

## **GROWING the CHURCH FAMILY**

### **Jesus' Revolutionary Perspective on Family**

**August 6, 2023**

#### **DAY 1 The Family We Choose**

**Scripture:** [John 1:11-13](#); [Ephesians 2:14-22](#); [1 Timothy 3:14-15](#)

**Reflection:** If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have two families. The first one, your family of origin, is the one you were born into. You had no control or choice in the matter. This family may have been very nurturing, or it may have had dysfunction. Either way, your family of origin is fixed and cannot be changed. However, when you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are born again through His grace, this time into *His family*, His household, the Church.

While it has become common for believers to refer to their local church as their 'church family,' many don't fully grasp what it means for fellow believers to be *family*, not just members of an organization. We often miss the depth of Jesus' vision for the way His family is meant to relate to one another and the world around them. Sometimes we bring the misconceptions and dysfunctions of our earthly families into our understanding of God's household. Sometimes we redefine what family means in that context until it looks more like a social club or school house. But the scriptures give us clear illustrations and instructions about Jesus' heart and purpose for our spiritual family.

Over the next few days, we'll look at some distinguishing characteristics of His family and how God's design for His household challenges us to have a deeper relationship with Him and each other.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- How do my definitions of natural family and spiritual family differ?
- How has my family of origin influenced the way I interact with God's family?
- What are the characteristics of 'family' that I find difficult or perhaps even inapplicable in my relationships with other believers?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, thank you for inviting us into the fellowship of your family. Please open our hearts and minds to your guidance on what it means to be a child of your household. May your Church be transformed as we learn to live and love the way Jesus taught... In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### **DAY 2 Connected by Faith**

**Scripture:** [Mark 3:31-35](#); [Matthew 10:34-39](#); [Mark 10:28-31](#); [John 19:26-27](#)

**Reflection:** Jesus redefined family for His people. Not only did He open the door for the inclusion of Gentiles into a previously Jewish faith community, but He also shifted priority from biological family to spiritual family. In the Jewish culture of that day, parents were considered the ultimate authority in a person's life, other than God himself. Earthly family hierarchies dictated significant roles and responsibilities, tying family members together with traditions and expectations. But Jesus emphasized obedience to God as a greater unifying factor than these blood relationships ([Mark 3:35](#)).

It's important to understand that by quoting [Micah 7:6](#) in [Matthew 10:35-36](#), Jesus wasn't suggesting that his specific intention was to divide earthly families; he was addressing a cultural tradition that believers may have needed to leave behind to wholeheartedly serve Him. This would particularly apply when a person became a disciple of Jesus, but their earthly family did not.

It may seem scary or hard to choose the things of Jesus above the priorities or preferences of our natural families. Still, it is important to remember that Jesus doesn't ask us to leave everything for Him and then abandon us. He assures us that what we receive from God is far more valuable than what we give up. Our obedience and sacrifice lead to a greater blessing.

In the area of family relationships, the Church is meant to fulfill that promise. The committed companionship of spiritual brothers and sisters is a provision and blessing to those who follow Him. Even as Jesus was dying on the cross, He knew He could rely on a brother in the faith to care and provide for his earthly mother. The depth of the relationship they experienced through unity in the Spirit resulted in loyalty and love as powerful as that between a mother and son.

**Ask Yourself:**

- When have I been challenged to choose between an earthly relationship priority and following Jesus?
- What did I learn about life in God's family through that experience?
- How has a shared commitment to serving God first impacted my relationships with other believers?
- How has God asked me to bless and provide for my spiritual brothers and sisters?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Heavenly Father, Sometimes the expectations and responsibilities of this world blind us to your words and your way. Thank you for opening our eyes to the value and importance of our spiritual family relationships. Help us to focus our attention on your will and to trust you to provide all that we need as we do so... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Take a little time to think about your current level of connection to others in the body of Christ. Brainstorm a few ways that you might deepen those relationships, and then challenge yourself to take one of those steps this week.

**DAY 3 Love One Another**

**Scripture:** [John 13:34-35](#); [Romans 12:9-13](#); [Galatians 5:13-14](#); [1 Peter 4:8-10](#)

**Reflection:** The family of Jesus is marked by unconditional, self-sacrificial love. We are compelled to love each other this way every day - not just when it is convenient, not 'when it really matters' from our earth-bound point of view. The family members of Jesus are called to love and serve one another so consistently and willingly that others know they are Christians by observing how they treat one another.

