples must pay constant attention to transforming our affections and attitudes to reflect the Lord's character. In John's gospel, the first words of Jesus are "*What are you seeking?*" (John 1:37). Have you ever asked yourself that? The reality is, you'll often get what you're looking for (cf. Matt. 7:8).

At times, we all fight against our desires to choose the *right* thing (Rom. 7:19). But a significant change comes in a Christian's life when what we want changes (cf. Rom. 8:5-7). It's not an automatic switch that "just happens" one day. Keeping our heart with vigilance requires us to recognize what's happening in our hearts (Prov. 4:23) and do the daily work of exposing ourselves to God's transforming power. The Psalms begin with a blessing on those who meditate on God's instruction (Psalm 1), envisioning a tree planted by the water. A drizzle on the surface won't change our hearts. Like a tree whose roots get soaked in a flowing stream, we need to get drenched in God's nourishing word. While Bible study helps us understand the truth (Dimension 1), Bible meditation lets it seep into us so that our response begins to change in the moment of action. Take the time to think deeply about it, pray it, and talk about it.

Finally, it's a daily practice – catching ourselves going down the wrong mental pathways and redirecting. Our mindset slowly changes from frustrated to grateful, from bitter to forgiving, from covetous to content, and from irritable to patient. God's word gets etched onto our hearts, and his Spirit brings fruit into our lives (Gal. 5:22-24).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p><b>READ</b></p> <p>Luke 2:41-52; Prov. 4:23; Acts 13:22; Matt. 7:7-8; Gal. 5:22-24</p> <p>5 PASSAGES ABOUT TRUTH</p>	<p><b>REFLECT</b></p> <p>What do I really want? Is that the same thing that God wants?</p> <p>A QUESTION TO PONDER</p>	<p><b>REQUEST</b></p> <p><i>"Lord, create in me a clean heart. Renew a right spirit within me."</i> (Psalm 51:10)</p> <p>A SIMPLE PRAYER</p>	<p><b>RESPOND</b></p> <p>Write a letter to yourself describing who you want to be.</p> <p>AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE</p>	<p><b>REACH OUT</b></p> <p>How have your aspirations &amp; attitudes changed as you've matured? What future "heart" changes do you want to make?</p> <p>AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS</p>

# Action Figures

## CROSS TRAINING | DISCIPLESHIP DIMENSION #3: ACTION

From what I can tell, there are two types of kids: those who play with their toy figurines and those who collect them to display on a shelf. I probably would've made a fortune selling unopened, mint-condition Star Wars toys from my childhood. But back then, I couldn't rip open the packaging fast enough to start playing! In my defense, they are called "action" figures for a reason.

As we grow up in discipleship, we learn the truth and let it rewrite our hearts. But what comes next in Cross Training to be the Lord's disciple? At some point, we have to get off the shelf, unwrap our protective packaging, and take action for Jesus! So, let's talk about how Christ can shape our behavior and put us into play!

### What You Need to Know

Faith works! As we grow, right thinking leads to right living. Christ calls us to a counter-cultural lifestyle. We forgive those who hurt us, go the extra mile when someone asks us, and give more than someone demands. We seek peace and joyfully endure insults (Matt. 5-7). We can talk about our faith all day long, but until our walk matches the talk, it isn't really living faith at all (James 2:14-17, 22-26; cf. Heb. 11).

Like a three-legged stool, we need to hear sound words of truth to form a wholesome heart and stir us to healthy behavior. If you take just one of these supports away, the whole thing falls apart. Without the truth, you're passionately following your own path rather than God's (Rom. 10:2-3). Eliminate a loving heart, and all your knowledge and sacrifice gain you nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Remove action, and you're like those hypocritical teachers of Jesus' day who preached but didn't practice (Matt. 23:3).

### What You Need to Do

Remember that change takes time. Don't get so distracted by lofty goals that you lose focus on the small steps you can take today. You'll have good days and bad ones, but don't give up! Develop Christ-like spiritual habits, filling yourself with God's Word, spending time in prayer, and finding support in the church.

Stop thinking that *someone* will take action or that *someday* you'll make the right choices. If not you, who? If not now, when? We've all spent enough time living in sin, and now it's time to let the old life go, embracing the new (1 Peter 4:3). Deny yourself, take up your cross, and offer yourself as a daily sacrifice to Jesus (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 12:1-2). "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:13-16; 6:1-4).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 13:4-8; 1 Pet. 2:12; James 2:14-26; Matt. 7:17-27	<b>REFLECT</b> What one small change could make a big difference in my life?	<b>REQUEST</b> <i>"Lord, let my daily conduct bring the glory all to you and not to myself."</i>	<b>RESPOND</b> Do something *extra* for someone today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What have others done for you that made a positive impact?
5 PASSAGES ABOUT TRUTH	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Beyond the Bat Cave

## CROSS TRAINING | DISCIPLESHIP DIMENSION #4: COMMUNITY

What little boy didn't love Superman or Batman growing up? I'd often pretend I could fly, shoot laser beams from my eyes, or that I had a fully stocked utility belt with all the coolest gadgets. But what good would all those abilities do if the heroes never left their secret hideouts? Imagine if Clark Kent chilled out all day in the Fortress of Solitude, or Bruce Wayne played video games in the Bat Cave 24x7! A hero's job – like most meaningful work – is about people!

As we grow up in discipleship, we learn the truth, let it rewrite our hearts, and take action for Jesus. But what else do we need in Cross Training to be the Lord's disciple? We need to leave our fortress and venture out to serve those in our community. So, let's talk about how our relationship with Christ shapes our other relationships!

### What You Need to Know

Jesus' disciples follow his lead by building up believers and reaching out to those who don't yet know the Lord. *"As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Gal. 6:10).

Our first concern is the community of believers. Paul spends a giant chunk of his letters on the attitudes and behaviors needed for a healthy family in Christ. We strive for *"humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph. 4:2-3). It's easy to get hung up on what others "have done for me lately." But God's family flourishes when each of us begins with a Christlike commitment to contribute to others.

The Lord is also concerned with how we relate to those outside the church. We represent *him* in our interactions and seek to bring people into contact with the Lord himself (2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Peter 2:9).

### What You Need to Do

Let's accept that whether we're connecting with those in the church or outside it, dealing with people is "messy" business. We all have our burdens, but Christ calls us to help bear each other's load (Gal. 6:2). Past and habitual sins, money problems, emotional brokenness, and marital issues – real difficulties are rarely solved by a quick and easy donation made from a distance. Are we ready to listen and invest in people? Christ's disciples can't passively keep to themselves, hoping folks will leave us alone. As Jesus *"went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38), we must seek to love people and do as much good for others as we can (Luke 6:27-36). Jesus' story of the good Samaritan teaches us to get involved when someone needs us, rather than keeping our distance as we go about our "holy" business (Luke 10:25-37).

Commit to hospitality (Heb. 13:2; Rom. 12:13), welcoming friends and strangers with grace and generosity. That often means opening our homes, but these days there are lots of other ways to invite others to connect and build friendships.

Relationships are two-way streets, but *"so far as it depends on"* us, we seek peace (Rom. 12:18). Perhaps neighbors will notice our distinctive lives of hope and character (1 Peter 2:9-12) and ask about the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 9:9-13, 35-38; Luke 10:30-37; Eph. 4:25-32; Rom. 15:2-7; 1 Peter 3:8-16	<b>REFLECT</b> What can I do to build more meaningful relationships?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, show me where I can serve and support others today."	<b>RESPOND</b> Give an encouraging text, card, or call to someone you think might need it today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What approaches have you found most effective in teaching an unbeliever about Jesus?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



## Mark of the Master ①

# Faith

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S REALITY

- **Belief** – See With the Eyes of Faith
- **Trust** – Trust in God Completely
- **Loyalty** – Stand Firmly With the Lord
- **Sharing** – Care Enough to Share Your Faith

# We Interrupt Our Program

CROSS TRAINING | FAITH: BELIEF

In 1938, a popular radio program went viral, convincing listeners that Martians were invading New Jersey. Though the media reported widespread hysteria over Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" dramatization, only a handful of people believed what they heard over the radio. Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt our program to bring you a special bulletin: with all the misinformation out there, be very careful about what you choose to believe!

Over the last month, we've seen four discipleship dimensions: Truth, Heart, Action, and Community. Continuing our Cross Training, keep those dimensions in mind as we apply them to twelve marks of the master, beginning with faith. Faith includes our beliefs, trust, and loyalty. And as we relate to others, our faith leads us to speak, confessing Christ, and sharing the gospel. Let's start this week by taking a closer look at belief.

## What You Need to Know

God – the Father and Creator of the universe – loved humanity so much that he sent Jesus – his sinless Son – to die for us. And *"...whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). We believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead to save us from our sins (Rom. 10:9-10). But *"without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him"* (Heb. 11:6).

Jesus didn't refuse to give *any* evidence, but he placed limits on how much he would give (Matt. 12:39). After he rose from the dead, Thomas, one of his disciples, was skeptical. He said, *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"* (John 20:25). A week later, Jesus welcomed him to do just that. While Thomas quickly changed his tune, Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:29). Our faith in the Lord will take us past what we can prove and require us to decide to trust him (Prov. 3:5).

## What You Need to Do

Don't take anyone else's word for it! Your faith needs to be your own (2 Tim. 1:5). Consider nature's complexity and design (Rom. 1:19-20). Listen to what the gospels say about Jesus (John 20:31) – the prophecies he fulfilled, the miracles he performed, and especially the facts surrounding his resurrection (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:1-11). Know why you believe what you believe through careful study (Acts 17:11), testing everything (1 Thess. 5:21).

And then walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). As believers, we have a different perception of life, the future, and all the realities we can't see (cf. 2 Kings 6:17-20). Let the *"secret and hidden wisdom of God"* (1 Cor. 2:7) develop in you *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor. 2:15). The good news of Christ may seem silly to some (1 Cor. 1:19), but it pleases God *"through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe"* (1 Cor. 1:21). So, grow in your faith, rooted and grounded in him, and gratefully serve the Lord every day (Col. 2:6-7).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Mark 9:14-29; John 9:35-41; 20:30-31; Psalm 119:65-72; Rom. 4:16-25	<b>REFLECT</b> How does faith change the way I see my life and everything happening around me?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." (Mark 9:24)	<b>RESPOND</b> Pray for something big and bold, and believe that God can do it.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What has strengthened your faith?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Working Without a Net

CROSS TRAINING | FAITH: TRUST

Years ago, looking for something new and exciting to try, I took a trapeze class. I remember climbing the tall, shaky metal ladder, hooking my legs to hang upside down on the bar, and swinging out. Then came the hard part: trusting someone else's grip as I let go of the bar and flew through the air.

Fortunately, there was a net in case something went wrong. But in the disciple's life of faith, we work without a net. So why would anyone release the cables that seem to secure them? Why would we choose instead to take the Lord's hands and let him swing us far beyond our comfort zone? Because he is faithful, reliable, and utterly count-on-able to keep his promises and see us through!

This year we're Cross Training to develop twelve marks of the Master, beginning with faith, which encompasses our belief, trust, and loyalty. Last week we explored belief, so now let's work our way to trust.

## What You Need to Know

While belief starts in our *mind*, trust is an act of the *heart*. Belief defines *what* we think is true, but our trust decides *who* we'll rely on. It's the mortar that holds relationships together. No wonder faith is the basis for knowing God (Gal. 2:20; 3:11, 26).

Riches will fail (Prov. 11:28), our minds might lead us astray (Prov. 28:26), and even our closest friends could betray us (Psalm 118:8). But God has never let anyone down, made a promise he won't keep, or told a lie (Heb. 6:18). He always works for our good (Rom. 8:28). So we hope in him and wait on him (Psalm 62:5-8). Because we know him (2 Tim. 1:12), his character gives us stability and peace (Isaiah 7:9; 26:3-4; Phil. 4:7).

## What You Need to Do

Like any relationship built on confidence, every interaction with the Lord should convey how much we trust him. Speak to him with trust through your regular and sincere prayers (Mark 11:24). Allow him to lead you wherever he desires (Prov. 3:6-8). Smile in hope, knowing all he has prepared for you (John 14:1-4).

Read Scripture to grow your trust in God, noticing his track record of love, power, and wisdom. Learn to pray with confidence by praying the psalms, holding onto the Lord "*my rock*," "*my fortress*," and "*my salvation*" (2 Sam. 22:2). Even in difficult times, let's echo the confidence of three faithful men long ago who said, "*... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up*" (Dan. 3:17-18).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 14:1-4; Heb. 13:5-6; Jer. 29:11-14; Prov. 3:1-8; 2 Sam. 7:27-29	<b>REFLECT</b>  Who is God?	<b>REQUEST</b>  "Oh Lord, I trust in you without fear. What can anyone do to me?" (Psalm 56:3-4)	<b>RESPOND</b>  List some problems you're unsure how to solve, and then sit in stillness, knowing that God is God.	<b>REACH OUT</b>  When has God proven trustworthy in your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Through Thick and Thin

## CROSS TRAINING | FAITH: LOYALTY

Have you ever read the story of Don Quixote, the landowner who imagined he was a knight? In Cervantes' classic novel, Quixote's trusty servant, Sancho Panza, pretends to be a squire and goes with Don Quixote on all his misguided and confused adventures. He's not perfect, but he's loyal. Sancho says he "cannot help loving" his master with all his heart and soul, "and cannot leave him in spite of all his follies." Unlike Quixote, our master leads with genuine wisdom and power. Have you ever thought about what it means to be loyal to Jesus through thick and thin?

This year we're Cross Training to develop twelve marks of the Master, beginning with faith, which encompasses our belief, trust, loyalty, and willingness to share our faith. This week, let's talk about our loyalty to Christ.

### What You Need to Know

What if there was an English word that could mean belief, trust, or faithfulness ... or all three at the same time? That's what's happening with the Bible words for faith. The Bible word translated faith in some places is translated faithfulness in others. The two are linked and if we don't get that, we'll have an incomplete view of faith.

God is always faithful. So we, too, must offer our loyalty to him. Habakkuk 2:4 says, *"\*the righteous will live by faith.\*"* But the Hebrew word for "faith" mainly means firmness, fidelity, and faithfulness. In Galatians, the same Greek word is translated faith (Gal. 5:6) and faithfulness (Gal. 5:22) in the same chapter.

What these three ideas have in common is the firm foundation they create for any relationship. Marriages don't survive without both trust in each other and faithfulness to each other. Friendships are built on belief, trust, and faithfulness (Prov. 18:24), like Ruth's devotion to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and Jonathan's loyalty to David (1 Sam. 24:6-10). But it's much more true for our relationship with our Lord. He is worthy of our wholehearted trust and devotion.

John's gospel emphasizes believing in Jesus, but to believe in him is to *\*receive\** him as Christ the Lord (John 1:11; 11:27; 20:28-31). It's not just believing an idea, it's choosing to stand with him as your King.

### What You Need to Do

Like Samuel's statement, *"speak, for your servant hears"* (1 Sam. 3:10), we stand available to God, always ready for our orders. When you see an opportunity to serve others in the name of Christ or to expand his kingdom, jump at the chance. Keep the approval of your master in mind. Can you dare to imagine – as a hymn says – "the smile of the blessed Giver" as he looks in joy upon the faithful deeds of his redeemed servant? Remember the words Jesus used to describe a master's approval: *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master"* (Matt. 25:23).

Overcome evil in your life by looking to him in faith and faithfulness. Every temptation tests our loyalty to God. When Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's house, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. He was not only loyal to her husband, but more importantly, he saw any sin as an affront against God. He told her of the confidence her husband had placed in him, then asked, *"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* (Gen. 39:9). Resolve not to break trust with God and damage that relationship.

Remember *who* you serve and *why* you're able to serve him. Paul thanked Jesus for judging him faithful and appointing him – a former persecutor – to his service (1 Tim. 1:12-14). He said, *"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised"* (2 Cor. 5:14-15). So live for him who is forever worthy of your utmost devotion.

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 19:16-31; Luke 9:57-62; Josh. 24:14-15; 1 Kings 8:57-61; 2 Tim. 4:10-18 <i>5 BIBLE PASSAGES</i>	<b>REFLECT</b>  What gives Jesus joy?  <i>A QUESTION TO PONDER</i>	<b>REQUEST</b>  "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD" (Ps. 56:3-4)  <i>A SIMPLE PRAYER</i>	<b>RESPOND</b>  Repeat the phrase, "I stand with Jesus" when temptations come throughout the week.  <i>AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE</i>	<b>REACH OUT</b>  What situations have tested your loyalty to Christ?  <i>AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS</i>

# Can't Be Overshared

CROSS TRAINING | FAITH: SPEAKING

As a new parent, it seemed like every conversation with family and friends eventually led to some embarrassing discussion about vomit, gas, or destructive diaper detonations. Gross! Moms and dads love to overshare about their newborn war stories as if it were normal dinner conversation – but some things just can't be unheard. Although oversharing *can* lead to some awkward moments, some conversations can't be shared enough!

This year we're Cross Training to develop twelve marks of the Master, beginning with faith, which encompasses our belief, trust, loyalty, and willingness to share our faith. This week, let's explore the need to reach out to others about our belief in the Lord.

## What You Need to Know

Genuine faith leads us to speak. Our faith has to travel the distance from our heart to our mouth or, frankly, it will not save us.

*"But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"* (Rom. 10:8-10).

When we confess Jesus Christ as Lord, we announce our allegiance to him. In elementary school, many of us mindlessly recited the pledge of allegiance. But we can't think of *"the good confession"* (1 Tim. 6:12) as mere words or even *magic* words that save us while costing us nothing. When we declare our belief, trust, and loyalty to the Lord, we take our stand with God's anointed King.

And while that saving confession is part of our conversion, disciples don't make a one-time acknowledgment of our Master and then keep him a secret for the rest of our lives. Jesus says he'll acknowledge before the Father everyone that publicly acknowledges him (Matt. 10:32-33). It might cost you a lot, maybe even your closest relationships, but it's worth it (Matt. 10:34-39).

So we own Christ out of love for him, but we also owe a debt of love to others to share the gospel (Rom. 1:14-17)! We received a gift we can't pay for; the best we can do is pass it on! Paul couldn't separate his faith in Christ from expressing it to others. Can we say with him, *"we also believe, and so we also speak"* (2 Cor. 4:13)?

## What You Need to Do

Not everyone has a talent for teaching (Rom. 12:5-8; James 3:1), but we all can express the excellence of God (1 Peter 2:9-10). Some evangelize naturally, while most of us stretch outside our comfort zone to speak up, always honing our skills, working hard to develop a readiness to answer people's questions (1 Peter 3:14-17).

When you feel pressured to silently hide your faith, recognize who's behind it, and refuse to *"be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs"* (2 Cor. 2:11). Let's pray with the early church, *"grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness"* (Acts 4:29). God answered their prayer, and even as persecution scattered them, they *"went about preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). May we find the courage and love to do the same.

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 4:4-42; Matt. 5:14-16; Acts 17:22-31; 2 Cor 4:13-18; 1 Pet. 3:14-17	<b>REFLECT</b> What "baskets" keep my light from shining in the darkness?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh Lord, I call upon your name. Embolden me to speak of your deeds to all I meet!" (cf. Ps. 105:1)	<b>RESPOND</b> Find a way to mention the Lord to at least two people today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What have you used as a launchpad for spiritual discussions?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

## Mark of the Master ②

# Dedication

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S COMMITMENT

- **Counting the Cost** – Consider the Cost of the Cross
- **Wholeheartedness** – Give the Lord Your Entire Devotion
- **Establishing Priorities** – Reclaim Your Time & Attention for the Lord
- **Availability** – Offer Yourself to Serve Others

# Pay the Price

## CROSS TRAINING | DEDICATION: COUNTING THE COST

People love a good bargain! Growing up, I spent quite a few Black Friday mornings camping out in line for hours with my mom, rushing through the crowds to grab that discounted item, shopping until I almost literally dropped. But what if stores raised their prices rather than lowered them? Would those die-hard shoppers still be willing to pay the price?

This year we're Cross Training to develop twelve marks of the Master. We started with faith, and today we'll move on to dedication, which involves counting the cost, wholeheartedness, establishing priorities, and making ourselves available to others. So what is the cost of discipleship?

### What You Need to Know

Rather than hyping up crowds, Jesus turned them away with sticker-shock at the sky-high price of following him (Luke 14:25ff; John 6:66-69). He said, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children ... yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:26). Surely *"hate"* exaggerates his point (cf. Matt. 10:37), but the point is undeniable: no love can come before our love for him!

He sounds several jarring warnings to anyone unwilling to give everything (Luke 14:27, 33). Jesus compares our decision to a building financier who starts a project without checking that he has the resources to finish it. He wants us to do some soul-searching before accepting his offer, committing to him with open eyes. *"So,"* Jesus concludes, *"any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:33).

There's a paradox in how Jesus describes the disciple's life. He invites us to take up his yoke and find rest, describing his burden as light and easy (Matt. 11:29-30). Yet he also describes his way as narrow and hard (Matt. 7:13-14). So which is it?