While this may take different forms based on circumstances and needs, generously serving and showing hospitality demonstrates our willingness to set ourselves aside for God's greater story and to engage with each other as true siblings in Christ.

**Ask Yourself:**

- How consistently do I intentionally love and serve my fellow believers?
- What kinds of things distract me from serving?

-In what situations am I less willing to set myself aside?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, Thank you for loving us first, for leading the way, and for sending Jesus to show us how to love each other practically. Forgive us, Lord, for any selfishness, fear, or pride that holds our hearts back from loving your children the way you do. Teach us to give and serve generously and willingly every day... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Consider reading through [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#) and replacing the word 'love' with your name. If any of those statements feel uncomfortable (or a bit of a struggle), spend a little more time in prayer, asking God to help you grow in that aspect of love.

#### **DAY 4 Unity, Not Uniformity**

**Scripture:** [John 10:14-16](#); [Revelation 5:9-10](#); [Ephesians 3:6-15](#); [Ephesians 4:1-6](#)

**Reflection:** The family of God is unified but not uniform. As discussed on Day 2, *this* family is connected by faith in Jesus and obedience to the will of the Father, not by heritage, class, or any other social construct - and this is intentional. While Jesus taught in the Jewish synagogue, he did not limit his ministry to those the Scribes and Pharisees considered appropriate or worthy. He radically broke the normal social 'rules' by engaging in dialogue with women, tax collectors, Samaritans, lepers... ([Mark 2:15-17](#); [John 4:7-9](#)) And His closest disciples represented a surprising combination of people from different backgrounds as well; fishermen and tax collectors did not typically associate with one another. In truth, Jesus initiated the most diverse family possible by making a way for all to enter into a relationship with God.

Something in our human nature makes us want to gather with people most like us - maybe it feels more 'safe' or simple – but the unified body of Christ is meant to include every family, every tribe, and nation. As part of God's family, the Church, we are challenged to remain unified in the Spirit as we walk out our commission to share His good news with *all* people.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- When have I equated unity with uniformity in my relationships or associations?
- How can I expand the diversity of my spiritual family?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Heavenly Father, the diversity of your family is incredible and beautiful. Open our eyes to any way that we choose uniformity over true unity. Teach us how to honor, respect, and love one another as we live united in your Spirit... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Take a proactive step to engage with people of faith outside your regular people or places. Consider visiting a church in a different neighborhood, inviting someone new to your small group, or even joining a mission trip team.

#### **DAY 5 A Blessing to Be Shared**

**Scripture:** [Genesis 12:1-3](#); [Galatians 3:14](#); [Matthew 28:19-20](#)

**Reflection:** From the beginning, God intended His family to be a source of blessing for the entire world. The promise He made Abram in Genesis 12 continues to be fulfilled as His family expands and the children of God faithfully extend His invitation of salvation and restoration to new nations and new generations. The blessing of faith and family we have received is not just for ourselves; it is meant to be shared!

**Ask Yourself:**

- As a member of God's family of faith, how intentional am I to share the blessing I have received?
- How often am I tempted to remain focused on my own daily activities and neglect to extend God's love to others?
- What is one specific way I can share God's love with someone new today?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Merciful Father, Thank you for including us in your gracious plans to bless all the nations. Show us any ways that our focus is too narrow. Increase our hearts to share your love with others and open the door for opportunities to do so today... In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Keep your eyes and ears open today for an opportunity to share Jesus with someone new and challenge yourself to be faithful to obey when the 'door' opens!

## **GROWING the CHURCH FAMILY**

**Devoted: From Circles to Rows**

**August 13, 2023**

DAY 1 - DEVOTED

**Scripture:** [Acts 2:42-46, Romans 12:1-2](#)

**Reflection:** What does your involvement with your church look like? Would you say that you spend more time in rows, looking at the back of the head of the person in front of you? Or do you spend more time in circles? That is, in groups, facing each other, having actual investment in each other's lives? Much can be said for the importance of sitting in rows and listening as a larger group to the word of God being explained by pastors who have been gifted by God to lead. But if all of your church experience is sitting in rows, you are, most certainly, missing out on what God designed the church to be.

As we read about the first church in the book of Acts, we see that this community "devoted themselves" to teaching, and to each other. "Devoted" means to give yourself up to something. They abandoned themselves to these things unselfishly. They did this in response to the gospel. Instantly they knew that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, everything had changed. They now had forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and rebirth by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This also meant a change in how they determined their purpose and what they lived for. They knew what had happened to them was only the beginning. They needed to grow in understanding God's way and God's mission. And they knew that this wasn't just something that happened to them as an individual, but they were brought into a new family, a new body, a new unity. It was time to be devoted to discovering what this new life was all about and they knew that this must be done by sharing life with those who had also been instantly changed by the gospel.