Well, it's hard because we give up our life to gain it (Matt. 10:39). Yet we get so much in return, in both the present life and the life to come (Mark 10:29-31, 1 Tim. 4:8). Paul gave up a lot to follow the Lord, but he said, *"whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him"* (Phil. 3:7-9).

### What You Need to Do

Pour yourself out in God's service (Phil. 2:17) and *"present your body as a living sacrifice"* each day (Rom. 12:1) to *"glorify God in your body"* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Rather than hoarding *"me-time,"* steward and redeem the time (Eph. 5:15-17). Your choices, goals, and relationships now serve Christ – your life and your death are now for him (Rom. 14:7-8).

You can't be a new person while living your old life. So out with the old, in with the new (Rom. 6:1-6). Throw off anything that slows you down (Heb. 12:1).

Steel yourself for difficulty ahead. You *will* suffer (2 Tim. 3:12). Find the strength to continue, knowing *"that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 14:25-33; Matt. 16:24-25; 19:16-22; 1 Tim. 3:12-13; 2 Sam. 24:18-24	<b>REFLECT</b> "What do I still lack?" (Matt. 19:20)	<b>REQUEST</b> "Fill me, oh Lord, as I empty myself before you."	<b>RESPOND</b> Let go of something you've been unwilling to in the past.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What sacrifice are you glad you made for the Lord?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Squish Like Grape

## CROSS TRAINING | DEDICATION: WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

Have you ever tried to do something halfway? If we find ourselves hesitating, like Daniel San from the *Karate Kid*, maybe we need the timeless wisdom of Mr. Miyagi. "Walk left side," he told Daniel, "safe. Walk right side, safe. Walk middle, sooner or later get squish just like grape. Karate same thing. Either you karate do 'yes' or karate do 'no.' You karate do 'guess so,' squish like grape."

We're Cross Training to develop our dedication, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Dedication includes counting the cost, wholeheartedness, establishing priorities, and making ourselves available to others. So what does it mean to give the Lord our wholehearted – all-in – devotion?

### What You Need to Know

Sometimes we may use words like "all" and "always," when we mean "some" or "most," like when a spouse says, "You *always* do that!" But when Jesus uses the word **πᾶς** | **pas**, meaning *all, whole, or every* – he *always* means it.

When a law expert asked Jesus, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" (Mark 12:28), Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:29-30). God says you'll find him when you pursue him with "**\*all\***" your heart (Jer. 29:13). Doing what's right "*yet not with a whole heart*," like King Amaziah (2 Chron. 25:2) is no way to honor the living God.

Jesus can't stomach lukewarm Christians (Rev. 3:16) who go through the motions. He knows that halfway will kill you. But *how* do you love and serve God with all your heart and soul (cf. Deut. 10:12)?

### What You Need to Do

What keeps us from wholeheartedness? Sometimes it's fear and worry (Matt. 6:25ff). Maybe it's timidity and an overabundance of caution, holding back to protect yourself (2 Tim. 1:7). We can all get cynical when we give our all and it doesn't go well. It takes great courage to believe "*all things*" and hope "*all things*" (1 Cor. 13:7; Prov. 13:12). Spend time in confession, prayer, and worship, searching yourself to know what you've held back, what secret pain or wrong attitude might have kept you from wholehearted service (1 John 1:8-10; Prov. 4:23).

Sometimes trying to be like everyone else can stifle our wholeheartedness, but you're different by design (1 Cor. 12:18), to give Christ's body the diversity to accomplish his work (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:14-27).

Wholeheartedness requires us to do less to accomplish more. When we take on too much, we scatter our thoughts and fracture our focus, so that we can't fully listen to a friend or even sit quietly in prayer. We're told to "*work heartily*" not "*work hurriedly*" – there's a difference (Col. 3:23). No one had more important tasks than Jesus, yet he often gave one individual his full attention (e.g. John 3-4). Troublemakers, distractions, and naysayers will come, leading us to say with Nehemiah, "*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?*" (Neh. 6:3).

The poet, David Whyte, wrote of a season of exhaustion in his life, as his work utterly drained him. One night, a wise friend told him, "You know, the antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest. The antidote to exhaustion is wholeheartedness." Our bodies and minds will get tired. We might even get discouraged, but those who "*wait on the Lord*" will receive joy and renewal from him (Isa. 40:28-31; Matt. 11:28; Luke 6:38). So we keep presenting ourselves as a whole offering to the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2; cf. Lev. 1:9). Like the Macedonians, if we give ourselves first to the Lord, all the rest will follow (2 Cor. 8:5).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 2:13-17; Deut. 6:4-9; 1 Chron. 28:9-10; Rom. 12:1-13; Rev. 3:14-22	<b>REFLECT</b> What dark corners of my heart have I not considered lately?	<b>REQUEST</b> <i>"Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind" (Psalm 26:2).</i>	<b>RESPOND</b> Confess to God all that has held you back, then quietly sing "I Surrender All."	<b>REACH OUT</b> What do you find most encouraging when your passion gets low?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



# Things That Matter Most

## CROSS TRAINING | DEDICATION: ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

My wife and I love to sit and people-watch when we go out for dinner. In recent years, we've watched more couples – young and old – silently seated at the table together, both of them staring at their phones. What a delightfully distracted date-night! But we've been there too, as maybe you can relate. Why is it that we're so easily distracted from living "in the moment" today? How can we reclaim our time and attention for things that matter most?

We're Cross Training to develop our dedication, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Dedication includes counting the cost, wholeheartedness, establishing priorities, and making ourselves available to others. So why are our priorities so crucial to the Lord?

### What You Need to Know

Right before Jesus talked about counting the cost (Luke 14:25-33), he told the story of a man throwing a grand banquet (Luke 14:16-24). When the feast was ready, he sent word, and people "all alike began to make excuses" (Luke 14:18). One prioritized a recently purchased field, saying he needed to look at it instead of coming. Another wanted to inspect the oxen he just bought. A third said he couldn't go because he got married. You see, none of the excuses prevented people from attending. They just wanted to do something else they liked better. And that's how serving God works too. You're invited, but you get to choose if you value it more than anything else.

The Bible has a word for anything that takes priority above God in your life: idolatry. When we covet possessions, "covetousness ... is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). Or when we prioritize pleasing people above pleasing God (1 Thess. 2:4), we displace God from his rightful place. What is your most significant source of happiness, satisfaction, and peace? Our lives are full of good stuff from God, and we can rejoice in it all, offering service and thanksgiving to the source of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17). Even blessings – like marriage, children, work, and recreation – can become idols when we mix up the order of things and put them above Christ (cf. Matt. 10:34-39).

### What You Need to Do

Don't make excuses for distraction. It's easy to justify misplaced priorities, especially when we focus on "good" things. Remember Jesus' friend Martha, who busied herself cooking to show him hospitality? It took a wake-up call for her to see a "better" use for her time. But what if Jesus spoke to you, saying, "... You are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41-42)? We all have a little Martha in us, at times.

But how do you know if you "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" or chase "all these things" that preoccupy most of the world (Matt. 6:33)? First, you can examine your thoughts. What concerns have your attention? Dump them onto a piece of paper or talk about them with a friend as you try to order them within God's service. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). Second, you can review your expenses. "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also" (Luke 12:34). Third, scrutinize your calendar and "free time" activities (John 9:4; Eph. 5:16). Do some weeding in your garden, so "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things" don't "enter in and choke the word" (Mark 4:19). Rather than shoving more commitments into your schedule, consider what you could do for God without the added busyness. As our days fill up – even with necessary and useful activities – are we leaving ourselves enough time to build *his* house (Hag. 1:9-11; Phil. 3:8)?

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 10:38-42; Matt. 6:24-34; Mark 12:28-31; Josh. 24:14-15; Hag. 1:7-11	<b>REFLECT</b> What distractions steal my time and attention away from the Lord?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, clear out my life that you may rule it."	<b>RESPOND</b> Examine your calendar and expenses to discover what you prioritize. Edit and adjust to put the Lord first.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What do you struggle to keep in its proper place in your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# When You Need It

## CROSS TRAINING | DEDICATION: AVAILABILITY

When planning a big trip, you might need to book a flight, a rental car, or maybe a hotel room. But imagine showing up at the airport to discover there aren't any seats left on your flight, no cars in the rental car lot, or no vacant rooms at your hotel. What good is booking something in advance if no one's going to hold it for you? Don't you expect your reservation to be available when you need it?

We're Cross Training to develop our dedication, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Dedication includes counting the cost, wholeheartedness, establishing priorities, and making ourselves available to others. So how can we reserve ourselves to guarantee we're available to others?

### What You Need to Know

Jesus' disciples often tried to shield him from interruptions, like when a blind man tried to talk to him or when small children approached (Luke 18:35-43; Mark 10:13-16). Yet Jesus constantly made himself available to the disgraced and rejected. Remember his response when questioned about eating with sinners? *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Matt. 9:12-13).

Sometimes I make myself an island, but Christ crossed the gulf to come near to us. He left the security of heaven and became like us, to help us at incredible cost (Phil. 2:5-8; John 1:10-14). He comes with open arms, ready to receive. *"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"* (Rom. 15:7). What would happen if you cleared your schedule to focus on your family, friends, and neighbors who need you? How much more impact could you have for others if you prioritized their needs above yours (Phil. 2:3-4)? You might be busy – even with important spiritual work – but making yourself available to someone in a time of need is worth the time (Luke 10:29-37; 8:43-48).

### What You Need to Do

Being available to others requires you to show up, offer your support, and get deeply involved in people's lives. How do you do that? It begins by simply saying, "Yes!" Commit yourself to the work, no matter what's required. We pour ourselves out for others, spending and being spent, just like Paul did for the early church (Phil. 2:17-18; 2 Cor. 12:15).

First, we can deeply listen to someone and offer specific and targeted prayers to God about their struggles. James tells us to *"confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"* (James 5:16). Grow your skills as a listener, slow to judge, and trustworthy to keep a friend's words in confidence. Try to invest in relationships before the crisis comes.

Second, let's take action and get involved. While our prayers are a mighty way to fight for each other, don't just offer "thoughts and prayers" as a way to keep people at arm's length. Saying *"Be warmed and filled"* only has power when you take the next step by getting involved, putting our love to work (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:18)!

Third, let's move beyond patronizing "advice" to the more difficult work of burden-bearing and sharing the load (Gal. 6:1-2). Commit to listening, asking questions, and sharing in someone's challenges as you think, feel, and live through them together. *"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep"* (Rom. 12:13-15). With *"humility, count others more significant than yourselves."* Don't just look out for your interests, *"but also to the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:3-5).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Mark 10:13-16; Luke 10:29-37; Acts 4:32-37; Phil. 2:17-30; Gal. 6:1-10	<b>REFLECT</b> What opportunities to connect and serve lie just beyond my comfort zone?	<b>REQUEST</b> <i>"Lord, here I am! Send me"</i> (cf. Isa. 6:8)	<b>RESPOND</b> Check in with three people, listening for ways to bless them through quality time, prayer, and service.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How have your relationships evolved when you've gotten more involved?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Servanthood

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S SERVICE

- **New Eyes** – View Service Like Jesus Does
- **Humility** – Lower Yourself Like Jesus Did
- **Sacrificial Love** – Love Others As God Loves You
- **Showing Honor** – Live With Respect for Everyone

# Bionic Vision

## CROSS TRAINING | SERVANTHOOD: NEW EYES

My dad recently had surgery to fix his cloudy, unfocused vision. After a handful of futuristic procedures involving lasers and carefully calibrated lenses, he's now able to see without glasses for the first time in his life. But it took him a while to acclimate to his "new eyes" in the days after his surgery, as everything was too bright and tinted in psychedelic rainbow hues. And now that he's healed, his bionic vision is probably better than mine.

We're Cross Training to develop our servanthood, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Servanthood includes seeing with new eyes, humility, sacrificial love, and honor. So how does Jesus give us new eyes to see?

### What You Need to Know

As he prepared for his last days, Jesus began speaking more plainly to his disciples. He asked them, "*Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see...?*" (Mark 8:17-18). In between two stories about healing blind men (Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52), Christ challenges the disciples to shed their spiritual blindness. Three times on that final journey to Jerusalem, he tells them of his coming death (Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34), but they're unable to fully understand the victory of the cross (Mark 8:32-33; 9:32-34; 10:35-40). Each time, Jesus goes a step further, pointing to the sacrificial service demanded of his disciples (Mark 8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:41-45). He redefines greatness in the kingdom, saying, "*... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus wants us to receive glory and good things. But we have to reverse our thinking on *how* to get there. We're exalted after we humble ourselves (Jam. 4:10). To preserve our well-being, we sacrifice and pursue others' well-being. No area of life remains unchanged when we follow the cross-shaped path to blessing. When we see as Jesus sees, we view interactions with compassion, purpose, and spiritual awareness.

### What You Need to Do

Pray for new eyes to see how to relate to people. Do you follow the way of the world – looking out for number one and protecting yourself – rather than the way of Jesus? While Dr. Phil and other relationship gurus might have some good advice, Jesus' way has to be our starting point, and it will always seem a little strange to most folks. How can we have empowered love when we yield our rights, walk a second mile, or turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39-42)? Where our old eyes might see a victimized doormat, our new eyes see a way to "*overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:21). It requires daily reorientation, seeing each encounter with a fresh perspective.

Memorize a key verse that helps you refocus your life, like "*Love ... does not insist on its own way*" (1 Cor. 13:4-5) or "*in humility count others more significant than yourself*" (Phil. 2:3). Repeat it to yourself when you get stuck and feel yourself fighting for your own. Read one of the gospels, and each day, imagine how the Jesus you meet in Scripture would navigate *your* situations and choices. Yield to the influence of what Jesus would do, as you strive to say with Paul, "*It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me*" (Gal. 2:20).

But transformation doesn't happen when we read one Bible verse – it takes "*constant practice*" (Heb. 5:14). Every day I have to catch myself in the act of seeing with old eyes, fighting for what's "mine," and acting selfishly. But when I see it, then I can repair it. Now I can stop myself and course-correct mid-interaction. And as God's Spirit continues growing fruit in my life, I see the "Jesus way" to respond more and more. And my relationships and influence are blessed as I follow him.

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Mark 10:35-52; Luke 6:20-42; 24:13-35; John 12:35-43; 2 Cor. 4:3-18	<b>REFLECT</b> How could Jesus' perspective change how I view my current challenges?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, open my eyes" (Psalm 119:18).	<b>RESPOND</b> Think of a time you interacted with someone from a less-than-Christlike point-of-view. Reach out to apologize.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has God changed your perspective of sacrifice, service, and prioritizing others?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Back of the Line

## CROSS TRAINING | SERVANTHOOD: HUMILITY

As any retail worker knows, customers take their spot in line very seriously! They look for the quickest checkout, jockey for position, and sometimes fight like schoolchildren to defend their territory. It seems every few days, a new keruffle makes the news over someone cutting in line. It's silly, but haven't most of us gotten caught up fighting for our "place" at one point or another?

We're Cross Training to develop our servanthood, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Servanthood includes seeing with new eyes, humility, sacrificial love, and honor. So how can we humbly place ourselves at the back of the line as a servant?

### What You Need to Know

Once while Jesus sat at a dinner, he quietly watched guests enter and fight for the good spots at the table. He noted that if you sit in the seat of honor and someone more important comes in, the host will humiliate you by sending you to the back of the room. But suppose you place yourself at the lowest place. The host will say, "*Friend, we have a better place for you! Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*" (Luke 14:10-11).

Life has a way of disgracing those who elevate themselves (Prov. 11:2; 16:18; 29:23). God hates the pride that sneaks in and corrupts our hearts (Prov. 6:16-17; 16:5; Psalm 101:5). And in the end, God will turn the tables and bless the lowly (Luke 16:19-25). As Jesus often repeated, "*the last will be first, and the first last*" (Matt. 10:31; 19:30; 20:16).

A hidden beartrap lies on the path toward godliness. As God blesses us with growth and we congratulate ourselves on "how far we've come," pride can take hold and destroy all the good (cf. Luke 18:9-14). But even if you obey *perfectly*, how should you feel? "... *when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'*" (Luke 17:7-10).

The King of kings wrapped a towel around his waist, got on his knees, and washed his disciples' dirty feet (John 13:3-5). Why? As he explained, "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*" (John 13:14-15). In one simple act, Jesus destroyed any superiority they felt, giving his disciples marching orders to go and serve!

### What You Need to Do

To borrow an old cliché, "Keep it simple, servant" (K.I.S.S.). Rather than making everything a big production, work with what you have. Jesus used a towel and a washbasin to change his disciple's lives. Don't underestimate the value of a gifted meal or a few hours visiting someone who's sick or struggling (Matt. 25:34-40). If we imagine service as some elaborate act, we probably won't make it a regular part of each day.

Beware of defining yourself by your strength, wisdom, wealth, or position. Instead, rejoice in the goodness of the God you've come to know (Jer. 9:23-24). "*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord*" (1 Cor. 1:31; cf. Gal. 6:14). Spend time each day in worship. When we magnify the Lord, we see our smallness – and yet we walk away feeling filled! It's better to worship than to get "too big for our britches" like the king of Babylon who took credit for "his" accomplishments. After God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, he rightly declared, "... *praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble*" (Dan. 4:37).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:2-11; 12:9-21; Luke 1:46-55; 18:9-14; James 4:6-17	<b>REFLECT</b> What might Satan try to use to stir pride in me?	<b>REQUEST</b> "May I only boast in this, that I know you, the Lord of steadfast love, justice, & righteousness" (cf. Jer. 9:23-24).	<b>RESPOND</b> Go and visit someone or drop off a meal.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What small acts of service have made a difference to you?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# "As You Wish"

## CROSS TRAINING | SERVANTHOOD: SACRIFICIAL LOVE

There are so many ways to say, "I love you." In a popular film about a so-called "kissing book," a rugged "farm boy" and a beautiful girl fall in love. But whenever she bosses him around, he always responds with, "As you wish," when he really means, "I love you." Later, when she finds out he's still alive, the only way she knows it's truly him – the love of her life – is when he shouts, "As you wish" while tumbling down a hill. But these two phrases aren't as different as you might think.

We're Cross Training to develop our servanthood, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Servanthood includes seeing with new eyes, humility, sacrificial love, and honor. What does it look like to love someone enough to sacrifice for them?

### What You Need to Know

The *Princess Bride* tells a sweet love story, but it's nothing compared to the Lord who loved us – *his* bride (Eph. 5:25-27) – when we seemed unlovable. "*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly*" (Rom. 5:6). The Servant Songs of Isaiah (Isa. 42:1-9, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12) tell of the obedient Servant who "*carried our sorrows*" (Isa. 53:4) though we were the straying sheep (Isa. 53:6).

It's easy to think of love as some warm and fuzzy feeling you have towards someone, but Christlike love is a commitment to everyone – friend and enemy alike (Matt. 5:43-48) – seen in each interaction with others (1 Cor. 13:4-8). We need to *tell* people we love them, but we also need to *show* them (1 John 3:18). Jesus didn't express love in empty platitudes but on a cross. Sacrifice is an undeniable "language of love," so whenever you doubt his love for you, go back to that supreme "I love you" (1 John 3:16). Then, resolve again to lay down your life by serving people around you (1 John 3:16).

### What You Need to Do

Examine the motive behind your sacrifices. You can give away everything you own or even lay down your life for someone, but if you don't do it out of love, it gains nothing (1 Cor. 13:3). On the surface, your sacrifice might look noble or loving, but only you (and the Lord) know that for sure. Do you serve out of obligation, victimization, or a martyr complex? Or does it come from willing love, the decision to pursue another's wellbeing? Like a lamb before the shearers, practice silent submission to God rather than fighting for yourself (Isa. 53:7; 1 Pet. 2:20-25).

Broaden the scope of your kindness beyond your friends and people who treat you well. "*For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? ... if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?*" (Matt. 5:46-47). Extend your welcoming warmth and friendship to neglected people around you (James 1:27).

Lean in to listen for ways to serve. Ideally, we'd all express our needs clearly, but sometimes it takes investigation to understand how to support each other. Listen for people's struggles. Pray with specificity and give with generosity (James 5:16).

How can you pour yourself out without going empty? It only works because God promises to fill us back up (Luke 6:27-38). We can give because God provides (Phil. 4:18-19). Do you believe his promise (2 Cor. 9:6-11)?

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 3:10-17; 1 Cor. 13:1-8; 1 John 3:11-24; Matt. 5:38-48; Rom. 5:6-11	<b>REFLECT</b> What's it look like for me to lay down my life for others in my day-to-day choices?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, pour into me a love for others that reflects your love" (cf. Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:19).	<b>RESPOND</b> Tell someone you love them today, not with words, but with your actions.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How do you balance your needs with sacrificing for others?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# "Gone for Good?"

## CROSS TRAINING | SERVANTHOOD: HONOR

With a family of educators, I constantly hear horror stories about the disrespectful ways our little ones talk. And sadly, it's not a surprise given how some adults speak to each other these days. Are honor, respect, and basic courtesy gone for good?

We're Cross Training to develop our servanthood, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Servanthood includes seeing with new eyes, humility, sacrificial love, and honor. So why does a disciple stick out like a sore thumb when they lift others in honor?

### What You Need to Know

As servants of King Jesus, we lower ourselves before him, honoring his rule over us (Phil. 2:9-11). We follow his counter-cultural example, prioritizing God and others (Matt. 22:37-40). Rather than jockeying for position, we value others and act as the "slave of all" (Mark 10:44). In the friendliest of competitions, we "outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10). While the world disrespects and disregards the poor and the marginalized, we're busy serving and honoring them as if they were our King (Matt. 25:37-40). As Jesus says, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).

The Bible's command to honor people forces us to examine how we *think* about people and how we *treat* them. Who do you deem worthy of respect? Who do you value and hold in high regard? Not everyone's actions seem worthy of honor, so why does Scripture say to "honor everyone" (1 Peter 2:17)? We show *everyone* honor out of reverence for our Lord who died for them (Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11). Each person's value comes from their "Maker" (Prov. 14:31). What gives you or me the right to dishonor "people who are made in the likeness of God" (James 3:9)? Every mature disciple can find guidance by returning to the golden rule we teach children – to do to others "whatever you wish that others would do to you" (Matt. 7:12). When I look down on others, I need to remember that it's "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Peter said to "honor the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17) even as he prepared Christians for persecution (1 Peter 3:15). Though we're citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Phil. 3:20), we're not rabble-rousers. We pay taxes (Mark 12:13-17), obey the government (1 Peter 2:13-17), give our best to our employers (1 Peter 2:18-25; Col. 3:23), and pray for leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

We should have been training for this our whole lives – in our homes! "Honor your father and mother ... that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Eph. 6:2-3) isn't just something parents tell their kids. It's a directive from God! And as we learn to honor our parents, "Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" (Heb. 12:9).

### What You Need to Do

They say, "Familiarity breeds contempt," but be careful not to dismiss or discount someone just because you've known them for a while. Rather than being a hometown "hero," Jesus' message was largely ignored by his friends and family from Nazareth (Mark 6:4-6). Honoring everyone means honoring strangers as well as those closest to you.

Keep an eye on your heart for feelings of bitterness or anger toward others – especially those in leadership roles. You may think you can hide your distaste for someone, but eventually, it's going to come out and reveal your thoughts (Matt. 15:18). Ask God to help you see others the way he does.

We all have moments of weakness, so be ready to apologize if you catch yourself acting disrespectfully. Don't leave someone with a bad taste in their mouth because of something you said or did without thinking. Like Paul, when he unintentionally criticized the High Priest, we need to admit our mistake and move on (Acts 23:1-5).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 4:16-30; Rom. 12:9-13; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:12-26	<b>REFLECT</b> Is my respect reserved only for those I view as "worthy"?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, help me honor everyone made in your image" (cf. Prov. 14:31; Gen. 1:26).	<b>RESPOND</b> Find a way to honor your parents today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> When does showing honor come easy? When is it a challenge?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

## Mark of the Master 4

# Joy

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S GLADNESS

- **Receiving the Gospel** – Rejoice Always in the' Good News
- **Hope** – Hope in the Lord and His Promises
- **Thanksgiving** – Enjoy God's Blessings Gratefully
- **Evangelism** – Share the Good News Joyfully



# "Instant Joy"

## CROSS TRAINING | JOY : RECEIVING THE GOSPEL

Few phrases bring as much joy to our daughter's heart as the four words: "We're going to Disneyland!" One year, as we started driving to California, we surprised her with the news that she'd soon see Mickey – and she lost her mind! Good news has a way of bringing instant joy and anticipation (Prov. 15:30).

We're Cross Training to develop our joy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Joy comes when we receive the gospel, build our hope, respond with thanksgiving, and teach others through evangelism. Wherever the gospel goes, joy seems to follow (e.g., Acts 2:46; 8:8,39; 13:52). What is it about the good news that gladdens people's hearts?

### What You Need to Know

The gospel – or good news – declares the reign of a new King – "our God reigns!" Right before Isaiah introduces the Servant "*pierced for our transgressions*" (Isa. 52:13-53:12), he proclaims: "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'*" (Isa. 52:7).

The news of God's kingdom brings with it peace, happiness, and deliverance from our worst oppressors. Our king's victory is our victory. Jesus, our God and King (Isa. 9:6-7; John 20:28), arose to reign – and so we will live with him as heirs of God (Rom. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Gal. 3:26-29). Jesus has "*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Tim. 1:10). In his death and resurrection, he defeated sin (Heb. 9:26), "*triumphing over*" the rulers of darkness that used to reign over us (Col. 1:13; 2:15). He came to "*destroy ... the devil and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery*" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Imagine you're imprisoned on death row, and someone walks in and says, "you're free to go now." That's what happens when you receive the gospel: your execution stayed, your innocence declared, and your shackles unbound. It's hard even to process our enormous reversal of fortune!

We don't just have hope for a better future; the gospel changes our life now, as we "*rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory*" (1 Peter 1:8). The burden of guilt, fear, and hatred lifted (1 John 4:10-21), we see God's love for us and discover a new identity, purpose, and strength (Eph. 3:16-21). God's Spirit leads us to different choices and a new intimacy with God (Rom. 8:13-17), mirroring Christ's closeness (Gal. 4:6).

### What You Need to Do

Make rejoicing your "new normal" – something you "*always*" do (1 Thess. 5:16) and notice when it leaves you. Nehemiah counseled people not to "*be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Neh. 8:10). If strength comes from our joy, it shouldn't surprise us when Satan tries to bury it under a mountain of forgetfulness and trouble. There's a time to be sad (Eccl. 3:4), but our joy "*in the Lord*" can stabilize us even in seasons of "*trouble*" (Phil. 4:4-14).

Don't hide your gladness. Joy can become contagious (cf. Acts 2:46-47) when you put it "*on a stand*" instead of under a basket (Matt. 5:14-15). The Thessalonian disciples "*received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit*" and "*became an example to all*" as "*the word of the Lord sounded forth from*" them (1 Thess. 1:6-8). Rejoice when you see the gospel spreading (Phil. 1:15-18; Rom. 16:19) and look for opportunities "*to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:10).

Reflect often on where you'd be if you never heard about Christ. Jesus spoke of some who received the word with joy but never grew deep enough roots to persevere through difficulties (Mark 4:16-17). Some forget their first love (Rev. 2:4), but others deepen their devotion, appreciation, and joy with each passing year. May we say with the old hymn, "I love to tell the story for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest."

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 2:22-38; Acts 8:26-39; Rom. 15:8-13; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; Isa. 52:7-53:12	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I allow troubles to rob me of my joy?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh Lord, make known to me the path of life and fill me with joy in your presence" (cf. Psalm 16:11).	<b>RESPOND</b> Post a list of ways your salvation gives you joy somewhere others can see it.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How would your life be different if you never obeyed the gospel?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# This Won't Last Forever

## CROSS TRAINING | JOY : HOPE

My wife was in labor with our son (without an epidural) for 32 hours. In the middle of the night, after about 24 hours of labor, she began to insist that he would never come out. Logically, she knew better, but in her exhaustion, she started to lose hope. "No," a nurse reassured her, "this won't last forever. He will come out!" She pushed through, and at 10:40 AM the following day, she happily held our boy.

We're Cross Training to develop our joy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Joy comes when we receive the gospel, build our hope, respond with thanksgiving, and evangelize to others. So how do we hold onto hope when weariness threatens our joy?

### What You Need to Know

In modern use, "hope" often describes a wish that might not come true. "Maybe my team will win it all this year – I hope so!" But a Christian has a "living hope" based on existing reality, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). When we realize that death had no power over Jesus (1 Cor. 15:20), we see it has no control over those who follow him (1 Cor. 15:52-57). God has prepared an inheritance for his heirs (Rom. 8:17,23; Gal. 4:4-7), a home where the river of life flows (Rev. 22:1), where "the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

We "hope in the Lord" (Psalm 131:3). More than all the magnificent outcomes he's promised, we happily wait on HIM with unembarrassed (Psalm 119:16; Rom. 5:5), unqualified certainty that whatever the "God of hope" does (Rom. 15:13), it will be good (Psalm 145:17; James 1:17). Because of his character, we trust his judgments (Psalm 36:6; Rom. 2:6-11). And because of his promises, we "know" we "have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Hopelessness says, "What's the point? Things'll never get better" (cf. Prov. 13:12). But light breaks into even our bleakest days when we believe we have something spectacular ahead. So, "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing" even our problems can serve God's purposes as we prepare for that day (Rom. 5:2-5).

### What You Need to Do

Reframe your difficulties, disappointments, and discouragements in the light of hope. When you start considering your situation hopeless, re-consider! "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). When Jeremiah couldn't escape his affliction (Lam. 3:19-20), he said, "this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases" (Lam. 3:21-22). Since God's mercies never run dry but "are new every morning ... therefore I will hope in him" (Lam. 3:23-24). So we "wait for him" without complaining (Lam. 3:25-26; Php. 2:14), looking ahead to mercies not yet seen (Rom. 8:24-25).

Live with boldness (2 Cor. 3:12) and confidence in Christ (2 Cor. 3:4). Hope links the present and future, looking through the lens of faith in God. Paul's letter to the Philippians exemplifies hope-filled living, from his conviction that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Php. 1:6) to his confidence that "my God will supply every need" (Php. 4:19). In between, Paul rejoices in what God will accomplish in his imprisonment (Php. 1:12-26) and strains forward to higher ground as he longs for the day of his resurrection (Php. 3:8-21).

Practice deliberate daydreaming about heaven. Since we already belong to that new, glorious day, we constantly carry our hope with us, aiming not to drift far from heavenly thoughts. Ask yourself, "What will it be like to see Jesus? Won't it be great to leave these headaches behind?" Talk about it. Sing about it. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:2-4).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 11:17-44; Rom. 8:16-39; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 John 3:1-3; Rev. 21:1-5	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I live like this world is not my home?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh God of hope, fill me with joy, peace, and boundless hope" (cf. Rom. 15:13)	<b>RESPOND</b> Sing a song of hope throughout the day.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What parts of this life are you excited to leave behind?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# All Year Round

## CROSS TRAINING | JOY : THANKSGIVING

In *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray lives the same holiday every day. He arises each morning with dread until he realizes all the gifts and opportunities that day holds. And when we look past the doldrums and difficulties of our day, we welcome a different kind of repeat holiday. We discover that Thanksgiving is more than turkey and stuffing. We carry the aim of that November Thursday into all our days, celebrating the grace of life by expressing our appreciation to the Giver of every good gift.

We're Cross Training to develop our joy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Joy comes when we receive the gospel, build our hope, respond with thanksgiving, and evangelize to others. So how do we enjoy thanksgiving all year round?

### What You Need to Know

When someone gives our kids a present, we ask them, "What do you say?" We understand that receiving a gift creates a debt – not for repayment, but thanks. When Jesus healed ten lepers, only one returned "giving him thanks" (Luke 17:16). "Where are the nine?" Jesus asked, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God but this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18). As we go on our way, do we notice we're blessed beyond measure and return to praise God?

God's people are created for praise and thanksgiving, as we enjoy his fullness (cf. Isaiah 43:7,21; Psalm 95:6). God made a "very good" universe that thrives by his blessing (Gen. 1:28-31). "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4). But when we take all this in mindlessly, without witnessing the gifts and acknowledging their source, our hearts darken, and our thoughts turn futile (Rom. 1:21). We wall ourselves off from a grateful heart through entitlement, comparison, worry, and pride. Beware of anything that closes your heart, extinguishes your joy, and stifles your view of God's glory (Psalm 13:5; Prov. 4:23).

### What You Need to Do

Before we can give thanks, we have to notice the blessing. Sometimes I sleepwalk through a whole week without taking in what God is doing in my life. No wonder Scripture links gratitude with alertness. "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Recognize that today is the blessing (Psalm 90:12-15) – open the eyes of faith to see God's gracious hand (Psalm 23:6; 42:8). As Maya Angelou said, "This is a wonderful day. I've never seen this one before."

Let your gratitude out by giving thanks! Thanksgiving naturally arises in "the voice of song" (Isaiah 51:3). Sometimes – overwhelmed with joy – our songs come with the exuberance of "a great shout" (Ezra 3:11) or "a joyful noise" (Psalm 95:2). But it's the melody we make to the Lord in our hearts that best expresses our thanks (Eph. 5:19-20). Even in everyday conversations, let thanksgiving set the tone rather than complaining or "foolish talk" (Eph. 5:4).

Present your life as an offering of thanks to God (cf. Rom. 12:1). As grace fills our lives, it overflows into other lives! What a sacred privilege – to channel this grace! To become his conduits, to the "overflowing in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor. 9:12)! When we give our money and possessions, we "will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor. 9:11). We also "speak" the good news to others, "so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>RESPOND</b>	<b>REACH OUT</b>
Luke 17:11-19; 1 Chron. 16:8-36; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Jam. 1:16-18; Ps. 107:1-43	What changes in me when I decide to live in gratitude for my life and the joy available to me in Christ?	"Let me see your grace all around me, Lord, and overflow with thanksgiving" (cf. Col. 2:7).	Go on a "gratitude walk" looking for God's blessings.	How does loss open you to gratitude?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Authentic Ambassadors

## CROSS TRAINING | JOY : EVANGELISM

Watching TV or scrolling through social media, you often find celebrities and influencers recommending some hot new product. But are they genuinely recommending it or just getting a truckload of cash to talk about it? It's enough to make your head hurt! If people only do things because they get paid – well, that's sad. Is there a more authentic way to introduce people to something truly life-changing?

We're Cross Training to develop our joy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Joy comes when we receive the gospel, build our hope, respond with thanksgiving, and evangelize. So how do we share our joy with the world as authentic ambassadors for Jesus?

### What You Need to Know

When heralds used to proclaim the "good news" of a king's victory or a new king's reign, they used the word our Bibles translate "*gospel*" (e.g. Mark 1:1, 14-15). So as God's heralds, we declare his triumph over darkness through the risen reign of the true King, Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9-15; Rom. 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:56-57).

We're Christ's representatives in this world, boldly persuading people to come back to God so he can deliver them (2 Cor. 5:11, 20). We are a "*letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God*" (2 Cor. 3:3). As God "*has shone in our hearts*" we want him to "*give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. 4:6). Because we've seen the transformational power of the gospel, we can't stop talking about our newfound joy (Acts 4:18-20). Rather than fearfully hiding in the shadows (John 7:13; 17:14-15), we're "*the light of the world*" – a "*city set on a hill*" (Matt. 5:14-16).

We don't need flowery language or a college degree to teach people about Christ – we already have all the tools and information we need (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-5)! Jesus didn't send out scholars or motivational speakers; he sent ordinary people – like you and me – armed with an extraordinary message (Mark 6:7-13; 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20). God loves it when the gospel spreads, as Isaiah said, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!*" (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:14-15).

### What You Need to Do

Equip yourself with a constant readiness to speak, "*as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace*" (Eph. 6:15). From the beginning of the gospel's spread, fear has threatened to extinguish it, but his people met that fear with boldness, prayer, and trust in God (Acts 4:23-31; 5:25-42; 16:22-31). Are you afraid of saying the wrong thing, offending people, or maybe even facing imprisonment? What if someone says "yes" to your invitation – will you be forced outside of your comfort zone? Remember that you go with Jesus, carrying his name. "*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me*" (Matt. 10:40). When Christ commissioned his followers to make disciples, he promised he would stay with them always (Matt. 28:19-20). So may our joy and faith overwhelm our fear as we shamelessly shout the good news of the Lord's salvation to everyone we can (Rom. 1:16).

Write down the names of people you want to bless with the gospel. Think of each person in your neighborhood, at work, and among your family and friends. Consider workers at local businesses, acquaintances in your groups and activities. Go through each name regularly, praying for God to extend his grace and peace to them. Ask for wise, courageous speech (Col. 4:5-6). And beyond those we know now, pray for new openings, "*that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ*" (Col. 4:3), praying in faith that God will "*advance the gospel*" (Phil. 1:12). Invite people to find out for themselves (John 1:45-46). Ask them to study with you, invite them to worship with you, or make yourself available to pray with them and talk with them about their questions (Acts 8:30-31). Our job isn't to strong-arm anyone into submission – even if we think we know what they need. It's simply to invite, to say, "*Come*" (Rev. 22:17) and allow them to take the free water of life if they want it. When we "*reason together*" with people (Acts 17:2; 24:25; Isa. 1:18), offering "*the Way*" (Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:26), it's like dropping a seed into the soil and letting God's power do the rest (1 Cor. 3:6). God's word is the seed that *always* brings new life to the willing heart (Matt. 13:18-23; Isa. 55:10-11).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Mark 6:7-13; John 1:40-49; 4:27-42; Rom. 10:10-17; 1 Cor. 9:16-23	<b>REFLECT</b> Who in my life can Christ bring hope and peace?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, teach me to plant and water, trusting you to provide the increase." (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6)	<b>RESPOND</b> Invite someone to hear the good news, whether in a gathering or over coffee.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What blessings do you wish your unbelieving friends knew?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

## Mark of the Master 5

# Reverence

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S MAJESTY

- **Knowing God** – Develop a Deeper Relationship with God
- **Fear of the Lord** – Fear the Lord with Reverence and Joy
- **Worship** – Bow Before the Almighty Creator
- **Holy Living** – Set Yourself Apart for God's Purpose

# Unrecognized

## CROSS TRAINING | REVERENCE : KNOWING GOD

Tony Hawk – the most famous professional skateboarder on the planet – loves to tweet about how often he's unrecognized or mistaken for someone else. Some people confuse him for Lance Armstrong, Tom Brady, or even Tony Stark. Even when he reveals his name, some folks say, "Oh, like the skateboarder? I wonder what he's up to these days." How embarrassing! I'm sure some days he'd love to say, "Don't you know who I am?" rather than flying under the radar. But that's a minor slight compared to the lack of recognition given to the Creator of all we see and enjoy.

We're Cross Training to develop our reverence, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Reverence comes when we know God, fear him, worship him, and live in holiness. But how can humans know God?

### What You Need to Know

When we talk about knowing someone, we usually have two different things in mind. First, we know *information*. The better you know someone, the more you know *about* them. In the same way, to know God is to know *who he is*, to understand his character, attributes, and desires (cf. Jer. 9:24). But we also have a *relationship* with those we know. You can understand a little *about* someone (like Tony Hawk!) and not even recognize them when you see them face to face. Job had heard a lot about God "by the hearing of the ear," but in his encounter with God, he humbled himself and repented (Job 42:5-6). Through Hosea, God exposed his people's lack of knowledge *about* God (Hos. 4:6). But God's goal was to *know* his people like a husband knows his bride (Hos. 2:19-23; cf. Hos. 6:6).

If we open our hearts, we can look around at creation and recognize the hand of almighty God (Rom. 1:19-20). Of course, observation can't teach us everything, but it should give us a sense of awe at his goodness and power, leaving us wanting to know him more. Do you acknowledge and seek God, or are you among the indifferent? "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21).

If we seek God, we'll come to know him – not by our wisdom, but by believing what he reveals about himself. He reveals himself in his word: "For ... the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). But we see God the clearest through Jesus, God the Son (Heb. 1:1-3). Jesus said, "He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me" (John 7:28-29). Jesus came so that we can live forever. "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). To know Jesus is to know God and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

### What You Need to Do

To contemplate God is to give the mind and heart its highest occupation. Cultivate an adoring interest in who God is. With each passage you read, ask, "who is God?" Meditate on his works (Psalm 143:5). Find comfort at night in his goodness. As David said, "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night" (Psalm 63:6).

And when you learn something about God, imitate it. To see God's face is to be transformed by it (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). Don't live like those who "profess to know God, but ... deny him by their works" (Titus 1:16). To know God is to love like God (1 John 4:7-12) and pursue his holiness (1 Peter 1:14-17).

Always remember that you are God's, and he is yours (Heb. 8:10-12). It's the bedrock foundation of your identity now. Holding onto this relationship, we'll never fall (2 Peter 1:3-8). For "now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back" (Gal. 4:9). What a "firm foundation" – even in unsteady days – to remember that "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Tim. 2:19).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 6:6-13; Jer. 31:31-34; Hos. 4:1-6; Prov. 2:1-8; 1 John 4:7-12	<b>REFLECT</b> How close is my relationship with God?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, may I come to know you better each day" (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).	<b>RESPOND</b> Stay up late or wake up early to meditate on God's steadfast love for you.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What attribute of God do you most want to emulate?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Recognize the Power

## CROSS TRAINING | REVERENCE : FEAR THE LORD

Last summer, a group of our friends sat around our fire pit to visit. Some roasted marshmallows. Others just enjoyed its warmth and stared into the flickering light. But when a young boy picked up a fiery stick and started waving it like a sword – typical boy behavior – the grownups got uneasy and cautioned him to stop. Why? Because we understood the nature of fire. We knew that we also needed to respect it and recognize the power it has as much as we appreciated its warm glow.

We're Cross Training to develop our reverence, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Reverence comes when we know God, fear him, worship him, and live in holiness. So how does our love for God and recognition of his power lead us to fear him?