Notice that "each person devoted themselves." You are called to take responsibility for your life - to determine that you will not be the weakest link. Nobody else is responsible for your devotion. Devotion to living in circles is not the pastor's job, your parents' job, your spouse's job, or anyone else's. Only you can devote yourself. Will you be devoted?

### **Ask Yourself:**

- Is most of my time with other Christians spent in rows or circles?
- What commitments do I need to make?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *My Jesus, my Savior, thank you for bringing me into your family and giving me new life. Help to see where I can be more devoted to the Church and to other Christians... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** This week, make plans to join a small group of believers or start a group. This is as simple as sitting down for coffee with someone!

Day 2- DEVOTED TO TEACHING

**Scripture:** [Acts 2:42, Acts 20: 7-12, Acts 17:11-12, 2 Timothy 2:15](#)

**Reflection:** Just as it happened in the first gathering of believers, you have been born again! You have been forever changed by Jesus! But God isn't done with you! Your salvation means you have been brought into a new way of life - a new way of thinking, a new purpose, and a new mission. However, even though you know there's a new way, you also know that understanding that way does not come to you overnight. The first believers knew that too.

It was only natural for them to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching. What does it mean to be devoted to the apostle's teaching? The apostles were mostly those who had been chosen and taught by Jesus. So, the apostle's teaching would consist of the teachings of Jesus. Their teaching would also consist of the teachings of what we now call the Old Testament, as explained by Jesus and by the Holy Spirit. Today, we have the life and teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament.

So, how do we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching? As they did, we also devote ourselves to the teachings of the Scriptures. But not simply as individuals. The first believers had grown up in the Jewish synagogue. Jews seldom studied the Scriptures alone. Instead, it was a communal activity. So, in a place of learning the sounds of dialogue and debate would fill the air as smaller groups of people struggled to understand the meaning of each passage and discuss how it applied to the larger issues of the day and their own lives. Studying, wrestling, and seeking hard after God in the Scriptures was done communally.

Devotion to the teaching of Scripture as a group takes hunger, commitment, and time. One of the most vivid examples of that hunger and devotion is in Acts 20. This small gathering listened to the apostle Paul's teaching for so long that a young man fell asleep and fell out of a third-story window! Does your circle need to grow in hunger and devotion of time to the teaching of the Scriptures? Oh, what amazing things might happen in the body of Christ if we were so devoted to the teaching of Scriptures that we would have to caution our circle not to sit on windowsills!

**Ask Yourself:**

- What evidence is there in my life that I am devoted to the teaching of the Scriptures?
- What preparation, study, or other steps could I take to contribute more in group discussions of the Scriptures?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Heavenly Father, your word is truth. I need to grow in the understanding of your ways and how to live for you. Show me how to be an active participant in the study and application of your word with other believers... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Try using a study Bible when you read the Scriptures and bring it with you to your next meeting with other believers. Share something you have learned!

Day 3 – DEVOTED TO SHARING

**Scripture:** [Acts 2: 42, 44-46](#), [Acts 4:32-34](#), [Gal 6:1-2](#), [John 13:34](#), [John 17:20-21](#)

**Reflection:** Sharing life with other Christians is not always convenient or easy. A lot of people evaluate their circles by what they get out of it. Sometimes people say, "This group doesn't really work for me."

Or “We aren't the same age.” “We aren't at the same stage of life.” “We are just too different.” We can be sure that the first church had plenty of differences too!

In fact, the first church originated from an event where 3000 were saved. These new believers were made up of people “from every nation under heaven.” It’s hard to say how many, but a lot of people did not speak the same language (Acts 2:5-11). Now this diverse group of believers is devoted to fellowship, and language and racial barriers have been overcome. Devotion to sharing life with other Christians means a commitment to overcoming obstacles that keep us divided.

What does sharing life together look like? How far does it go? Consider these phrases from our Bible readings: “*had all things in common*”, “*distributing...as any had need*”, “*in their homes*”, “*of one heart and soul*”, “*bear one another's burdens*”, “*love one another, just as I have loved you*”, “*that they may all be one*”. The specifics of what each group does as they share life together may be a little different. Local economic needs, level of persecution, and individual needs all play a factor. A healthy circle will be more than just a social gathering. There will be help for overcoming sin, emotional support, reconciliation, family challenges, work challenges, and financial crises. Again, each small gathering of believers will look different, but one thing is clear, there should be a spirit that says, “We are in this together!”