### What You Need to Know

In its first sentence, the Bible introduces us to the extraordinary being who created the universe (Gen. 1:1), bringing order to chaos and filling it with life. It continues recounting his deeds of might, justice, wisdom, and love – from Noah's flood (Gen. 6-8) to Pharaoh's plagues (Ex. 7-12), from tablets on a trembling mountain (Ex. 19-20) to a cross under a darkened sky (Matt. 27). It's enough to leave the reader breathless, amazed, and deeply humbled.

Someday, God will judge all people (2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 17:30-31). Knowing who will evaluate the quality of our lives gives us a clearer perspective about our lives. *"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil"* (Eccl. 12:13-14). But that doesn't mean he wants his children to live in fear of punishment. We have confidence and security about our future through our relationship with him, as John says, *"By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment ... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment ..."* (1 John 4:17-18).

If we want to live well, fearing God is our first step toward wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Regardless of what else we know, if we don't recognize who God is and hold him in the highest honor, we don't know anything about life's most important questions. How can we discern the right way and overcome temptation? It's *"by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil"* (Prov. 16:6). *Do we mean a cringing, panicked fear that makes us withdraw from God? No, rightly understood, fearing God draws us nearer to him, giving our lives stability and meaning. **"In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death"*** (Prov. 14:26-27).

### What You Need to Do

Take your choices seriously. We examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5), and if we see any false way, we repent. We work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). With stakes this high and a God this awesome, how could we take serving him lightly? If we cautiously handle a small flame around a campfire, knowing its power to set a forest ablaze (James 3:5), how much more should we respect our all-powerful God?

Remember that each person we meet will stand before God to answer for their lives (2 Cor. 5:10). Knowing what it means to fear God, we also aim to persuade others to repent (2 Cor. 5:11). Like warning someone about a dangerous fire (2 Peter 3:9-12), we point to the Savior who can rescue.

Let your understanding of who God is affect how you worship and pray. Though he is near us, he is not our "buddy." He's our God. It's enough to make us ask, "Who am I that you should think on me?" (Psalm 8:1-9). So we approach him in both joy and fear. When those who first saw the empty tomb heard that Jesus had risen, they ran to tell the others *"with fear and great joy"* (Matt. 28:8). The earliest Christians had a spirit of gladness (Acts 2:46), but also awe (Acts 2:42) and fear (Acts 5:11). Knowing God, we recognize his fierce power and holy "otherness" – distinct and wonderfully set above everything. Every interaction with God mingles reverence and awe with our joy and love in a relationship unlike any other. *"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire"* (Heb. 12:28-29).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 10:26-33; Deut. 10:12-22; Psalm 33:1-22; Heb. 12:18-29; 2 Cor. 5:6-11	<b>REFLECT</b> What humbles me when I consider God's greatness?	<b>REQUEST</b> "May all the earth fear you! May all stand in awe of you!" (cf. Psalm 33:8).	<b>RESPOND</b> Find an example of God's power and magnificence in nature, then worship him.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has fearing the Lord changed how you live?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Recognize the Power

## CROSS TRAINING | REVERENCE : WORSHIP

Since the '70s, L'Oréal commercials have convinced scores of customers to pay more for shampoo and conditioner because, as their spokespeople put it, "You're worth it." Haven't we all thought that before? Maybe not about hair care products, but I've convinced myself to spend more money than usual on something because "I'm worth it." But what if we flipped that thought process and asked what we'd spend on our God, who actually *is* worth it?

We're Cross Training to develop our reverence, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Reverence comes when we know God, fear him, worship him, and live in holiness. So how do we show honor and respect to a God who's incredibly worthy of worship?

### What You Need to Know

When we worship, we respond to God's grace and greatness by acts that express our reverence and submission to him. Worship expresses worth – think of it as expressing worth-ship. "*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*" (Rev. 4:11)

One New Testament word often translated "worship" (*proskuneo*) relates to bowing down (literally or figuratively). It's a profound act of respect, submission, and reverence. People often bowed before Jesus during his earthly life, worshipping him (Matt. 2:11; 14:33; 28:9). That would be unthinkable and totally inappropriate for any being but God (Rev. 19:9-10; Acts 10:25-26). Beware of letting anything else sneak into your heart as an object of such honor and devotion. We become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8), and we were created to worship only God (Matt. 4:11).

Another word translated as "worship" (*latreuo*) was often used for priestly service. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice as an act of "*spiritual worship*" (Rom. 12:1). As his priests, we bring "*spiritual sacrifices*" (1 Peter 2:5) and "*offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe*" (Heb. 12:28). Our financial gifts supporting the Lord's work come before him as "*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*" (Phil. 4:18; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). Our prayers ascend to God's presence like the holy incense the priests used to offer in front of the most holy place (Rev. 8:3-4).

Like the early disciples (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25) – and the congregation of Israel before them (Ps. 22:22; 107:32) – we fill our lives with God's praise, worshipping him in private (Matt. 6:5-6) and gathering with others to worship and edify one another (1 Cor. 14:15-26). It's not important where we worship, but it does matter *how* we worship, as God seeks "*true worshipers*" who "*worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:20-24). In sincerity and devotion, we lower ourselves in obedient surrender, lifting him up in his way (Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:23).

### What You Need to Do

As you see God's splendor all around you and consider his great acts of creation and deliverance, respond by creating what *you* can to magnify him. We can speak and write words that proclaim his excellence (1 Peter 2:9-10). We can sing beautiful songs about him to "*continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God ... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name*" (Heb. 13:15). When you "*do good and ... share what you have,*" God considers it an offering to him, and "*such sacrifices are pleasing to God*" (Heb. 13:16).

The Psalms have a lot to teach us about adoring God, placing our full hope in him, and entrusting our lives under his kingship. Make the Psalms a regular part of your life, reading, praying, even singing them.

Gather with the saints on the first day of the week to remember Jesus by breaking bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-28). In this supper of remembrance and communion (1 Cor. 10:16-17), we draw near to him in reverent gratitude, proclaiming what the Lord did for us in his death (1 Cor. 11:26). It's a moment with our Lord not to be missed.

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 4:20-24; Col. 3:14-17; Rom. 12:1-2; Ps. 95:1-6; Mal. 1:6-14	<b>REFLECT</b> What distracts me from my true focus in worship?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Heavenly Father, may your name be held in reverence" (cf. Matt. 6:9).	<b>RESPOND</b> Bow down in your room and pray a psalm of worship.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What idols have you dethroned from your heart to keep God at the center?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



# Prized Possessions

## CROSS TRAINING | REVERENCE : HOLY LIVING

When we got married, my wife inherited one of her family's most prized possessions – a set of fine china. Yet, despite its beauty and sentimental connection, we've never once eaten with it. We've rarely even touched it since it's packed away safely in a box in the garage to avoid damage. Well, God has a set of fine dishes set apart for special use too! The difference is, he wants to use us! *"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work"* (2 Tim. 2:21).

We're Cross Training to develop our reverence, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Reverence comes when we know God, fear him, worship him, and live in holiness. So how do we live as God's special people, "set apart as holy"?

### What You Need to Know

Though God created humans to enjoy his presence (cf. Gen. 3:8), sin distanced us from God's holiness (Isaiah 59:2). We see it in the cherubim blocking the Garden gate (Gen. 3:24) and the command not to touch Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:12). We see it in the temple veil that kept people afar, and most all, the "blood of Jesus" that lets us enter "through the curtain" to "draw near" at last (Heb. 10:19-22)!

Holy means different or unique – not in the sense that each person is unique or snowflakes are different – because each person is still a person. Each snowflake is still a lot like every other of its kind. But God is unlike anyone or anything else. *"There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God"* (1 Sam. 2:2). That's what we mean when we say God is holy. He is utterly apart, transcendent, and distinct by his very nature. That's why the heavenly creatures *"never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'"* (Rev. 4:8; cf. Isaiah 6:3). Full of goodness, righteousness, and creative power, God's eternal existence depends on no one. So what does God mean when he says for us to be holy as he is holy (1 Peter 1:16)?

When God separates anyone or anything for himself, he sanctifies them – he makes them holy. What is holy is distinguished – not just from what is unholy – but from what is common (Lev. 10:10). Under the Levitical system, before Christ's new covenant (Heb. 7:21-24), nothing common was used in God's service; everything in the temple was set apart by God. He distinguished his priests from regular, righteous Israelites who didn't have that particular function (Exod. 28:1). The incense, the furnishings, and even the vessels used in the temple were set apart (Num. 4:16-20). That doesn't mean other vessels were evil; they were fine for common, everyday purposes. But what God sets apart for his service is holy. And we *"are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession"* (1 Peter 2:9).

Yet when God decides to live in the midst of a special people, they must reflect his character. So, holiness also means moral purity and freedom from sin, through Christ's perfect sacrifice and our ongoing obedience (1 Peter 1:14-19).

### What You Need to Do

Cleanse your heart, your habits, and your house (1 Cor. 5:7). In order to be holy, we must be clean (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1). In the Old Testament, cleanness involved a whole host of ceremonial rules. But in the new covenant, we're not clean because of what we eat or what we touch, but because of what we think and what we do (Mark 7:18-23). Are there any dirty little secrets in your heart that make you unsuitable to serve before God? *"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded"* (James 4:8). Examine the shows you watch, the sites you visit, the music you hear, the words you say, and the way you view people in your life. The Christian life is a continual process of searching ourselves and repenting when we find anything out of alignment with God's will. He will forgive, but we must repent (Rom. 2:4). Hold your thoughts and behavior to God's standard, not your own. Remembering the price Christ paid to make us holy, let his grace train you (Titus 2:12) inspiring greater heights of righteousness.

Another word related to holiness is godliness. Godliness is our deep reverence for God that leads to piety and devotion. We make life choices that honor him because we live before a holy God. Instead of filling up the "in-between" bits of your day – the walk from a meeting to your office or the drive home after dropping off the kids – pause to remember that holy God is near. As his temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20), everywhere you go, you stand on "holy ground" (cf. Exod. 3:5). The more we realize and remember that truth, the more our lives will reflect his goodness.

Go into each interaction with the intention of shining God's light (Matt. 5:14-16). Make a habit of praying for people before and after you meet with them (1 Tim. 2:1). *"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>RESPOND</b>	<b>REACH OUT</b>
John 17:6-19; Phil. 2:12-18; 1 Tim. 2:15-22; 1 Peter 1:13-2:12; 1 John 3:6-10	Have I set myself apart for God's purposes?	"In your grace, Lord, train me to live a godly life" (cf. Titus 2:12).	Walk through your house, searching for any signs of "leaven" that needs cleansed from your life (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).	What do you find is the hardest part about being separate from the world while living in the world?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

## Mark of the Master 6

# Mercy

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S FAVOR

- **Receiving Grace** – Receive God's Amazing Grace
- **Forgiveness** – Forgive Others As God Forgave You
- **Kindness** – Love People Enough to Take Action
- **Patience** – Be Patient in Difficult Moments

# Unpayable Debts

## CROSS TRAINING | MERCY : RECEIVING GRACE

Ever since I was old enough to have a job, I've tried to be financially responsible by paying my bills on time and saving money in case of emergency. But while we've probably all cringed at the amount on a credit card or cell phone bill, what if the amount due was so astronomically high, you could work your entire life and never make a dent in it? What if your poor choices ran up such a deficit that – without even realizing it – you're now drowning in a sea of debt?

We're Cross Training to develop our mercy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Mercy comes when we receive God's grace, forgive others, show kindness, and develop patience. So how did God's grace cancel those incredible, unpayable debts we all owed because of our sins?

### What You Need to Know

Suppose a king showed favor to a particular servant with surprising kindness and generous gifts. That servant has received grace, the favor and goodwill of the king. The more surprising the kindness – either by the servant's unworthiness or by the lavish extravagance of the gifts – the greater the grace. But no one ever offered greater favor than the "amazing grace" of God towards us.

Given enough time, all people sin against God (Rom. 3:23). In our passion and pride, we've all ignored God's will to chase our own happiness (1 John 2:16). We've lived shamefully as sin's slaves, earning eternal death as our final payment (Rom. 6:20-23). If it sounds like a bleak picture, you're right, it is! But that's where Jesus – the one person who never sinned (Heb. 4:15) – comes in. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). Through Jesus' death, he paid the price of our peace and freedom – to ransom and redeem us (Isa. 53:5; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Our gracious God, "who desires all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) offers this gift and patiently waits for us to accept it, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). So any who come to Christ can enjoy his grace, "having been buried with him in baptism...raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God...And you, who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us...nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:12-14).

God's mercy – like his grace – is not equal to our worthiness. But where grace emphasizes his generous favor, mercy emphasizes his compassion toward us, in our weakness. In God's grace, he gives us what we don't deserve. And in his mercy, he spares us what we do deserve.

### What You Need to Do

Humbly accept God's salvation as a gift, rather than a wage for services rendered. What could be easier than receiving a free gift? Sounds too simple – which gives many of us pause because receiving grace requires us to acknowledge we can't fix this problem and save ourselves. We may want to sneak our worthiness in through a back door, trying to prove we're better than others. But the goodness that saves us rests with God alone. "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:4-9)

Have confidence in your salvation (Rom. 5:1-2) and boldly call on God for help (Heb. 4:16). "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). We understand why a father shows favor to his children – because he loves them. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:9-11).

Respond to God's grace by serving him in righteousness (Rom. 6:1-2). Honor the gift and its giver through good works (Eph. 6:8-10). We'll never be worthy of all this grace, but we can choose today to let our "manner of life be worthy of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). We can say "Thank You" for his grace by putting to death the old ways of sin (Rom. 6:1-23). Don't "fall away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12) having received "the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. Heb. 6:4-6; Gal. 5:4). Rather, let God's grace train you to renounce ungodliness (Tit. 2:11-12). Someday, we'll complete the circle of grace and gratitude, receiving heavenly crowns and casting them down before God, knowing our victory is only possible through his grace (Rev. 2:10; 4:10-11).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 7:36-50; Titus 2:11-14; Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 3:20-24; Heb. 4:14-16	<b>REFLECT</b> What specific sins has God forgiven me of, showing me mercy?	<b>REQUEST</b> "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (cf. Luke 18:13).	<b>RESPOND</b> Write a "Thank You Card" to the Lord for his incredible gift.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has your response to God's grace changed as you've matured?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Number 491

## CROSS TRAINING | MERCY : FORGIVENESS

My wife recently suggested to some guys that we didn't need to take our regular volleyball game so seriously. "Who cares who wins and loses?" "But that's why we keep score," they replied, "if we can't win or lose, why even play?" My competitive streak leads me to feel exactly the same – for some of us, keeping score is what makes it fun! But some parts of life are ruined by keeping score. I once heard about a Christian wife who would joke with her husband when he annoyed her, "That's number 491" – referencing Jesus' command that we shouldn't forgive someone seven times, but seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22, KJV). When Scripture says love isn't "resentful" (1 Cor. 13:5), a more literal translation would be, "love does not count up wrongdoing" or "keep a record of wrongs." Forgiveness means doing our best to rip up the page where we kept track of their offenses.

We're Cross Training to develop our mercy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Mercy comes when we receive God's grace, forgive others, show kindness, and develop patience. But how can we forgive someone when the wrong they've done feels unworthy of mercy?

### What You Need to Know

God has forgiven our debt and paid the ultimate price for our freedom (Col. 1:14-16). Why would God do that for me? Mercy! "*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). So, as God extends his grace to us, we're expected to mirror that in our lives. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*" (Matt. 5:7). Like the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:21-35), when our Master wipes the slate clean on our debt, how will he feel if we're not paying that forward to others? God's free gift inspires us to be generous with others.

So we follow Christ's example, as he hung on the cross and prayed for God to forgive those who tormented and killed him. As he prayed, he found compassion for them in their ignorance, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:33-34).

When we forgive, we compassionately release someone from their debt of guilt toward us, leaving their judgment to God, who will properly avenge wrongs as he sees fit (Rom. 12:19). But when we refuse to forgive, we're like a container filled with acid. And the acid we hold eats away at the container – destroying us! Our sense of justice can become twisted into a desire to cling to our anger and judgment over the one who hurt us – or worse, hurt a loved one – perhaps even wishing evil on them. When we don't forgive, we get to hold onto our rightness and their wrongness, an appealing prize, but the cost is too high! Not only do we become jaded and bitter, but worse, we wreck our souls, losing our ability to receive God's forgiveness ... until we learn to offer it to others (Matt. 6:14-15).

### What You Need to Do

Audit your heart and your past, considering all those who have wronged you. Have you held onto any of those wrongs? Is there a brother you need to approach about wronging you (Matt. 18:15-20; Luke 17:3-4)? Is it time to let go of an old slight?

Pray for blessings and forgiveness for others, especially those whose wrongdoing particularly hurts or offends you. Take a cue from Stephen, who took his cue from Jesus, praying for his killers before he died, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:59-60). As a priest of God (1 Peter 2:5-10), you are called to intercede for others (1 Tim. 2:1), calling on God to bless (cf. Num. 6:22-27) even those who curse you (Rom. 12:14).

Then go a step further than praying for them, by doing what you can to serve them. "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:20-21).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 18:21-35; Luke 6:27-38; Rom. 12:15-21; Eph. 4:31-5:2; Gen. 50:15-21	<b>REFLECT</b> How do mercy and forgiveness liberate me?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Merciful Lord, please bless those who have wronged me" (cf. Matt. 5:44).	<b>RESPOND</b> If there's anyone you don't have harmony with, do what you can to reconcile (cf. Rom. 12:16-18).	<b>REACH OUT</b> What are the biggest barriers to forgiveness?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Pay It Forward

## CROSS TRAINING | MERCY : KINDNESS

Maybe it's happened to you. You pull up to the drive-thru counter, ready to pay for your dinner. Then the cashier tells you that the car in front of you already paid for your food. A small gesture, maybe, but enough to make your day a little better and perhaps inspire you to pay it forward to the car behind you. This past December, the chain of vehicles that "paid it forward" at a Minnesota Dairy Queen extended to 900 customers. Strangers gave each other over \$10,000 of food, one act of kindness at a time. Couldn't our suspicious, anxious world use more good deeds – big and small – to restore some faith in each other?

We're Cross Training to develop our mercy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Mercy comes when we receive God's grace, forgive others, show kindness, and develop patience. So how is a merciful heart reflected in acts of kindness?

### What You Need to Know

The Lord has always wanted people to show mercy more than he wanted sacrifices (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13). It's at the heart of God's desire for us: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8).

One Greek word translated as "kindness" in our Bibles is *philanthropia* – literally "love for humanity." The native islanders showed "unusual kindness" to Paul and his shipmates when they wrecked on Malta, welcoming them and kindling a fire for them (Acts 28:2). The other Greek word for "kindness" is *chrestotes*, which describes benevolence, helpfulness, generosity, and goodness. It's a virtue found in the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) and Paul's famous description of love (1 Cor. 13:4). Both words describe God's goodness toward us (Titus 3:4; Rom. 2:4), which we must "put on" ourselves (Col. 3:12), as we imitate him (Eph. 4:32-5:2).

We don't *feel* kindness, we *show* it! Jesus' famous story about the Good Samaritan illustrates how *feeling* compassion leads to *acting* mercifully. After others passed by the other side, the Samaritan saw the helpless man and "had compassion" (Luke 10:33). A flurry of action words follows that feeling of compassion: He went to him, bandaged him, anointed him, "brought him to an inn," and "took care of him" (Luke 10:34). He took out his wallet and paid an innkeeper to care for the man, promising to return and pay for any other expenses later (Luke 10:35). The Lord closes his parable with a question, asking who "proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The correct answer isn't "the man who felt merciful" but "The one who showed him mercy" (Luke 10:37). So while we can't always help, when we do, our actions reveal our hearts – "if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17-18).

### What You Need to Do

Enter each day looking for ways to show kindness. One of our hymns speaks of the "Beautiful Life" that comes from doing golden deeds and helping those in need. So open your eyes, like Jesus and his disciples did, to those who are hurting and in need all around you (John 5:6; Acts 3:4).

And while you're looking, try to find the opportunities to do good that offer no apparent earthly reward. Lend money expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:35-36). Help people privately (Matt. 6:2-4). Give to strangers (Heb. 13:2,16) and those who actively dislike you (Matt. 5:38-48).

Aim to give something to every person you visit. Bring a blessing, a gift, a card, or an act of service. Small acts of kindness add up. "Do your little bit of good where you are" said Desmond Tutu, "it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." Remember the simple truth of Christ's words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 10:25-37; 2 Sam. 9:1-13; Zech. 7:9-10; Matt. 25:31-46; Col. 3:8-14	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I look outside my bubble and create ways to show kindness?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, keep me from growing weary in doing good" (cf. Gal. 6:9).	<b>RESPOND</b> Bless each place you go today with an act of kindness.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What was the last kind thing someone did for you?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# T.N.T.

## CROSS TRAINING | MERCY : PATIENCE

Maybe you grew up, like I did, watching the animated hijinks of Wile E. Coyote. Suspending your disbelief that a desert-dwelling animal had access to such a massive supply of TNT, it's incredible how many times the Coyote would accidentally blow himself up. No matter how well-prepared or elaborate the scheme, something always went wrong, leading to an explosive ending. But have you ever felt like you're operating with a short fuse that's ready to blow up in your face?