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- What barriers have I allowed to keep me from sharing life in a deep and meaningful way with other believers?
- How can I become more devoted to sharing life with other believers?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Lord Jesus, you have given me new brothers and sisters. Our love, our devotion, our support of each other, and our unity should be stronger than any other group on earth. Please help me to see how I need to grow in sharing life with other believers... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** With your circle, discuss how your group can go deeper in the way you share life together.

Day 4 – DEVOTED TO SEEKING GOD

**Scripture:** [Acts 2:42](#), [Acts 12:5-16](#), [James 5:13-16](#), [Matthew 18:20](#)

**Reflection:** One of the most significant lessons that we learn from the first believers is they were constantly seeking the presence of God. Acts 2: 42 says they were devoted “*to the breaking of bread and the prayers*”. “*Breaking of bread*” does not simply mean having a meal together, but specifically refers to communion. Communion was taken in remembrance of the suffering, broken body, and shed blood of Jesus. It also reminded them of His presence. They also sought after God through prayer.

A great example of how these believers prayed is when Peter was thrown into prison. Acts 12 tells us that “*earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*” The result? The Lord sent an Angel that set him free. When Peter came to the house where a group had met to pray, they were disoriented at first, and it took them a minute to realize that God had actually answered their prayers. They sought God together, and He answered in a very powerful way!

The early church turned to God for everything. They prayed all the time. If someone got into trouble. They prayed. If they were scared, they prayed. If there was a need, they Prayed. Prayer is evidence of dependence and desperation for the movement of God. The lack of prayer is evidence of self-dependence and pride. Any small gathering of Christians that focuses primarily on social activities is communicating that all is good and under control and does not sense a deep need for God to work in their midst. May this never be true of our circles!

**Ask Yourself:**

- When was the last time I joined a group to spend time in focused prayer for a specific situation, problem, or person?
- How could my circle grow in deeper and more focused times of prayer?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Lord Jesus, teach us to pray. Help us to long for and be more aware of your presence. Give us ears to hear the answers and the direction you give us... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Devote time to pray with your group. As each person shares a need, pause to pray for them before moving to the next person. Don't forget to pray prayers of thanksgiving and praise too!

Day 5 – CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITIES!

**Scripture:** [Acts 2:43, 47](#), [Acts 4:23-31](#), [Eph 3:20-21](#)

**Reflection:** Being devoted to circles, and not just Sunday morning rows is not just another good thing to do. Being devoted to life with other believers is God's plan for spiritual transformation in us, in other believers, and even in those still outside the church.

In Acts 4 we read another great example of the wonderful things that happen when we are devoted to sharing life and seeking God together. Peter and John had just experienced their first taste of persecution. They were held overnight, questioned, and threatened for preaching in the name of Jesus. When they were released, what do you suppose they did? They went to their circle. They told their friends what happened and then they all prayed together. The result? *"The place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."*

This week we have read how the first believers lived together. They shared life together. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They prayed together. They sought the presence of God together. And what happened? The benefits of gathering in circles and not just in rows are inspiring! In Acts 2 we read that *"awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done"*. There was a lot of praising God, they had favor in their community, *"and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved"*! Who wouldn't want to be part of that kind of movement by God?!

What if this kind of movement of God is closer than you think? What if there is more life change? What if there is more impact that you are to have on other people? What if you are to experience the presence of God in a deeper way than you already are? Devote yourself to circles and see what God will do!



**Ask Yourself:**

- What have I seen God do through Christians sharing life together?
- What am I hoping and praying that God will do in and through my circle?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Oh God, I know you have a vision and a plan for me and my circle that's greater than anything I could imagine. Give us a hunger and a passion to pursue your plan with all our hearts. Work through us for the strengthening of other believers, for the reaching of the lost, and all for your praise and glory! Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Discuss with your "circle": How do you think God might want to use us as a group?

## **GROWING the CHURCH FAMILY**

**Connected: from believing to belonging**

**August 20, 2023**

DAY 1 - DEVOTED

**Scripture:** [Acts 2:42-46](#), [Romans 12:1-2](#)

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This also meant a change in how they determined their purpose and what they lived for. They knew what had happened to them was only the beginning. They needed to grow in understanding God's way and God's mission. And they knew that this wasn't just something that happened to them as an individual, but they were brought into a new family, a new body, a new unity. It was time to be devoted to discovering what this new life was all about and they knew that this must be done by sharing life with those who had also been instantly changed by the gospel.