We're Cross Training to develop our mercy, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Mercy comes when we receive God's grace, forgive others, show kindness, and develop patience. So how can we become more calm and loving when it's easier to explode?

### What You Need to Know

Genuine love *"is patient"* (1 Cor. 13:4) because *"Love bears all things"* and *"endures all things"* (1 Cor. 13:7). No wonder God shows his love for us in *"the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience"* (Rom. 2:4). Jesus shows his *"perfect patience"* towards his followers when we take too long to understand his will and obey (1 Tim. 1:16; Luke 22:31-34; John 14:9). The *"God of endurance"* (Rom. 15:5) is *"slow to anger"* (Ex. 34:6), patiently waiting for people to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

We say someone has a "short fuse" when – like a stick of dynamite – it doesn't take them long to explode. The Greek word *makro* means "long," so the word translated *"patience"* – *makrothumia* – makes us think of a looong-fuse or a *"longsuffering"* nature (Gal. 5:22, KJV). It describes "a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation" (Louw-Nida). With patience, we can "bear up under provocation" showing "forbearance" (BDAG).

To unite Christ's church, imperfect people have to create *"perfect harmony"* with other imperfect people (Col. 3:14), understanding that none of us have "arrived." No one has *"already obtained"* our goal, none are *"already perfect,"* but we *"press on"* (Phil. 3:12). While our brothers and sisters might *"not yet"* (1 Cor. 3:1-3; 8:2) act as spiritually mature as they should, we can believe the best in others and look forward in hope of future growth (1 Cor. 13:7). So Christ's followers put on *"compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another"* (Col. 3:12-13).

### What You Need to Do

What do you do when you feel the reins slipping out of your hand, as your tongue – like an untamed beast – is about to lash out (James 1:26; 3:3-8)? Some people count to ten, but how about remembering these ten familiar words instead: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13)? How about imitating Nehemiah, who paused before speaking in a stressful moment, and quietly *"prayed to the God of heaven"* (cf. Neh. 2:4-5)?

But we need to center ourselves in God's will before the tense moments come, taking time away to pray (Eph. 6:16-18) and meditate on God's Word (Psalm 1). How did the most patient man who ever lived navigate life's difficulties? In his most stressful, emotionally draining seasons (Matt. 14:13), as demands and interruptions piled up (Mark 6:31-32), Christ slipped away to pray (Mark 1:35; Matt. 14:23). As important as sleeping and eating are to our health (and even our patience), Jesus sometimes gave up both to spend time in solitude (Luke 4:1-2) and prayer (Luke 5:15-16). So don't neglect your spiritual well-being!

When you fail, repent and call on the Lord's partnership in your life (Psalm 51). Don't let one outburst become a downward slide of shame, disappointment, and frustration (cf. Matt. 25:29). God's mercy toward you never runs dry (Lam. 3:23). He's a rock (Psalm 18:2), a help in your weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10), the source of unimaginable power at work within you, as you cling to Christ (Eph. 3:20-21). Can anxious, impatient people like us have a "long fuse," *"bearing with one another in love"* (Eph. 4:12)? With man, it might seem impossible, but *"with God all things are possible"* (Matt. 19:26).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 22:31-34; 1 Tim. 1:12-17; Prov. 16:32; Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Thess. 5:12-18	<b>REFLECT</b> Am I willing to bear with others' weaknesses and failings, as God bears with mine?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, give me the good sense to be slow to anger and overlook offenses" (cf. Prov. 19:11).	<b>RESPOND</b> Take extra time this morning to prayerfully prepare to respond graciously to the day's difficulties.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What irritation or "button" is the Achilles heel of your patience?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

## Mark of the Master 7

# Integrity

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S DIRECTION

- **The Whole Truth** – Embrace the Whole Counsel of God
- **Purity** – Maintain Your Heart's Purity
- **Character** – Develop Character Through Trial
- **Courageous Speaking** – Speak Up With Boldness

# Selective Hearing

## CROSS TRAINING | INTEGRITY : THE WHOLE TRUTH

When was the last time someone caught you listening but not *really* listening? It happens to me all the time, especially when I've got a lot on my mind or I'm distracted by something. My wife will be chatting away, thinking I'm processing what she's saying, and suddenly realize I'm in "la-la land." But when she mentions something I'm interested in, I'm suddenly laser-focused with my attention. "Did you just say something about ice cream?" Selective hearing may be a problem in a marriage, but it's an even bigger problem when it comes to God's word.

We're Cross Training to develop our integrity, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Integrity comes when we receive the whole truth, live with purity, develop our character, and speak courageously. So why do we need to hear all God has to say if we want to walk with integrity?

### What You Need to Know

How does God define integrity? God told Solomon to walk "*with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you*" (1 Kings 9:4). Integrity is about wholeness, honoring *all* God's commands. Jesus wants his disciples "*to observe all that I have commanded*" (Matt. 28:20). Only then can we "*\*do everything in the name of the Lord\**" (Col. 3:17).

"*The sum of your word is truth,*" says the psalmist, "*and every one of your righteous rules endures forever*" (Psalm 119:160). What does it mean that the "*sum*" of God's word is truth? In Numbers, this word translated "*sum*" describes the total number of Israelites, all accounted for (Num. 1:2,49). Likewise, in Psalm 119, it means the totality of God's word – every part of it all taken together. We can't grab onto the pieces of the truth that fit our views and justify our actions. We don't pick and choose.

When you take the stand in a court, you might be asked: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" Does this mean saying every true thing? No, it means not holding back any relevant truth. We need this same kind of teaching of the gospel – not holding back any relevant truth. Paul considered himself free of guilt – no matter what anyone chose to do – because he "*did not shrink from declaring ... the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:26-27). A few verses earlier, he explained it like this: "*I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable*" (Acts 20:20). Bring all his counsel to every aspect of your life. Walk with God in integrity by doing "*all that is written*" (Josh. 23:6) "*with all your heart*" (Deut. 26:16).

### What You Need to Do

Study through all the different sections of Scripture and diverse subjects. Is there a kind of Bible literature you've avoided? Is there a subject you've dodged? Take it on. Find a partner, if you need it, to think it through with you, but seek out God's counsel from all of his word for all of your life.

Decide to do God's will, no matter what it requires, and you will recognize the truth (John 7:17). "*Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you are unable to accept My message*" (John 8:43). When we're willing to accept even the hard sayings of the Lord, then we'll understand all that he wants us to know.

Then, apply *everything* you learn from Christ, paying particular attention to commands you find challenging or might tend to dismiss as "less important." Without application, Bible study is just an academic exercise. So once you've changed your mind to accept all of Christ's commands, let them change your actions to become more and more like your Master (James 1:22-25; 2 Cor. 3:18).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 28:16-20; Josh. 1:7-9; Psalm 119:1-24; John 6:60-69; Titus 2:1-10	<b>REFLECT</b> Is there any part of God's will I haven't taken seriously?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, may I understand and embrace your whole counsel for my life" (cf. Acts 20:27).	<b>RESPOND</b> Make a plan to study something you've avoided or neglected.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What command has been a challenging hurdle for you?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



# Water Snob

## CROSS TRAINING | INTEGRITY : PURITY

Nothing seemed more refreshing on a hot summer day as a kid than drinking from the hose. But as an adult, I'd have to be pretty thirsty to want to drink that unfiltered and over-chlorinated municipally-sourced hose-water. My wife's also somewhat of a "water snob," with particular brands of bottled water she won't tolerate. "Water should just taste like water," she'll say, refusing to drink anything that hasn't been filtered from those unexpected chemical and mineral additions.

We're Cross Training to develop our integrity, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Integrity comes when we receive the whole truth, live with purity, develop our character, and speak courageously. So how do we filter out impurity from our hearts today?

### What You Need to Know

The Greek word translated as "pure" is *katharos* (like in our English word "catharsis")— meaning clear of dirt, clean, spotless, and unsoiled. Like a glass of water you'd want to drink, purity doesn't happen when there's a bunch of unwanted add-ins. So when Jesus said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8), he's describing those with a spotless and unsoiled inner-life. And he's uniquely qualified to inspect and detect even the tiniest defect within us (Heb. 4:12-13).

Remember when God said to Satan, "*Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason*" (Job 2:3)? Purity is a unique characteristic among people, and only those with integrity will keep themselves "*unstained from the world*" (James 1:27). When we commit to walking with integrity and purity, we set an example for others to follow (1 Tim. 4:12).

If you wouldn't want to drink a glass of water with a single drop of sewage, why would God want even a drop of sin in our lives? Jesus warned, "*what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander*" (Matt. 15:18-19). So purity starts with guarding our hearts – through God's word (Ps. 119:9-11) – from the filth that leads to sinful actions.

### What You Need to Do

Fill your mind with pure thoughts. Direct your thoughts toward "*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable*" (Phil. 4:8).

Treat even "minor" sins seriously (Mark 9:42-48). Remember that the devil is the father of lies (John 9:44; cf. Gen. 3:4). Proceed with caution, and realize the poisonous effect that "little" sins can have.

Catch impurity early, noticing unhealthy attitudes and ungodly impulses. We'll struggle to rid ourselves of habitual sin after it takes root. Like a weed, sin is easiest to uproot when it's small. "*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled*" (Heb. 12:15).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:29-30; Matt. 15:16-20; 23:25-28; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Dan. 1:5-21	<b>REFLECT</b> When am I most susceptible to impure thoughts?	<b>REQUEST</b> " <i>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me</i> " (Ps. 51:10).	<b>RESPOND</b> Do a "purity check" on yourself, using a close friend for support.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What have you courageously done to keep yourself pure?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Pass the Test

## CROSS TRAINING | INTEGRITY : CHARACTER

How safe is your car, really? Sure, the manufacturer has told you about the airbags, crumple zones, and rigorous safety inspections, but will your car actually keep you alive in an accident? The auto industry constantly crashes brand new vehicles in frightening ways to make sure they pass the test. They even simulate real people at the wheel with their crash test dummies. But we face tests every day, too – high-speed collisions with temptation and trials that threaten to crush us. Will our character prove sturdy or crumple on impact?

We're Cross Training to develop our integrity, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Integrity comes when we receive the whole truth, live with purity, develop our character, and speak courageously. So how can we reinforce our character for life's collisions?

### What You Need to Know

When the Bible talks about character, it's talking about the fortitude to pass the test. The Greek word *dokimē* – translated as character, test, or proof – means to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination (Louw-Nida). Like a soldier tests the strength of his sword in battle, we show our moral makeup every time we face adversity. And like so many commendable qualities of Christ, character doesn't develop overnight. It grows as we continually – and successfully – navigate life's challenges. As Paul said, "*suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*" (Rom. 5:3-4).

God judges our character, not by our outward appearance but by the condition of our hearts. As God told Samuel, "*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*" (1 Sam. 16:7).

### What You Need to Do

Keep your eye on your moral development. Today's many tasks and tests present opportunities for practicing virtue. Attend to your patterns and relationships, mindful of their effect on your character (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). "*Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

As strange as it sounds, we can find joy in our problems when we see that in Christ, our obstacles improve us rather than tearing us down (Rom. 5:3-5; 8:28-37). Try to see God's creative hand, chiseling away imperfections and sculpting you into his image (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18-4:12; Heb. 12:7-11). It takes perspective and power to see anything good in heartbreak, pain, and frustration, so pray for wisdom from God, trusting that he can help you rejoice in your trials (Jam. 1:2-6).

Give special attention to the parts of your life no one sees. Trying to *look* good can get in the way of *doing* good. Christ shared an incredible insight into character development when he taught his disciples to do good in secret (Matt. 6:1-9). Think of your character like an iceberg. Most of an iceberg lies submerged underwater and remains unseen. When all of our praiseworthy qualities are seen and praised, it's hard to know whether it's for real. But when we do even *more* admirable deeds in secret than we do in public, we bolster our character and leave no doubt about our motives.

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 5:1-5; Phil. 2:12-16; James 1:12-27; 2 Peter 1:3-11	<b>REFLECT</b> What have my choices, attitudes, and trials revealed about me this year?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Father, refine me in the furnace of my trials" (cf. Isa. 48:10).	<b>RESPOND</b> Look back at the past year & give thanks for a difficulty you faced, recognizing the growth God can bring from it.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has suffering strengthened your character?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Battle Cat Courage

## CROSS TRAINING | INTEGRITY : COURAGEOUS SPEAKING

Growing up watching TV in the 80's, my friends and I imagined we, like scrawny Prince Adam, could thrust our sword in the air, shout "I have the power!" and transform into He-Man. But He-Man had a sidekick, Cringer, who needed a transformation of his own. His green and orange feline friend was scared of his own shadow until He-Man turned him into the fearless Battle Cat with a bolt from his sword. And, if you've ever felt frightened like Cringer – maybe you, too, need a bolt of courage from above.

We're Cross Training to develop our integrity, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Integrity comes when we receive the whole truth, live with purity, develop our character, and speak courageously. So how does Christ transform us from cowardly to courageous in this dark world?

### What You Need to Know

If someone saves a child from a burning building, we rightly call them a hero. But the hero might ask, "what other choice did I have? I couldn't walk by and ignore the situation!" What looks like courage on the outside often feels like a necessity on the inside. The Lord's people often describe that same feeling of responsibility to speak, even when it's uncomfortable. "*For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*" says Paul (1 Cor. 9:16). Jeremiah felt the same, saying: "*If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot*" (Jer. 20:9). In the same way, "*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others*" as "*the love of Christ controls us*" (2 Cor. 5:11, 14). As a watchman on a city wall, if we don't warn of danger, that's on us (Ezek. 3:17-21). Who are we if we don't love people enough to speak up?

What's the measure of a true friend? Why does the Bible declare "*faithful ... the wounds of a friend*" (Prov. 27:6)? Because you can count on your real friends to tell you what you need to hear, not just what you want to hear. We can get this all twisted and cut people off for speaking uncomfortable words. At times we might have to say with Paul, "*Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?*" (Gal. 4:16). Biblical love doesn't seek a friend's short-term happiness at all costs. "*Love ... does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth*" (1 Cor. 13:4, 6). We can't control a person's response, but we try to believe the best (1 Cor. 13:7) and know that our service to God is never meaningless (1 Cor. 15:58).

God's people have a history of boldness in the face of uncomfortable and even dangerous circumstances (cf. Heb. 11:36-12:3; Acts 4:29). From Stephen's convicting sermon (Acts 7) to Esther's royal requests (Est. 5 & 7); from Barnabas advocating for Saul (Acts 9:27) to Paul opposing Peter (Gal. 2:11ff); from Joshua's "*choose this day*" (Josh. 24:15) to Nathan's "*you are the man!*" (2 Sam. 12:7). May we join the long line of courageous saints who stepped up and spoke up.

### What You Need to Do

Think before you speak (Prov. 16:23). Know your heart – are you responding from bitter anger or genuine concern? We can mistake *courageous* speaking for "*rash*" speaking (cf. Eccl. 5:2), "*loud*" speaking (Prov. 27:14), or "*harsh*" speaking (Prov. 15:1). We can't go around looking for conflict, but we won't pretend there's peace without God either (Jer. 6:14). By "*speaking the truth in love*" (Eph. 4:15), we seek to build people up, not tear them down. When we tame our tongue (James 3:7-10), we can direct it to offer wise, purposeful words (Col. 4:5-6). Every time we say anything in Christ's name, we soberly speak "*as one who speaks oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11), taking care in what we say and how we say it.

Read the room, considering the impact that your words will have. Maybe it's best to speak up publicly (Gal. 2:11), or perhaps it's better to address it privately (Acts 18:26). Consider how you would want someone to approach you in a difficult conversation (Matt. 7:12), and make sure it fits the occasion (Eph. 4:29).

Once you've prepared yourself, speak up! Though it'd be easier to stay quiet, "*if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted*" (Gal. 6:1).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 10:26-40; Acts 4:13-31; Col. 4:2-6; Jer. 1:6-19; Ezek. 3:17-21	<b>REFLECT</b> What makes me shrink back from confrontational conversations?	<b>REQUEST</b> "God, give me a spirit of power, love, and self-control" (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7).	<b>RESPOND</b> Initiate contact with someone today to offer encouragement, pointing to Christ.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What impact have the courageous words of others made on your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Watchfulness

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S VIGILANCE

- **Spiritual Awareness** – See the Spiritual Forces at Work
- **Readiness** – Be Ready to Stand Firm
- **Resisting the Devil** – Push Back Against Satan's Schemes
- **Wisdom** – Develop Discernment and Skillful Living

# The Rest of the Story

## CROSS TRAINING | WATCHFULNESS : SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Paul Harvey was a master storyteller known for giving his radio audience a peek behind the scenes at the "mysteries of history." For over half a century, his even-toned, folksy voice revealed the lesser-known side of famous people and important events. Mr. Harvey closed each broadcast with the words, "And now you know ... the rest of the story." But Scripture tells us about another side of history, too – a spiritual realm we can only see through the eyes of faith.

We're Cross Training to develop our watchfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Watchfulness comes when we're spiritually aware, living with readiness, resisting the devil, and full of wisdom. So, what do we need to know about the spiritual realities that define the rest of our story?

### What You Need to Know

Elisha's servant, Gehazi, got up early one morning, went outside, and discovered an army of horses and chariots surrounding the city, bent on seizing Elisha. Terrified, he asked his master what they should do, and Elisha told him not to fear, "for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). Then Elisha prayed for him, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see" and suddenly he saw a mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

When we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7), we live with an awareness of things we can't easily see. We can pull back the curtain and see the true power of light and the real face of darkness. We aren't ignorant of the schemes of our adversary (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Peter 5:8), realizing that the battle isn't "against flesh and blood, but against ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). We know that God's angels are "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14). And that our Lord Jesus is with us always (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-8).

Even when you can't see his hand, God is present in your life, working all things together for good to those who love him (Rom. 8:28). Remember Joseph's words as he looked back on his life's struggles? Others may have meant it for evil, but God had his purposes (Gen. 50:20). He worked through their choices, placing Joseph in a position to save multitudes. Like Joseph, we'll never have all the answers, but faith helps us see that there *are* answers because there *is* – without a doubt – someone working our story towards a good end.

### What You Need to Do

Look beneath the surface. Sometimes there's more at work than what seems immediately apparent. The hand of God, the devil's schemes, and the things that matter most aren't the things most people spend their days thinking about. But everything is exposed to the light for the believer – so wake up, and let us walk circumspectly, for the days are evil (Eph. 5:13-17).

Remind others of the spiritual realities that we all so easily forget. Try to give perspective and encouragement when others get weighed down, distracted, or lost in the "cares of the world" (Mark 4:19). Be patient with those who can't yet see, understanding "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Christians trained to see the spiritual wounds beneath a troubled person's attitude can better meet their actual needs.

Build spiritual "reality checks" into your day. For example, when hiking, it's helpful to check your map occasionally, and climb up to a higher vista when you can, so that you can see where you are and where you're going. We need those check-ins every day, the spiritual vistas that let us see the big picture beyond our bills, to-do lists, and the daily drama of life. We can find that perspective in prayer (Eph. 6:18), in meditation on God's Word (Ps. 1), in conversation and worship with other believers (Acts 2:42-47), and in acts of service to others that we offer to God as a sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:16).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 18:33-40; 1 Thess. 5:4-11; Eph. 1:15-23; 5:6-17; Rev. 1:4-21	<b>REFLECT</b> What can I see happening in my life, through the eyes of faith?	<b>REQUEST</b> "O Father of Glory, enlighten the eyes of my heart" (cf. Eph. 1:17-19).	<b>RESPOND</b> Listen for spiritual needs in your interactions, remembering the eternal spirit in each person.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Is there an event in your life you saw one way at the moment but later saw more of the story?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Head on a Swivel

## CROSS TRAINING | WATCHFULNESS : READINESS

Weather permitting, I love riding my electric scooter to work. The commute is usually uneventful, but sometimes – out of nowhere – things can get interesting. There's always the possibility of cars veering into the bike lane, dogs lunging at the ends of their leashes, or smartphone-transfixed pedestrians wandering in front of me. At any moment a quiet morning ride can turn into an adrenaline-fueled fight for my life! So I keep my head on a swivel, watchful of my surroundings, and ready for whatever today's ride has in store.

We're Cross Training to develop our watchfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Watchfulness comes when we're spiritually aware, living with readiness, resisting the devil, and full of wisdom. So how do we keep our spiritual head on a swivel, ready for whatever life throws at us?

### What You Need to Know

Watchfulness is an essential part of wisdom. We can't live skillfully if we don't keep our eyes open, paying attention to what's happening in our lives. When we wake up to what's happening (Eph. 5:13-14), it changes our choices, how we spend our time and use our resources. *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil"* (Eph. 5:15-16).

Peter's first letter encourages readiness for service, persecution, defending the faith, meeting temptation, and meeting Christ at his return (1 Peter 1:13-14; 3:14-16; 4:1-7, 12-14; 5:8-9). *"Do not be surprised"* when fiery trials test you, Peter said (1 Peter 4:12). Rather, with clear-eyed, alert, readiness, *"preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you"* (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8). And be ready for unbelievers' questions, with a heart honoring *"Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you"* (1 Peter 3:15).

And when we take each day with the awareness that the master might come at any time, it adds another layer of readiness. *"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (Matt. 24:42-44).

### What You Need to Do

*"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life"* (Prov. 4:23). When we weaken spiritually, it's because we have let ourselves get lulled to sleep, not giving our full attention to the things that matter most. We need to *"wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die"* (Rev. 3:2).

Combine watchfulness with prayer (Eph. 5:18) to avoid falling to temptation (Matt. 26:41). Pride is the antithesis of readiness, so don't get cocky *"lest you fall"* (1 Cor. 10:12-13). Stay *"watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love"* (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Watch out for dangers, like false teachers (Matt. 7:15), forgetfulness (Deut. 4:9), and loose speaking (Ps. 141:3).

But also, watch for the Lord! Watch for his guiding, delivering hand (Ps. 59:9). Our watchfulness pairs – not only with our prayer – but also with our thankfulness (Col. 4:2). If we don't pay attention, we'll miss all that the Lord has done and is doing, and forget to live in gratitude toward him.

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 12:35-48; Mark 13:32-37; Matt. 24:36-25:13; Eph. 5:7-21; 1 Peter 4:1-14	<b>REFLECT</b> When do I tend to let my guard down?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, help me stay dressed for action" (cf. Luke 12:35).	<b>RESPOND</b> Write down three things you want to be on the lookout for today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What sources of spiritual distraction have you regulated or eliminated from your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Resistance is Futile

## CROSS TRAINING | WATCHFULNESS : RESISTING THE DEVIL

Any loyal *Star Trek* fan knows the terror of the Borg. As they bring their unstoppable and overwhelming technological advantages against the rest of the universe, they announce the foolishness of fighting for freedom, repeating with emotionless certainty: "Resistance is futile." We're in a fight of our own against an enemy that – at times – can seem just as overwhelming. Is it futile to resist evil?

We're Cross Training to develop our watchfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Watchfulness comes when we're spiritually aware, living with readiness, resisting the devil, and full of wisdom. So, what does the Lord want us to know and do to overcome the evil one?

### What You Need to Know

Near the beginning of the Bible, we're introduced to a "crafty" figure called "the serpent" (Gen. 3:1) who cunningly converses with Eve, blurring lines and twisting the truth. That conversation led to humanity's banishment from Eden and a lasting enmity between the woman and the Serpent (Gen. 3:15,23-24). Toward the end of the Bible, John identified the serpent with several of his other aliases: "the great dragon ... that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9).

After his baptism, Jesus faced the devil's temptations for forty days in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-2). Unlike humanity's first meeting with Satan, Jesus met each of the devil's crafty challenges with an accurate word from Scripture (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). And then, "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Today, Christ's followers still face this ancient enemy, who wants to enslave us in fear and darkness (Heb. 2:14-15). Using the language of warfare, James tells us to "submit" or surrender to God, and to "resist the devil" – to stand against him in fierce opposition (James 4:7). With our dangerous adversary on the prowl, Christians have to stay clear-headed and alert (1 Peter 5:8), resisting with a firm faith and the recognition that we aren't alone in this fight – other believers the world over are standing with us through similar attacks (1 Peter 5:9).

We need to understand Satan's tactics so that we won't be "outwitted" through our ignorance of his designs (2 Cor. 2:11). Satan slanders and accuses us (1 Tim. 5:14; Rev. 12:10), brings hardship in times of testing (Rev. 2:10), and snatches up the word before it can take root in the heart (Mark 4:15). Ultimately, he wants to deceptively lead us from our sincere devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

### What You Need to Do

Take bold, decisive action to thwart each attempt of Satan to worm his evil plans into your life. If we aren't vigilant, we can let dangerous habits and influences into our fortified walls like a Trojan Horse. So "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14). Cut out any danger you can avoid (Matt. 5:29-30). We can take away some of Satan's power when we forgive others (2 Cor. 2:10-11) and deal with anger and conflict before the devil can seize it as an opportunity (Eph. 4:26-27). We can steal some of his thunder by confessing our sins to each other and keep them from festering in the dark (James 5:16).

Meet temptation with prayer and Scripture (Eph. 6:17-18; Matt. 4:1-11). We need to recognize the limits of our enemy's power, but also recognize our own limitations. We can't naively take this struggle lightly or expect to "foil the tempter's power" (as the hymn says) by ourselves, with our own willpower and wisdom alone (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12). Yet the devil has already been defeated (Heb. 2:14) along with his horde of other evil spiritual powers (Col. 2:15). Those who stand with the Lord are already victors with no need to live afraid (Rom. 8:31-37). And we *can* stand in temptation when we arm ourselves with hope and faith in his ability to save, with his mighty word as our sword, and with righteousness covering our heart (Eph. 6:13-18). Remember that you stand, not by your own strength, but by his (Eph. 6:10).

Look for the way out of the temptation to sin, confident that it is there, even if it's not immediately clear (1 Cor. 10:13). Sin can have a destructive inertia, so whatever it takes, you have to find the way out. As the Lord told Cain, "if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:6-7). Resistance can be hard, especially when sinful habits have become ingrained, but it is not futile. Hold onto the Lord, and truly, you are "able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 4:1-11; Gen. 3:1-15; Eph. 6:10-18; James 4:4-10; Rev. 12:1-17	<b>REFLECT</b> How has Satan tried to attack me lately?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, may I stand in the strength of your might today" (cf. Eph. 6:10).	<b>RESPOND</b> Ask a friend if you can pray for each other to have strength in trial today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What has helped you overcome temptation?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Play How You Practice

## CROSS TRAINING | WATCHFULNESS : WISDOM

Are you ready for some football? After months of intense training and preparation, it's time once again for eleven players to take the field. After that first coin-toss, there's no more time for team-building activities, footwork drills, or agility exercises. When kickoff comes, as they say, "you revert to your training" and "play how you practice." But skill-development and preparation aren't just foundational in football – it's also core to our spiritual lives.

We're Cross Training to develop our watchfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Watchfulness comes when we're spiritually aware, living with readiness, resisting the devil, and full of wisdom. So, how do we develop the skills to tackle life's biggest obstacles?

### What You Need to Know

The Hebrew word for "wisdom" is also translated as "skill" throughout Scripture. For example, as God directed the Tabernacle's construction, he gave specific craftspeople the skill (or wisdom) to do the intricate artistic work (Ex. 36:1). He filled people with the Spirit of skill to make the priestly robes (Ex. 28:3), to design in metalwork, stone, wood, embroidery, and weaving (Ex. 35:30-35; 31:2-6), to spin the ornate fabric (Ex. 35:25-26), and to make all the hanging curtains (Ex. 36:8).

And Paul seems to draw on this passage in Ephesians, when he pairs wisdom with being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:15-18). Only, instead of skillfully building God's house out of gold, wood, and linen, Christians – even us today – are led by the Lord to build his house with our lives (Eph. 2:20-22). We expertly mold and shape our hearts, minds, and relationships into the masterpieces God directs us to create.

Another great wisdom book in Scripture is Ecclesiastes. We learn to carefully consider life's seasons and how the present moment is best spent (Eccl. 3:1-8). And the preacher teaches us to live with joy, giving our all to each task we take on (Eccl. 3:12). Wisdom comes when we sharpen our skills, taking the time to improve ourselves (Eccl. 10:10).

### What You Need to Do

Pursue wisdom as a way of life. In addition to fearing God (Prov. 9:10), Proverbs says, "*the beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom*" (Prov. 4:7). We have to chase it, train for it, and care deeply about living wisely each day. Solomon became wise – not by osmosis or happenstance – but by asking God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9-12). And we can obtain wisdom in the same way (James 1:5-6).

Let wisdom take root in your heart (Prov. 14:33). Recalling the Bible's great wisdom book, we keep our "*heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life*" (Prov. 4:23). We're on the lookout for opportunities to improve ourselves, starting from the inside out (Matt. 12:35).

Wisdom takes practice, especially in your words. "*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.*" Make sure your words are always "*gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*" (Col. 4:5-6). You're not trying to force people to do what you want, but you are skillfully speaking in a persuasive and influential way (2 Cor. 5:11). Open your ears, engage your brain, and choose your words carefully (James 1:19; Prov. 17:27).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Mark 11:27-33; Luke 11:29-32; Prov. 1:20-33; 4:1-9; Eph. 5:6-21	<b>REFLECT</b> What areas of my life could use some sharpening?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh God, give your servant an understanding mind to discern between good and evil" (cf. 1 Kings 3:9).	<b>RESPOND</b> Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 and identify your current season. What is it time for now?	<b>REACH OUT</b> What have you learned when you've failed to make wise choices?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



# Fruitfulness

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S INCREASE

- **Accountability** – Accept Responsibility to Bear Fruit
- **Zeal** – Fan the Flame of Your Faith
- **Diligence** – Work Hard for the Lord
- **Stewardship** – Manage God's Blessings Well

# The Buck Stops Here

CROSS TRAINING | FRUITFULNESS : ACCOUNTABILITY

With football seasons upon us, maybe it's helpful to remember the sage words of Harry Truman, who said, "It's easy enough for a Monday morning quarterback to say what the coach should have done after the game's over. But when the decision is up before you – and on my desk I have a motto which says 'The Buck Stops Here!' – the decision has to be made." Though you can't control anyone else – a coach, a politician, a spouse, or even your children – you're always accountable for your decisions in life.

We're Cross Training to develop our fruitfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Fruitfulness comes when we're accountable, full of zeal, diligent workers, and good stewards of our blessings. So how do we take responsibility, owning the daily decisions we make?

## What You Need to Know

Remember when Jesus went to a fig tree and cursed it after seeing it had no fruit (Mark 11:12-14)? What was that all about? The prophets often compared Israel to fig trees (Jer. 8:13; Mic. 7:1) or vineyards, which God expected to bear fruit (Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2-5). And here, in between the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple, Jesus makes a prophetic declaration against Israel. So what does that have to do with us? Well, we are now his field (1 Cor. 3:7-9), saved to bear fruit to God (Rom. 7:4).

In Luke, Jesus tells a story about a tree that won't bear fruit (Luke 13:6-9). Finally, after three years of waiting, the vineyard owner is ready to cut it down, though his patient vinedresser wants to give it one more year. The parable shows how the Lord offers second chances – praise God! – but there's also a final chance when the consequences for not bearing fruit will come to bear in judgment.

And when the Master returns in judgment, we won't be able to blame anyone else for our unfruitfulness. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil"* (2 Cor. 5:10). As stewards of the Lord's blessings, someday we'll answer for how productive we've been – no excuses and no deflection (Matt. 25:14-30). Will we hear, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* or, *"You wicked and slothful servant!"* (Matt. 25:23, 26)?

## What You Need to Do

Sound a mental alarm when you begin to play the blame game. Maybe "passing the buck" sounds like, "But he said ...," or "Everyone else was doing it," or even, "She started it!". While it's easy to absolve ourselves of wrongdoing by spinning a spectacular tale, God always knows better (1 Sam. 15:10-16). So catch your mistakes early by listening carefully before you start believing the stories you tell yourself.

Be good to everyone you meet (Gal. 6:9-10), treating each interaction as though you're planting a seed in the ground. As Paul said, *"... whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life"* (Gal. 6:7-8). So what kind of plant will your good deeds grow into?

Consider installing a "mouthguard" (Prov. 13:3) to protect against thoughtless words (James 3:5). As Jesus warns, *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matt. 12:36-37).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 12:33-37; John 15:1-8; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Gal. 6:1-5; Ezek. 18:1-20	<b>REFLECT</b> Have I buried my "talent" in the ground?	<b>REQUEST</b> "O LORD, be gracious to me and heal me as I acknowledge my sins against you!" (cf. Ps. 41:4).	<b>RESPOND</b> Do a "secret" good work no one will know about but the Lord.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has taking ownership for your decisions changed how you relate to other people?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# The Family Pyro

## CROSS TRAINING | FRUITFULNESS : ZEAL

One of the highlights of fall is the chance to gather around the fireplace. I'm good enough at starting the fire, but usually, the fire eventually dies down under my watch. My wife is the real fire expert, tending it and keeping it going (we jokingly call her the family "pyro," she loves it so much). And really, isn't it the same with our zeal? For many of us, it's easier to ignite a short-lived passion than to *sustain* the fire within us.

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### What You Need to Know

Zeal is the great antidote to laziness, apathy, and our sad tendency to drift and coast. Listen to the way these three commands fit together: "*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord*" (Rom. 12:11). To be "*fervent*" is to "to be stirred up emotionally, be enthusiastic/excited/on fire" (Arndt, Danker, Bauer, Gingrich). And a fervent spirit leads to zealous diligence in our service.

Like with all fires, we can either stoke the flame or extinguish it. Paul once encouraged the young evangelist Timothy to "*fan into flame the gift of God*" he had within him (2 Tim. 1:5-6). The more we stay "*hot*" for the Lord, the less likely we'll become "*lukewarm*" or even "*cold*" (Rev. 3:15-16).

But renewing our zeal isn't enough – we have to pair our zeal with knowledge (Rom. 10:2). Apollous was a gifted, zealous teacher, but he needed to learn "*the way of God more accurately*" (Acts 18:24-28). Misguided zeal can become out-of-control fanaticism. Pre-conversion Saul described himself as zealous while persecuting Christians (Acts 22:3-5; Gal. 1:14). And pre-conversion "*Simon the zealot*" belonged to an ultranationalist Jewish patriot group known for their violence against Rome (Luke 6:15). But in Christ, their zeal found a proper focus, and their service to God became fruitful.

### What You Need to Do

Continually remind yourself why you love the Lord. Jesus said the Ephesian Christians didn't tolerate evil or false teachers. They even endured persecution patiently, and yet they had "*abandoned the love*" they had "*at first*" (Rev. 2:2-4). They needed to "*remember*" (Rev. 2:5) – or literally, to "keep on remembering." It's not enough to do right things out of habit or even out of duty. We need to "keep on remembering" his grace, the works we did at first, and the reason we came to him in the first place. You'll find renewed zeal when you "*remember that at one time you ... were ... separated from Christ ... having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Eph. 2:11-13).

Get curious. When I feel like there's nothing more to learn, the Bible begins to lose its appeal. Stay curious about God's Word, like those Bereans who searched the Scriptures every day (Acts 17:10-11). Plant yourself beside the waters and soak your heart daily in the life-giving stream of truth (Psalm 1:2-3). May we discover and re-discover the passion of those two men who walked with the resurrected Christ as he explained the Bible. "*They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'*" (Luke 24:32).

Get connected. When we pull away and isolate ourselves, our fire quickly extinguishes. But Jesus draws *all people* to himself (John 12:32). There's not a person you've ever met who Jesus hasn't died for, in his church and throughout the world. We welcome each other as Christ welcomed us and draw closer together in harmony (Rom. 15:1-7). We connect with each other, share our lives with each other, and bear each other's burdens as a family (Eph. 4:32).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 2:13-17; Psalm 119:137-144; Rom. 12:7-13; 2 Cor. 7:10-16; Rev. 3:15-16	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I talk about the Lord as if he's the most important part of my life?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh God, ignite within me a fervent spirit of service" (cf. Rom. 12:11).	<b>RESPOND</b> Think of something you love to do for the Lord, and go do it today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What has helped you sustain your zeal?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Your Best Work

## CROSS TRAINING | FRUITFULNESS : DILIGENCE

If you've ever asked your kid to clean their room, only to have them return a few minutes later claiming the job has been completed, you probably know a thing or two about diligence. "Is that your best work?" we'll ask our daughter. And usually, we know that the answer is, "No." Though we're not expecting perfection, if an important task is rushed or tackled half-heartedly, what's the point in doing it at all? But it's not just our little ones who struggle with putting in less than our best.

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### What You Need to Know

Diligence means putting in our best effort. The Greek word translated "diligent" (2 Peter 1:10; 3:14), is also translated "endeavored" (1 Thess. 2:17), "strive" (Heb. 4:11), making "every effort" (2 Peter 3:15), and being "eager" (Gal. 2:10; Eph. 4:3). And four times, it's translated "do your best" (2 Tim. 2:15; 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12). It means to work hard, bringing intense effort and motivation (Louw-Nida).

The Book of Proverbs invites us to learn diligence by watching how ants work, toiling to prepare for the future, needing no boss watching over their shoulder to motivate them (Prov. 6:6-11). Proverbs says that a half-hearted job can wreck an endeavor (Prov. 18:9). So *plan your work*, laying the proper foundation before diving in (Prov. 24:27). And then *work your plan*, confident that success often follows "the plans of the diligent" (Prov. 21:5).

By faith, we hold to our confidence that God rewards those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). We "make every effort" to mature and develop in virtue, "all the more diligent" as we recognize the confidence we can have as we grow (2 Peter 1:5-10). There's no coasting to eternal life; we have to "strive to enter that rest" ahead of us (Heb. 4:11). Though we don't earn our salvation by our good deeds (Eph. 2:8-9), this journey will require a wholehearted pursuit of the Lord and his holiness (Matt. 6:33; Heb. 12:14).

### What You Need to Do

Bring sincere effort to all your tasks, big or small. As we look to identify jobs worthy of our heartiest commitment, both the Old and New Testaments use the word "whatever" (Eccl. 9:10; Col. 3:23-24). Ecclesiastes considers life's brevity and exhorts us not to waste a minute of it with half-hearted effort. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" (Eccl. 9:10). Paul adds that our reverence for Christ motivates a different kind of work, "not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men ..." (Col. 3:22-23). So whether it's a humble assignment at work or a major company initiative, whether a spiritual pursuit or a relationship, strive to do it well.

Diligently apply yourself to faithfully interpreting the Bible. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). God's Word deserves more than just casual reading. May we follow the example of Ezra, who "set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach" (Ezra 7:10). To "study" like Ezra means we "seek, inquire, consult ... learn information not previously known" (Swanson), and then we live it.

When your diligence wanes, remember *why* you work – and why your work matters. Indeed, it's interesting that the English word "diligence" comes from a Latin word (*diligo*), which means to love. That connection – now often forgotten – between love and work helps us see why Jacob's seven years of labor for Rachel felt like a few days (Gen. 29:20). Perhaps even the Greatest Commandment's emphasis on loving the Lord "with all your might" (Deut. 6:5) points to the effort and commitment we give when led by love. Ultimately, all labor has lasting meaning through Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:54, 58).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 9:35-38; Gal. 6:6-10; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 3:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:14-19	<b>REFLECT</b> How much of my time and attention are devoted to working for God?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, May I never grow weary of doing good" (cf. Gal. 6:9).	<b>RESPOND</b> Say "no" to something today so you're able to say "yes" to something spiritually productive.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How have you overcome the temptation to "phone it in"?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Just Caretakers

## CROSS TRAINING | FRUITFULNESS : STEWARDSHIP

I have some friends who run a supermarket in the Seattle area, and the care they put into managing their company has taught me a lot about work and life. Why do they bring such love and thought to each aspect of their business? Well, they call it stewardship. It's a family business that they hope will thrive many generations into the future. They aren't permanent owners, just caretakers of their grandchildren's heritage. And when we open the Scriptures, we discover that we're all just caretakers of God's blessings.

We're Cross Training to develop our fruitfulness, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Fruitfulness comes when we're accountable, full of zeal, diligent workers, and good stewards of our blessings. So when we accept our role as stewards, how does that change our relationships?

### What You Need to Know

To steward is to manage something that doesn't belong to you faithfully. As Jesus asks, "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager (KJV: "steward"), whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?"* (Luke 12:42). The steward must answer for his choices, for "*it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*" (1 Cor. 4:2).

Humans were given dominion over the world to enjoy and subdue (Gen. 1:26-28). When God placed Adam in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2, he assigned him "*to work it and to keep it*" (Gen. 2:15). Even paradise was a blessing to steward. All that we have is a stewardship, since "*the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof*" (1 Cor. 10:26). We even steward our bodies: "*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). And when we realize none of it belongs to us, it changes how we live.

### What You Need to Do

Aim to give more than you get, to produce meaningful fruit from all the rich resources the Lord pours into your life. In Jesus' parable about the fruitless fig tree, the landowner asks, "*Why should it use up the ground?"* (Luke 13:7). The vinedresser, though, requests permission to give it *more* resources. He says, "*let it alone this year ... until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down*" (Luke 13:8-9). In other words, as the Lord pours blessings down, we have a purpose beyond merely enjoying them. He wants us to use them, doing good works (Eph. 2:10) and sharing with others (1 Tim. 6:17-19). Steward your energy, your money, your relationships, and your time (Eph. 5:16-17). How can you produce the most fruit for the kingdom?

Make financial choices as a money manager for the Lord. God wants us to enjoy his blessings (Eccl. 3:12-13; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). And what you have is yours in that you have the authority right now over how to use it (Acts 5:4). Yet ultimately, everything is the Lord's, who loves us and provides for us (Deut. 10:14). Stewarding money doesn't mean "making lots of money for myself." It means making sound investments for the master and his kingdom. You could be a pro at money management – living within your means and growing your portfolio – and yet a terrible steward. Like the rich man in Jesus' story that God called a "*fool*" at his death, we may have stored up lots of money, but are we "*rich toward God*" (Luke 12:16-21)?