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In Acts 4 we read another great example of the wonderful things that happen when we are devoted to sharing life and seeking God together. Peter and John had just experienced their first taste of persecution. They were held overnight, questioned, and threatened for preaching in the name of Jesus. When they were released, what do you suppose they did? They went to their circle. They told their friends what happened and then they all prayed together. The result? *"The place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."*

This week we have read how the first believers lived together. They shared life together. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They prayed together. They sought the presence of God together. And what happened? The benefits of gathering in circles and not just in rows are inspiring! In Acts 2 we read that *"awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done"*. There was a lot of praising God, they had favor in their community, *"and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved"*! Who wouldn't want to be part of that kind of movement by God?!

What if this kind of movement of God is closer than you think? What if there is more life change? What if there is more impact that you are to have on other people? What if you are to experience the presence of God in a deeper way than you already are? Devote yourself to circles and see what God will do!

**Ask Yourself:**

- What have I seen God do through Christians sharing life together?
- What am I hoping and praying that God will do in and through my circle?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Oh God, I know you have a vision and a plan for me and my circle that's greater than anything I could imagine. Give us a hunger and a passion to pursue your plan with all our hearts. Work through us for the strengthening of other believers, for the reaching of the lost, and all for your praise and glory! Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Discuss with your "circle": How do you think God might want to use us as a group?

## **GROWING the CHURCH FAMILY**

### **Discipled: from Hearers to Doers**

**August 27, 2023**

#### **DAY 1 DOERS, NOT JUST HEARERS**

**Scripture:** [James 1:22-25](#)

**Reflection:** Discipleship calls us beyond hearing God’s word to actually doing it. A “doer” of God’s word is always making connections and adjustments in his or her life to make sure it lines up with the word of God.

It can be easy to call it “good enough” by doing a regular Bible reading, or going to church for an hour every Sunday. The reality of our call as followers of Jesus is that it’s meant to be more than that. We’re called to take what we read and what we learn and put it into action in how we live our daily lives. One of the best ways for us to do this is alongside other followers of Jesus. God gave us the gift of community – living, serving, worshipping, praying, suffering alongside each other – to help us be doers. We grow and thrive in our walk with Jesus when we walk alongside other believers. True spiritual growth requires community.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- Am I more naturally a “hearer” or a “doer”?
- What keeps me from being more of a “doer”?
- Am I living in community with other believers?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, help us to heed your words and be a body of believers who don’t just hear what you say but also do what you say. Help us to find others to live, serve, and worship alongside so that we can grow your church... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Over the next few days, consider what your next step might be to live more fully in community with other believers. Maybe it’s attending church more consistently and filling out the “I’m new” card (or whatever your local church calls it). Perhaps it’s signing up to attend a small group. It could be asking someone to mentor you or finding someone you can mentor.

#### **DAY 2 TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME**

**Scripture:** [Matthew 16:24-26](#) and [Ephesians 2:19-22](#)

**Reflection:** There’s a popular hymn that talks about following Jesus, and chances are, you’ve heard it before – especially if you grew up going to kid’s church in the 1980s and 1990s! A portion of the lyrics go like this: *“I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.”* These lyrics are a poignant reminder of what we’re called to do as followers of Jesus. No turning back to the old way of things.

Reading Jesus’s words in our passage from Matthew might feel like a big ask. As Jesus is talking to his disciples, he’s using his own future death on a cross as a metaphor FOR discipleship. When we decide to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves and surrender to God’s will for our life, no matter what. The reality is though, it’s not easy.

This is where the absolute importance of a Christian community comes in. When we decide to follow Jesus, He doesn't ask us to live life alone. We become part of God's family when we decide to follow him. The passage from our reading in Ephesians reminds us that we claim a new identity when we choose to follow Jesus. It forever binds us with other followers of Jesus. A group of people who become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. It's within this community that we can experience growth.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Am I living a surrendered life?
- What does "community" look like in my current reality?
- Am I satisfied that I'm living in community the way God designed for me to? Why/Why not?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, help us to surrender to your will for our lives. Even when it's hard. Help us to come together as one surrendered body... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Continue to consider what your next step might be to live more fully in community with other believers. Maybe it's attending church more consistently and filling out the "I'm new" card (or whatever your local church calls it). Perhaps it's signing up to attend a small group at your church. It could be asking someone to mentor you or finding someone you can mentor.