Look around your relationships and see at gifts you've been entrusted with, faithfully tending to them as stewardships. The friend who trusts you with their secret wounds (Prov. 17:9, 17), the husband or wife that you uniquely get to call "yours" (Song 2:16), and the children God fills your quiver with so you can aim to send them into the world straight and true (Psalm 127:1-5). Those we love are not ours to own, but they pass through our lives as both a gift and an opportunity to bless them on their way, directing them to the true lover of their soul (John 15:13).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 19:11-27; Gen. 1:26-31; Matt. 24:44-51; 1 Peter 4:9-11; Luke 16:1-13	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I consider myself the <i>owner</i> or the <i>servant</i> <i>manager</i> of "my possessions"?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, give me wisdom for the care of all you entrust to me" (cf. Matt. 24:45).	<b>RESPOND</b> Devote a few extra dollars and a few extra minutes growing "kingdom" fruit in someone today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What does fruitfulness look like to you, in real, everyday life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Endurance

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S STEADFASTNESS

- **Faithful Witnesses** – Find Encouragement in Stories of Faith
- **Strength in Suffering** – Stand Strong in Times of Trial
- **Consistency** – Live with Steadiness Before the Lord
- **Burden Bearing** – Carry Life's Heavy Load

# A Different Story

## CROSS TRAINING | ENDURANCE : FAITHFUL WITNESSES

Training for half marathons, I realized I'm not a huge fan of running as a recreational activity. But race day is a different story! If every training run had that same sense of excitement and camaraderie with thousands of other runners, it'd be different. Running Phoenix's Rock 'n' Roll marathon, you have rock bands playing every couple miles, people giving you high-fives, and plenty of encouragement. And the difference between training and race day highlights the importance of keeping our eyes on all the faithful witnesses that went before us.

We're Cross Training to develop our endurance, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Endurance comes when we look to faithful witnesses in God's word, grow stronger in suffering, remain consistent, and bear each other's burdens. So how do the faithful figures found in Scripture stir us to endure and keep going?

### What You Need to Know

When we read about David taking his stand against Goliath (1 Sam. 17) or Esther courageously outwitting Haman (Est. 8), we find the strength to face our own Goliaths and Hamans. When Job refuses to give up, we want to see how his epic story ends (Job 42) because in his struggles, we see a little bit of our own. And when Elijah feels all the world is out to get him, and no one's on his side, we lean in to hear *"the sound of a low whisper"* (1 Kings 19:12) and long to know what God will speak to his lonely soul.

In all these accounts about people *"of whom the world was not worthy"* (Heb. 11:38), we find both encouragement and a challenge to continue living by faith as they did. Because by faith, *"the people of old received their commendation"* (Heb. 11:2). God could've filled the Scriptures with anything, but he chose to give us a vast collection of stories about devoted people. Why has so much been written about these forerunners of faith? *"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4).

### What You Need to Do

Approach your spiritual life like a marathon, not a sprint. Taking to heart the examples that went before you (good and bad!), eliminate anything that slows you down. As the conclusion of Scripture's "Hall of Faith" coaches us mid-run:

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Heb. 12:1).

Don't gloss over the sins of your heroes. After all, the Bible doesn't! Recognize the weaknesses and missteps in Noah (Gen. 9:21-23), Abraham (Gen. 20), Moses (Num. 20), David (2 Sam. 11), and the rest of the *"witnesses"* that surround us (Heb. 12:1). When you see your own faults, take heart, knowing that God can forgive our sins (1 John 2:2) and perfect his power in our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9). Though we're all like jars of clay – fragile and unimpressive – he places within us a treasure that shines brighter than the sun (2 Cor. 4:6-7). So we take the baton to run the next leg of the race – joining the long line of imperfect servants giving their all to glorify a perfect God.

And finally, never, ever take your eyes off our perfect forerunner, the one whose name is *"Faithful and True"* (Rev. 19:11). When the path is hard to see and it seems the uphill climb will never end, remember that Jesus found a way to stand in every kind of trial (Heb. 4:15) so that we can take his route and *"follow in his steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). Just keep running, *"looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Heb. 12:2).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:11-12; Acts 7:2-60; Rom. 15:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 11:1-40	<b>REFLECT</b> What do I need to learn from the saints of old?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Father, help us imitate faithful examples, as they imitate Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1).	<b>RESPOND</b> Look for an opportunity to share a meaningful Bible story with someone.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Of all God's people in the Bible, whose story comes to mind as a major influence on your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Inhospitable Environment

## CROSS TRAINING | ENDURANCE : STRENGTH IN SUFFERING

It seems like more and more people are heading up to space – from a host of billionaire CEOs to Captain Kirk himself. But it's incredible how much planning it takes to send humans into such a harsh environment. Threats are never far – between extreme temperature swings, dangerous radiation, and debris traveling up to 17,500 mph. So engineers and astronauts obsess over every detail, making sure to harden their equipment to withstand the deadly conditions beyond the atmosphere. But it's not just astronauts who need to plan for potential dangers.

We're Cross Training to develop our endurance, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Endurance comes when we look to faithful witnesses in God's word, grow stronger in suffering, remain consistent, and bear each other's burdens. So as Christ's disciples on earth, how can we strengthen our hearts to hold up in an often inhospitable environment?

### What You Need to Know

We find resilience in hardship when we trust the Lord. *"Nothing is too hard" for God who "made the heavens and the earth" by his incredible strength (Jer. 32:17). And God's power (Isa. 40:25-28) becomes an unending source of strength for those who wait on him. "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint ... but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:29-31).*

A Christian's power comes from a surprising place: recognizing our weakness and fully accepting that Christ's grace is enough to see us through. Listen to these words Jesus said to Paul: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). And Paul responded, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:10). He places his "weaknesses" right alongside the rough stuff of life he faces like "insults" and "calamities," while finding contentment in "hardships" because "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:11).*

Remember that God's Son suffered in the flesh, showing how frailty is no cause for shame, shrinking, doubt, or fear. And just like Jesus *"was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God ... we also are weak in him, but ... will live with him by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4).*

### What You Need to Do

Trust in God, not your "stuff." Those who trust in their resources will fail, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright" (Psalm 20:7-8).* As we trust him, we *"wait for him,"* finding encouragement in his mercy even when our soul feels doubled over in grief (Lam. 3:20-26).

Hard as it sounds, embrace your trials as training in righteousness. Look for the fruit God creates from it all, even finding joy in it, *"knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3-4).* To consider trials *"all joy"* (James 1:2) doesn't mean they're fun. But we can find a fullness heart and a lightness of spirit in the midst of the worst of it when we see the Lord at work (cf. Heb. 12:5-11, Rom. 8:28-39). Most of us don't wake up excited to be tested. But *"the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"* – and as we remain steady, we move closer each day to becoming *"perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"* (James 1:3-4).

So wait on God, confident in the future resolution that He'll bring someday. Then, with hope, compare your struggles with the blessings of Heaven. As Paul said, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).* When you feel overwhelmed in despair, hang onto his promises tighter than ever. *"He will wipe away every tear from (your) eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore ..."* (Rev. 21:4).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 15:18-16:3; 2 Cor. 12:1-10; James 1:2-12; Lam. 3:19-27; Isa. 40:25-31	<b>REFLECT</b> What good has come from the hardships in my life?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Oh Lord, deliver me from all my many trials" (cf. Ps. 34:19).	<b>RESPOND</b> Offer God thanks and praise for something (or someone) difficult in your life right now.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What trials have you gone through that changed you?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS



# Stay on Track

## CROSS TRAINING | ENDURANCE : CONSISTENCY

Change is hard, and *consistently* making different decisions is even more challenging. Alcoholics Anonymous started in 1935 when Bill Wilson, then 6 months sober, reached out to help a friend. Members earn chips for reaching benchmarks in their recovery – one year sober, for example – to celebrate that string of consistent sobriety. One AA slogan of encouragement is "Keep coming back. It works if you work it!" In other words, stick with the program! Attending a single meeting can only help so much; the goal is to make the hard choices that help you stay sober day after day after day.

We're Cross Training to develop our endurance, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Endurance comes when we look to faithful witnesses in God's word, grow stronger in suffering, remain consistent, and bear each other's burdens. So how can we do the hard daily work to stay on track?

### What You Need to Know

An afflicted, anonymous psalmist wrote that the strength within us might fail (Psalm 102:23-24) and the world around us will perish (Psalm 102:25-26), "*but you are the same, and your years have no end*" (Psalm 102:27). Our Lord is consistent – "*Jesus Christ ... the same yesterday and today and forever*" – and he calls us to be as well (Heb. 13:8-9). Jesus said his disciple must "*take up his cross*" – not occasionally – but "*daily*" if we want to follow him (Matt. 16:24).

The book of Hebrews serves as a warning about the dangers of inconsistent Christianity. It encourages us to think about older saints who taught us and remember how they lived: "*Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith*" (Heb. 13:7). We won't drift if Christ is our "*sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*" (Heb. 6:19). It's easy to fall out of the habit of gathering with the church, considering assembling over-rated or unimportant. But Hebrews says, "*to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Steadiness is a mark of maturity. It takes time and effort to stabilize our way of life rather than getting "*tossed to and fro by the waves*" – "*no longer ... children*" but attaining "*mature manhood*" (Eph. 4:13-14). As disciples, we embrace childlike innocence, but we need to grow beyond immature inconsistency. As Paul warns, "*Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature*" (1 Cor. 14:20).

### What You Need to Do

Choose your "ruts" and dig them deep through deliberate repetition. Sometimes we get into discouraging or destructive patterns, like the wagon wheel ruts that stagecoach drivers couldn't easily escape. But as a friend used to say, "a good rut is just as hard to get out of as a bad one." For example, suppose we ingrain habits like gratitude, service, and assembling with believers. In that case, the inertia of good things can take us a long way, carrying us through moments when our willpower grows weak and our motivation drops to all-time lows.

Build your life around times of prayer. Talk to the Lord in the morning, the night, and throughout your day at both designated and improvised times. Jesus taught his disciples that they "*ought always to pray and not lose heart*" (Luke 16:1). In a trio of commandments, the Bible urges consistency in joy, prayer, and gratitude, regardless of our situation (1 Thess. 5:16-18). If we let circumstances dictate who we'll be, how we'll think or act, we'll lose ourselves and drift away from our identity in Christ. Like the prophet Daniel, we have to resolve in our heart (Dan. 1:8) and hold to the practices that keep us focused on the Lord – like Daniel's daily prayers (Dan. 6:10).

Most of us will face seasons when our consistency will falter, and we wander from those godly patterns. That's when we most need to remember what our life is all about. "*For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God*" (1 Tim. 4:10). If we can think like a farmer, rising each day to work for a future yield, keeping our eyes focused and our hand on the plow (Luke 9:62), we'll steady ourselves and never "*grow weary of doing good*" (Gal. 6:9). May we look back someday on a life of consistent service and say, "*the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith ... there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing*" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 8:28-29; Luke 18:1-8; Acts 11:19-26; Psalm 119:31-33; Phil. 2:12-30	<b>REFLECT</b> What consistent traits do I want to build my life around?	<b>REQUEST</b> "May my heart be steadfast, O Lord" (cf. Psalm 57:7).	<b>RESPOND</b> Start your day by honoring God (e.g., prayer, Bible, etc.) and do it for the whole week.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What attribute do you hope people can reliably see in you?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Fellow Soldiers

## CROSS TRAINING | ENDURANCE : BURDEN BEARING

Every soldier knows that their gear is their responsibility. It's hard to imagine a Marine telling their brothers in arms to carry their pack on the battlefield or even in basic training just because they're tired and don't want to do it anymore. After all, the warrior next to them already has just as much of their own gear to carry. And yet, if a soldier gets wounded in battle, others will do whatever they must to take his load, even hoisting him on their back if needed to get him to safety. In the same way, when Paul says that each of us must "bear his own load" (Gal. 6:5) right after commanding us to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), it helps to keep those two scenarios in mind. Because as we each take responsibility for ourselves, we also look out for fellow soldiers in need.

We're Cross Training to develop our endurance, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Endurance comes when we look to faithful witnesses in God's word, grow stronger in suffering, remain consistent, and bear each other's burdens. So how do we bear each other's burdens, and why is it so crucial?

### What You Need to Know

When Scripture says to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), the word translated "burdens" (*baros*) describes a weight – often signifying a heavy, oppressive hardship. Jesus used it to describe the workload of laborers who bore the "burden of the day and the scorching heat" (Matt. 20:12). In context, this burden we help bear might come as a "transgression" or temptation someone needs help overcoming (Gal. 6:1). But it could also come as a financial or physical need (cf. Gal. 6:6-10).

Burden bearing goes both ways. You may need help tomorrow from the brother or sister you help today. And that goes for even the strongest among us (cf. Ex. 18:22; Num. 11:11, 17). So, Paul emphasizes the mutuality – the one-another-ness – of the command. He says, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). As the old Bill Withers song goes, "sometimes in our lives we all have pain, we all have sorrow ... we all need somebody to lean on."

### What You Need to Do

First, carry your own load. You are responsible for you. "But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load" (Gal. 6:5). We can make a huge difference in people's lives (James 5:19-20), but we can't control anyone else's choices (cf. Josh. 24:15; Mark 8:34). We must recognize our limitations and place boundaries when someone expects us to carry what God wants to belong only to them. We can grow stronger and wiser through practice (Heb. 5:13-14). Still, we can also fatigue those load-bearing muscles if we overdo it. So to sustainably serve others well, we'll need both mercy and discernment.

Quietly get involved and get to work. If we want to really support one another, we can't get scared off by the messiness we'll find in each other's lives. Keep yourself grounded, and don't look down on anyone who happens to need your help at the moment. "For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3). Our brothers and sisters aren't broken-down equipment for us to fix, yet sometimes a person's failures and hardships define how we see them. We're "one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). May we "have the same care for one another" since, as "one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

And when you grow weary carrying your load and another's burden, remember you have a Friend with an endless capacity for burden-bearing. Our Shepherd finds the lost lamb and "lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" as he carries it home (Luke 15:5). Unlike governments (1 Sam. 8:11-18; Ex. 1:11-14) and religious leaders (Matt. 23:4) that ride on people's shoulders, breaking their backs, our King bears his kingdom on his own shoulder. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). So we resolutely trust in our Lord whose burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30), for "even to your old age" he promises, "I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Isa. 46:4).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 15:4-7; Matt. 25:31-46; Isa. 53:1-13; Rom. 15:1-7; Gal. 6:1-10	<b>REFLECT</b> How invested am I in others' problems and struggles?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Give me the strength and compassion to see the burdens of others and act in mercy" (cf. Luke 10:33-37).	<b>RESPOND</b> Review your prayer list and find a way to aid a brother or sister.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Is it ever difficult for you to maintain perspective & healthy boundaries as you support others? Why or why not?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Leadership

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S GUIDANCE

- **Following Jesus** – Get Behind Jesus on Life's Road
- **Meekness** – Stay Moldable as Christ's Disciple
- **Shining Your Light** – Let Christ Be Seen In You
- **Shepherding** – Lead Like the Good Shepherd

# Learning the Ropes

## CROSS TRAINING | LEADERSHIP : FOLLOWING CHRIST

Newborn puppies are just the cutest! But as much as you might want to take one of these tiny bundles of fur home right away, they really should stay with their mother and littermates for a while. A dog who hasn't spent the first months of its life learning the "pecking order" of the pack becomes an unsocialized, over-excited, nervous wreck of a dog later in life. At one point in their puppyhood, even older pack leaders were a bottom-of-the-totem-pole pack member, obediently – and adorably – learning the ropes. But learning to be a follower isn't just for the dogs. It's also a requirement for all who want to serve in Christ's kingdom today.

We're Cross Training to develop our leadership, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Leadership comes when we follow Jesus, live with meekness, let our lights shine, and shepherd those around us. So how can we become great leaders by first becoming obedient followers?

### What You Need to Know

The four gospels repeatedly capture moments when Jesus called people to follow him. Walking up to Matthew at a tax booth (Mark 2:13-17), summoning four fishermen on the shoreline (Mark 1:16-20), or telling a rich, young man to sell his possessions and follow (Mark 10:17-27). Why emphasize these invitations? Maybe because the essence of discipleship lies in accepting that call and following Christ. Where he went, they went. They lived as his constant students, imitators, and apprentices. And if we follow Christ today, we must commit to walking with him, too.

When young people reach adulthood, sometimes they feel compelled to make their own way in the world, to forge their own path. But as disciples of Christ, we follow his path, walking "in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) and never running ahead of Jesus or his instruction. "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

Let's acknowledge some words that have never sounded fun and these days seem outright antiquated: submission (James 4:7). Obedience (1 Peter 1:2). Subjection (Heb. 12:9). Why would any intelligent, competent human willingly yield their own rights and choices in deference to another? Even more strange: why surrender your will to someone you can't even see? For Christians who have come to know a Savior they trust implicitly, Peter summarizes our answer well: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

### What You Need to Do

Replace what you want with what Christ wants. A positive commitment to Christ has more inherent power than a negative commitment NOT to do evil because we find our strength in him (Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13). When we empty our house of unhealthy desires and habits, we need to fill it up with the good stuff, or it can all come back (cf. Matt. 12:43-45; Eph. 4:22-32). Rather, turn your attention to all that is "true ... honorable ... just ... pure ... lovely ... commendable ... anything worthy of praise" (Phil. 4:8).

Focus your attention on Jesus in everything you think, say, or do. His life serves as our perfect example as he leads us through this life. Study and imitate how Christ lived, but most importantly, why he lived that way. He is your cornerstone (Eph. 2:20-21), your leader (Heb. 2:10; 12:1-2), "Christ who is your life" (Col. 3:4). With equal parts humility and conviction, we declare our aspiration and commitment: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Walk away from anything weighing you down in your walk with Christ (Heb. 12:1-2). Jesus invites us into his rest, his light and easy burden (Matt. 11:30). He invites us to yoke ourselves to him, walking side by side with him and learning from him (Matt. 11:29). And when we love and trust him, we, at last, find peace under the yoke of his leadership. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> John 21:15-22; Mark 1:16-20; Matt. 9:9-13; 19:16-30; Luke 9:23-62	<b>REFLECT</b> Have I given Christ full control over my life's direction?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, lead me and help me to always walk with you, and never turn back" (cf. John 6:66).	<b>RESPOND</b> Share with someone what your life might have been like if you hadn't answered Christ's call.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Why did you first decide to follow Jesus and why do you still follow him?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Steel and Velvet

## CROSS TRAINING | LEADERSHIP : MEEKNESS

Abraham Lincoln's biographer, Carl Sandberg, described him as "both steel and velvet ... as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog." Lincoln's steely will held the course through an awful civil war, because he believed it necessary, and based on a just cause. Yet with the victory won, as Robert E. Lee surrendered, Lincoln brought a gentler touch to his former enemies. He chose to "to bind up the nation's wounds" – rather than to rule with an iron fist. It reminds us of a biblical virtue that leaders – and all disciples – need today.

We're Cross Training to develop our leadership, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Leadership comes when we follow Jesus, live with meekness, let our lights shine, and shepherd those around us. But what is meekness, and how does it shape our relationship with God, others, and our circumstances?

### What You Need to Know

A lot of folks seem to associate meekness with weakness. We might think of a meek person as a doormat that gets walked over. But Aristotle described *prautes* – the Greek word behind it – as the balance "between bad temper and spineless incompetence, between extreme anger and indifference" (TDNT). As misunderstood as meekness is, it's no wonder modern translators update it to "*gentleness*" (e.g. Gal. 5:23) or "*humility*" (Zeph. 2:3). It could describe a tamed and trained animal – even a mighty warhorse – whose fierce strength stays under the control of its rider. And so, as we surrender to God's will, we live with the quiet strength-under-control the Bible calls "meekness."

Jesus the "*meek and lowly*" gives his meekness as a reason to follow him (Matt. 11:29-30). Which makes perfect sense, since a spirit of meekness lets a king have compassion on his people, giving mercy rather than always leading with a rod (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21). He leads his disciples into the blessedness of a meek life (Matt. 5:5) and wants our relationships defined by such a gracious, meek way with one another (Eph. 4:2).

We can also learn a lot from Moses, who "*was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth*" (Num. 12:3). Moses seems hotheaded and out-of-control as a forty-year-old (Ex. 2:11-15). Then, as an eighty year old he seems so lowly he's broken down, too full of doubt to yield to God (Ex. 4:1, 10, 13). But through his continued service to God, Moses learned meekness – the humble strength to stand against Pharaoh (Ex. 5-14), and the patient gentleness to lead an obstinate people (Ex. 16).

### What You Need to Do

Keep a meek and moldable mind when you hear God's word (James 1:19-21). Meekness epitomizes the ideal learner's attitude. Even the most mature among us can continue growing when we humbly receive instruction, yielding to its wisdom. The opposite of a meek learner is a defensive, stubborn heart – a perfect recipe for keeping you just as you are, hardening to the pain of correction, but also missing the gifts of growth.

Be considerate, courteous, patient, and kind. Flying off the handle and impulsively fighting for our rights can get mistaken for strength. But that's the easy way, not the way of noble character. Meekness points to a different kind of wisdom, teaching us to empty ourselves rather than grasping at status (Phil. 2:5-7). The meek pursue harmony and prioritize people over selfish ambitions (James 3:13-18). They're "*peaceable, gentle, open to reason*" (James 3:17) and "*look ... to the interests of others*" (Phil. 2:3-4).

And finally, don't kick against God's direction. While Paul resisted the will of Christ, the Lord appeared to him and said "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads*" (Acts 26:14). A stubborn horse might fight against the stick used to prod them on. But what does the horse really gain? A lot of pain in their backside! And what do we gain from our "self-determination," when we resist the Lord's leadership? Pain and frustration where we could have God's peace and abundant grace! Our Lord desires to lead you, to bless you, and to mold you into his image, "*both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:3-12; 11:25-30; Psalm 37:1-11; Col. 3:12-15; James 3:13-18	<b>REFLECT</b> Is there an area of my life where I'm fighting God rather than yielding?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Give me a heart of meekness. As I receive your implanted word, shape my life" (cf. James 1:21).	<b>RESPOND</b> Place the words "blessed are the meek" in your pocket as a reminder today.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Where have you seen the beauty of meekness in others?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Afraid of the Dark

## CROSS TRAINING | LEADERSHIP : SHINING YOUR LIGHT

Are you afraid of the dark? For many, the idea of entering a pitch-black room without a nightlight is terrifying to consider. What's out there? Are you going to step on or trip over something? When the lights are on, our fears subside. But without light, we're left wondering what's lurking in the shadows. It's incredible how just a little light can ease our worries and help us move forward!

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### What You Need to Know

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" but then he added, "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Isaiah spoke of the Messiah who would offer light to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:7). When Paul quotes that passage and applies it to spreading the gospel, he shows how we carry Christ's light to the world. "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:47).

We see the tragic evils of a lost world all around us (Phil. 2:15). But it wasn't so long ago that you, too, "were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). We have Christ's light within us, like a bright and glorious treasure shining out of a clay jar (2 Cor. 4:6-7). So God gives us the task of making his goodness visible in the world. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16).

### What You Need to Do

When your good works are on display, check your motives carefully. While Jesus calls us to shine brightly in the world (Matt. 5:14-16), he warns against showing off. He said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). Point people to Jesus with your generosity, love, and selflessness, rather than boastfully pointing to yourself. As a good leader, invite people to imitate you – without making it about you at all (1 Cor. 11:1).

If you want to shine brighter, stop complaining or arguing. A Christian who's never satisfied or always fighting with people is like a powerful flashlight without batteries. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world ..." (Phil. 2:14-16). Remember that your contentment, gracefulness, and easy-going nature can crank up your influence to eleven!

Keep courage when your differences stand out. Those differences give light to others around you and help them find their way. Standing for Christ can get lonely and disorienting (cf. 1 Kings 19:10), especially when you're young. But you're not alone (1 Peter 5:7-10). Find strength for your mission, remembering that everyone around you can find life in Christ, and his life gives light to all (John 1:4). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:14-16; John 8:12-18; Phil. 2:12-18; Isa. 49:1-13; 2 Cor. 4:1-7	<b>REFLECT</b> Do I ever hide or dim my light around others?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Lord, give me the courage and love to shine" (cf. Matt. 5:14-16).	<b>RESPOND</b> Ask an acquaintance what you can pray about for them.	<b>REACH OUT</b> Is there a time you wish you had let your light be seen?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Cowboys and Shepherds

## CROSS TRAINING | LEADERSHIP : SHEPHERDING

Have you ever thought about the difference between cowboys and shepherds? Both have a herd to move, but while cowboys "drive" cattle, shepherds "lead" their sheep. Both stay alert to dangers, but shepherds know their sheep in a way cowboys don't. The cowboy prods and hollers at cattle, while the shepherd's rod and staff bring comfort (Ps. 23:4). No wonder God describes himself as a shepherd!

We're Cross Training to develop our leadership, one of twelve marks of the Master we're working on this year. Leadership comes when we follow Jesus, live with meekness, let our lights shine, and shepherd those around us. So why is shepherding the Bible's defining picture of leadership?

### What You Need to Know

God has long promised his people wise and compassionate leadership. Through Jeremiah, God said, *"I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding"* (Jer. 3:15). He rebuked *"the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture"* (Jer. 23:1). He declared: *"I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord"* (Jer. 23:4).

And his promise finds fulfillment today, first in Christ (Micah 5:4-5; Matt. 2:6), and then in the shepherds Christ gives his church (Eph. 4:11-12). These men must meet specific qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) as *"shepherds"* (1 Peter 5:2), also called *"elders"* (Acts 20:17) or *"overseers"* (Acts 20:28). As leaders, they keep *"watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account"* (Heb. 13:17).

But though you may not be a shepherd over God's church, chances are, someone in your life looks to you as a leader. And maybe shepherds have something to teach *all* of us about leading!

### What You Need to Do

Take your leadership cues from Jesus – *"the chief shepherd"* (1 Peter 5:4), who exemplifies perfect leadership. If we want to lead well, we need to learn the attributes of *"the good shepherd"* (John 10:11). A shepherd must stay watchful and protect the flock (Acts 20:28). Shepherding requires both firmness and tenderness, both the rod that defends and the staff that corrects (Ps. 23:4). A good shepherd risks his life to fight off wolves (John 10:12) and to go find the wandering sheep (Matt. 18:12-14). Are you ready to serve those you lead with that kind of fierceness, gentleness, and commitment?

Embrace opportunities to mentor when they present themselves. Whatever your roles and relationships, it's likely you have people looking to you for guidance. You may have a chance to provide an example, a listening ear, and a discerning counselor to co-workers at work. Parents shepherd their children into the way of the Lord, bringing his instruction into each aspect of our daily home life. Not only does God say to place his words *"on your heart"* (Deut. 6:6), but *"you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise"* (Deut. 6:7). Older women can give younger women perspective, training, and encouragement (Titus 2:3-5). And the counsel of older men can offer invaluable insight to young men (1 Kings 12:6-19).

Invest in other Christians, seeking to influence one another and grow together. *"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow"* (Eccl. 4:9-10). God wants us to support and strengthen one another, investing both our love and our wisdom. Two people of character can improve each other like *"iron sharpens iron"* (Prov. 27:17). God has made his people *"full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another"* (Rom. 15:14). The truth is, we all can benefit from *"an abundance of counselors"* (Prov. 11:14), and a wise person seeks out and *"listens to advice"* (Prov. 12:15). What a gift to find yourself surrounded by friends who can help make you better!

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>RESPOND</b>	<b>REACH OUT</b>
John 10:1-18; Ps. 23:1-6; 1 Peter 5:1-14; Ezek. 34:1-10; 1 Sam. 17:32-37	Does "shepherding" describe my leadership style?	"Holy Father, teach me to care for others the way you care for me" (cf. Ps. 23).	Touch base with someone who looks up to you, offering them encouragement.	What moments have shown you how difficult and worthwhile shepherding can be?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Lifelong Learning

SHAPED BY THE LORD'S CALLING

- **Discipleship** – Keep Following and Learning Until the End
- **Hungering & Thirsting** – Want God's Goodness & Righteousness
- **Self-Examination** – Look Inwardly to What God Sees
- **Seeking Wise Counsel** – Listen Carefully to Wise Instruction



# Old Dogs

## CROSS TRAINING | LIFELONG LEARNING : DISCIPLESHIP

They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Is that really true? Maybe it's a reality for our canine companions, but doesn't it feel a bit insulting to equate our age with an inability to learn or grow? Sure, we'll probably develop habits into deep ruts over time, making it difficult to change course. Maybe our fear of venturing out of our comfort zone will take over. But no matter our age, there's always more to learn and new opportunities for growth in our walk with the Lord. So, this week as we kick off our last mark of the Master, we come full-circle back to the central idea of this whole journey: discipleship!

We're Cross Training to develop our lifelong learning, the last of twelve marks of the Master we've worked on this year. Lifelong learning comes when we follow Jesus as disciples, hunger and thirst after righteousness, examine ourselves, and seek out wise counsel. So how do we maintain a learner's mind, irrespective of our age or experience level?

### What You Need to Know

A disciple is a learner, a student of Jesus who listens to him (Luke 9:35). We let our Lord's life and teaching remake our lives – that is the essence of discipleship (Luke 6:40). When we enroll ourselves in this training academy of Christ – so to speak – we fulfill God's promise that those in the kingdom will *"be taught by God"* (John 6:45; Isa. 54:13). If we don't continually place ourselves under the tutelage of Christ, submitting to his authority, why would we ever call him our master? As Jesus asked, *"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"* (Luke 6:46).

Before Christ ascended, he gave his disciples a mission, to go *"make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded"* (Matt. 28:19-20). So making disciples includes more than a baptism. It requires instruction – so that Christ can reform people as they do his commands. Our life is a race (2 Tim. 4:7), an ongoing contest which requires constant training and correction until the end (Rev. 2:26-27). So we listen to Christ's instruction every day, looking toward that finish line where we'll finally reach our goal and *"attain the resurrection from the dead"* (Phil. 3:10-16).

### What You Need to Do

Embrace correction. Think of yourself as a work-in-progress with many more challenging lessons ahead of you. Learn from the example of Peter, who – even as a respected leader of the church – needed Paul's correction when he separated himself from Gentile Christians for fear of false teachers in *"the circumcision party"* (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul's rebuke was just another in a long list of course corrections in Peter's journey, from confrontations (Mark 8:32, 33) and moments of doubt (Matt. 14:30-31) to hard lessons (John 21:17-23) and disorienting new truths (Acts 10:12-15). Peter's success came from his willingness to keep going and keep growing, and so will yours if you keep listening and learning.

Give encouragement and wisdom to other disciples along the way. Sometimes a disciple's humility makes us so aware of our need to grow that we think we can't teach anyone else. But following Christ's example means speaking to others with the meekness of a fellow-student. Christ, who always listened to the Father, could *"speak just as the Father taught"* him (John 8:28). In Isaiah, the Messianic Servant says, *"The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught"* (Isa. 50:4).

Take up your cross again today. Jesus said that those who follow him would need to do it under a cross (Matt. 10:38). Or as the next verse puts it, we have to lose our life for him to save our life (Matt. 10:39). Dying to ourselves and living for him (Gal. 2:20) – easy to say, hard to consistently do – we discover the joy of service, sacrifice, and submission. Each day brings new opportunities to develop as lovers of God and others (Matt. 22:36-40). *"For to me, to live is Christ"* (Phil. 1:21).

### THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REQUEST</b>	<b>RESPOND</b>	<b>REACH OUT</b>
John 6:44-51; Luke 6:39-49; Matt. 8:19-22; 17:1-8; Eph. 4:17-24	What doors of growth and progress are opening for me the older I get?	"Oh Lord, increase my love for you as I grow older in your service" (cf. Eccl. 12:1-8).	Express your appreciation to an older believer who's been an influence on you.	What are you continuing to learn that you thought you already knew?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Gasping for Air

## CROSS TRAINING | LIFELONG LEARNING : HUNGERING & THIRSTING

A man came to a great teacher, wanting to become his student. When the teacher walked away, he followed him out of town to a lake. The teacher continued walking until the water was waist-deep. Then he turned around, put his hands on the prospective student's shoulders, and shoved him underwater with all his might. The man struggled until, at last, the teacher released his grip, and he came up, gasping for air. "When you want wisdom as badly as you just wanted to breathe," the teacher said, "you'll be ready to learn, and I'll teach you."

We're Cross Training to develop our lifelong learning, the last of twelve marks of the Master we've worked on this year. Lifelong learning comes when we follow Jesus as disciples, hunger and thirst after righteousness, examine ourselves, and seek out wise counsel. So what are *you* thirsting for, and how do your longings and desires give shape to your life?

### What You Need to Know

If you've had a hungry baby in the house, you know all-too-well what Peter means when he says to "*long for the pure spiritual milk*" like "*newborn infants*" (1 Peter 2:2). I don't know if I've ever wanted anything as badly as a hungry newborn wants milk! But Peter gives two reasons to summon that kind of single-minded desire within ourselves. First, just like a baby knows they like the taste of milk, Peter says that we'll thirst for spiritual milk if we've "*tasted that the Lord is good*" (1 Peter 2:3). God's goodness leaves us hungry for more – everywhere that we encounter it. And second, we long to "*grow up into salvation*" (1 Peter 2:2).

Jesus gives assurance to "*those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*" when he promises "*they shall be satisfied*" (Matt. 5:6). As we see our part in the world's brokenness, we hunger for upright hearts, integrity, love, and for godliness to characterize our every thought and deed. When we cry out to God, wanting him to reign in us, Jesus says we'll "*be satisfied*" (Matt. 5:6). What a comfort!

Where do we get the idea that following Jesus comes easy? Jesus sure wanted us to see the opposite! Once, someone asked him, "*Lord, will those who are saved be few?*" And he said to them, "*Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able*" (Luke 13:23-24). So *strive* – keep "*straining forward*" (Phil. 3:13) like athletes giving every last ounce of effort because they want it so badly (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

### What You Need to Do

Surround yourself with people that value the same things. Some people have a contagious passion that you can't help but catch when you spend time together. A zealous brother or sister can stoke the fire within even the strongest among us. Paul told his friend Philemon: "*I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you*" (Philem. 7).

Feast on the word. When God called Ezekiel, the Lord gave him a scroll and told him to eat it (Ezek. 2:8-3:4). "*Then I ate it,*" Ezekiel says, "*and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey*" (Ezek. 3:3; cf. Rev. 10:9-10). God wants us to take the written words into ourselves and make it a part of us. Find in God's word both bread to sustain (Matt. 4:4) and honey to enjoy (Ps. 19:10). As Jeremiah said, "*Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart*" (Jer. 15:16).

Examine yourself to know what you *really* want (John 1:38). It's a helpful question – sometimes painful – the more we honestly search ourselves (Ps. 139:23; 2 Cor. 13:5). Why do you do the things you do? What do your choices reveal about how you've ordered your priorities? Where do you rank comfort and ease? Do you long for fellowship with the Lord? Jesus says we can change what we find by changing what we seek in our life: "*seek, and you will find*" (Matt. 7:7).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 5:3-12; 7:7-8; 1 Peter 2:1-3; Ps. 19:1-14; Prov. 2:1-11	<b>REFLECT</b> What do I really want?	<b>REQUEST</b> "O God, I thirst for you. May I look upon you" (cf. Psalm 63:1-2).	<b>RESPOND</b> Schedule some time with someone you consider zealous for Christ.	<b>REACH OUT</b> What has this year left you "hungry" for?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Regular Checkup

## CROSS TRAINING | LIFELONG LEARNING : SELF-EXAMINATION

My family – with our pasty-white complexion – has a history of skin cancer. Over the years, I've had many questionable spots scraped, burned, and surgically removed. But after skipping my dermatologist appointment for almost a decade, my doctor was shocked by the amount of work he needed to do as he checked every freckle, sun-spot, and mole. So as I wait for the results of multiple biopsies, I'm reminded that it's not just the "outer self" that needs regular checkups. Maybe it's past time to schedule an appointment with the Great Physician for a spiritual examination.

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### What You Need to Know

Jesus directs our attention to ourselves during the Sermon on the Mount, when he tells us to *"first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye"* (Matt. 7:5). Personal change like that begins with what we *"see"* and *"notice"* (Matt. 7:3). When we hear God's word, it should lead us to take a hard look at ourselves and start the work of correcting any problems we find. Anyone who hears and doesn't do that is *"like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror"* and then *"goes away and at once forgets what he was like"* (James 1:23-24).

But sometimes we get so caught up examining others, that we forget to check ourselves. Many in Corinth wanted to test Paul, but he repeatedly emphasizes the word *"yourselves"* to challenge them to look in the mirror. *"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"* (2 Cor. 13:5). Rather than having a distorted picture of ourselves as we help others, we need to turn our focus inward and test our own work (Gal. 6:3-4).

### What You Need to Do

Before you worship, take a moment to consider yourself. Do I have an issue to work out between me and my brother or sister? *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matt. 5:23-24). Before participating in the Lord's Supper, see if you've prepared your heart to remember Christ in a worthy manner. *"But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup"* (1 Cor. 11:28).

Bring your life before God in honest prayer, inviting him to see you (warts and all) and lead you into his complete righteousness. David prayed to God, *"test my heart and my mind"* (Ps. 26:2). He begins another psalm acknowledging that God knows everything (Ps. 139:1-16), ending with a prayerful consideration of his own thoughts and actions, pleading, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"* (Ps. 139:23-24). When you find anything out-of-line with the Lord's goodness, acknowledge it to him and walk in the light (1 John 1:7-10).

Learn from your mistakes and try to see yourself more clearly through the lens of those difficulties. Even when something challenging happens that has nothing to do with you, see if there's something you can learn from it. Remember, *"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons"* (Heb. 12:7). Because *"the Lord disciplines the one he loves"* (Heb. 12:6) to improve us (Heb. 12:4-11). When Jerusalem was destroyed, Jeremiah's lament pointed the nation to a path forward through self-examination and repentance. He said, *"Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!"* (Lam. 3:40).

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Matt. 7:1-5; Ps. 139:1-24; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; 2 Cor. 13:1-10; James 1:19-27	<b>REFLECT</b> What does the Lord see when he looks closely at my thoughts and behavior?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Search me, O God. Know me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (cf. Ps. 139:23-24).	<b>RESPOND</b> Open up to a friend about an area of concern in your life, asking for their prayers.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How can you grow from the challenges you're experiencing?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS

# Different Voices

## CROSS TRAINING | LIFELONG LEARNING : SEEKING WISE COUNSEL

This year at a teen event, we had a competition where several teams had to guide a blindfolded teammate through a maze using only their voice. It was fun but a little chaotic, as our young folks tried to make their way, discerning between different voices and instructions: "Turn left!" "No, right!" "Keep going, you're doing great!" It's a bit like the different advice we receive as we navigate our own twists and turns. Who do you listen to – or should you just shut the voices out, determined to stumble along on your own?

We're Cross Training to develop our lifelong learning, the last of twelve marks of the Master we've worked on this year. Lifelong learning comes when we follow Jesus as disciples, hunger and thirst after righteousness, examine ourselves, and seek out wise counsel. So why do we need wise advisors, and how do we find them?

### What You Need to Know

Naturally, what makes sense to you makes sense to you! But we all need to hear other points of view. Even a fool is "*right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice*" (Prov. 12:15). If you think going it alone – listening to no one – proves your strength, remember that the battle usually goes to those with the best counselors: "*Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war*" (Prov. 20:18). In fact, while you don't want to listen to just anyone, this is one area of life where more is usually better. "*Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed*" (Prov. 15:22).

So when you come to a crossroads and face a challenging decision, look for those who can help you choose the right way. And even in your day-to-day walk, who would you love to take with you on this journey, to help you see things clearly and live well? Looking around your life, fill your cabinet of advisors asking yourself, "who do I want to have in my ear?" Prayerfully build relationships with mentors and friends who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as those who "*belong to Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 5:22-24).

### What You Need to Do

Choose your advisors carefully. Give attention to "*your father's instruction*" and "*your mother's teaching*" (Prov. 1:8). Rather than leaning toward those with whom you have the most in common, look for wisdom and the fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10). Unlike Rehoboam, who lost part of his kingdom by choosing the advice of his young friends over older counselors (1 Kings 12), seek out mentors and thinking partners who have more experience than you (cf. Prov. 16:31). As Job said, "*Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days*" (Job 12:12). That doesn't mean we should "*despise*" the wisdom of young, faithful people (1 Tim. 4:12). To the contrary, they too can offer a unique and helpful perspective, holding to their "*sincere faith*" in the word they've received (2 Tim. 1:5).

Humbly listen, even when it's uncomfortable to hear. Never become too proud for correction, since anyone "*\*who hates reproof is stupid\**" (Prov. 12:1). Find the "*sweetness of a friend*" in their "*earnest counsel*" (Prov. 27:9), even when their "*faithful ... wounds*" of correction (Prov. 27:5-6) hurt all the more for their frankness and love (Lev. 19:17-18).

Don't equate any human's advice with God's wisdom. To David and Absalom, "*the counsel Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God*" (2 Sam. 16:23). That can get dangerous even with the most sage and experienced advisor. Wisdom can come in a lot of varieties from a lot of sources, some better than others (cf. James 3:13-17). Christ's disciple will always look first to the "*Wonderful Counselor*" (Isa. 9:6; cf. Isa. 11:2). And so this series ends where it began – Cross Training under the instruction and example of the Master!

## THROUGH THE WEEK: 5 CHALLENGES

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>READ</b> Luke 2:40-52; Matt. 7:6; Psalm 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:33; 1 Thess. 5:6-14	<b>REFLECT</b> Who are my counselors now, and who should I seek to advise me?	<b>REQUEST</b> "Holy Father, fill my life with an abundance of wise counselors" (cf. Prov. 15:22).	<b>RESPOND</b> Buy lunch for a wise, older saint, enjoying their company and taking in their insights.	<b>REACH OUT</b> How has wise counsel made a difference in your life?
5 BIBLE PASSAGES	A QUESTION TO PONDER	A SIMPLE PRAYER	AN ACTION STEP TO TAKE	AN 'ICEBREAKER' TO DISCUSS