DAY 3 ON THE ROCK

**Scripture:** [Matthew 7:24-27](#), [1 Corinthians 3:11](#)

**Reflection:** None of us are strangers to the hardships and suffering that happen in this life. None of us are immune to tragedy and pain. The good news is that when we build our life on the everlasting love and truth found in Jesus, we can survive whatever comes our way. We must take what we learn and read in the Bible and put it into action. We need to be doers. If the mirror of God's word reveals bitterness or resentment, the doer will seek to be more forgiving. If the mirror of God's word reveals you need to be more caring, the doer will seek to live more compassionately. This is possible with the help and strength of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The faithful Christian life is reserved for those who don't just hear the word of God but live out the word of God.

When the rains and storm clouds come, the doers will stand solid on the rock.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Is my life built on the rock of Jesus Christ?
- What does the mirror of God's word reveal about me?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, help us to be a body of believers that stands on the solid rock. Help us to be able to put aside our differences so that we can encourage each other to live for you. Help us to be a generation of believers who loves you deeply and follows you wholeheartedly... Amen.*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Continue to consider what your next step might be to live more fully in community with other believers. Maybe it's attending church more consistently and filling out the "I'm new" card (or whatever your local church calls it). Perhaps it's signing up to attend a small group at your church. It could be asking someone to mentor you or finding someone you can mentor. If



you don't know where to start, seek out someone a bit further along in their faith journey and ask for advice.

#### DAY 4 THE MAKINGS OF CHRIST-FILLED COMMUNITY

**Scripture:** [Hebrews 10:24-25](#), [Peter 3:8](#), [Galatians 6:2](#), [Galatians 5:13](#), [Colossians 3:16](#), and [James 5:16](#)

**Reflection:** It's alongside a community of believers that we can live out the scriptures in a deeper way, fuel our spiritual disciplines, further our spiritual gifts, and fulfill our mission. Together as a body of Christ, we can spur each other on as doers. In today's passages, we get a few glimpses of what it looks like to live amongst other believers. None of this promises that spending time with others will be easy or peaceful or enjoyable all the time. Even if they love Jesus. It won't be. We're all human and sinners and in daily need of God's grace. God made each one of us with unique gifts and skills and it takes each one of us using those skills and gifts to build up His church. We are better together.

Life lived with others in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit is always better.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- According to the passages I read today, what are the different ways I'm called to live in community?
- Am I living my life in accordance with those scriptures? Why/why not?
- Who SHOULD I be living in community with (if I'm not already?)

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, I pray that you would bring your people together in our desire to love you and follow you. I pray that we would show each other grace, acceptance, and forgiveness when needed. Help us to support each other and build each other as is your perfect design... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** Continue to consider what your next step might be to live more fully in community with other believers. Maybe it's attending church more consistently and filling out the "I'm new" card (or whatever your local church calls it). Perhaps it's signing up to attend a small group at your church. It could be asking someone to mentor you or finding someone you can mentor. If you don't know where to start, seek out someone a bit further along in their faith journey and ask for advice.

#### DAY 5 LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST

**Scripture:** [1 John 2:3-6](#)

**Reflection:** We have spent the last few days exploring what it means to be a doer of God's Word, and not just a hearer of the word. If we call ourselves followers of Jesus, it is simply not enough to know what the Bible says. We have to live it out every day. A transformed life is one where words turn into actions, and every part of daily life is in accordance with God's will. A life lived according to God's plans and purposes, not our own.

In 1 John, the author is writing to his readers and reminding them of the hallmarks of Christian life: true doctrine, obedience, and devotion to God. In our passage from today, the author makes a bold statement about how we should live our lives.

*“Whoever claims to live in him must **live as Jesus did.**”*

Jesus didn't just hear what his Father said, He lived it out within a community of fellow believers.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Is it evident to people around me that Christ is in me?
- Am I living each day as Jesus did?
- Where do I need to invite a Christian community into my life?

**Pause to Pray for the Church:** *Father God, I pray you would continue to build your church as you designed it to be. I pray that the community of believers would come together and live FOR you in all ways. May we step deeper into devotion with you, so that we can fully live out your plan for our lives and our church... Amen*

**Take a Next Step into Christian community:** You've spent all week pondering what your next step might be to commit more fully to living within a Christian community. Take a step of action today! Make the phone call or send the email or text. Life is better together!