

Journaling

in the series
introductory HABITS

Keeping a spiritual journal is a practical way to help you grow as a Christian. Indeed, many of the greatest Christians through history have kept a regular record of their spiritual journey throughout their whole lives.



What is a Spiritual Journal?

A spiritual journal is like a diary in which you write about your life with God. To begin journaling, all you need is a book with blank pages, and a pen.

It's often called a spiritual journal because we are writing about our spiritual life with God. However, this may not be a good way to describe it, because ALL of life is about God! We can't separate our life with God, with everything else we are doing. So when we journal, we are writing about life, and how God is in it with us.

You can use your journal to write down:

1. Important discoveries from your personal Bible study, prayer, time at church, or other Christian meetings
2. Prayer requests for others and God's answers
3. Questions and problems for God
4. Private thoughts and feelings about your journey with God
5. Helpful quotations or Bible verses that you want to remember
6. Things you learn about yourself, God and life
7. Successes and thanks to God
8. Anything else that relates to your spiritual growth—its completely up to you
9. Explore a particular subject related to your personal journey. For example, how does God communicate to me?

Sometimes you may not be too sure what to write. When this happens, you can pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to bring to mind anything that is important for you to remember and record in your journal.

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE CHARACTER OF JESUS

It is really important that writing in your journal should be something that you enjoy and is helpful. If it feels too difficult, you will probably want to give up quite soon. However, for some people, writing ideas down on paper may not come naturally or easily. You may prefer to think more than write. Even though this might be true for you now, try and persevere for a while. If you can learn to enjoy journaling, it will be an invaluable help to you the rest of your life.



The Benefits

1. Encouragement as you are reminded later of what God has taught you
2. Confidence in God as you see how he has led you over time
3. You will have a growing resource of discoveries, texts, and quotations, that will not be forgotten
4. The journal becomes a safe place to explore your feelings and thoughts that are too private to share with others



When and Where?

Some people write in their journals at the end of the day. Others write in it the moment a new thought hits them. Others do it regularly at their Bible reading and prayer time. So find a time that fits you.

Journaling is normally something very private—only you may ever see what is written inside. So find a quiet place where you can be in peace; quiet enough to hear the Holy Spirit as you read, think, pray, and write.

the MORE I see GOD WORKING in my LIFE,
the MORE FAITH, PEACE and THANKS will INCREASE

Reflecting On My Life

in the series
introductory HABITS



Why reflection is so helpful

Reflection is helpful for two important reasons. Firstly, to become aware of God's work in our lives. Sometimes we can clearly see God at work. At other times it is more difficult, and we may be tempted to think that because we can't see God, he is not with us, or caring for us. But that is not true.

Did you know that in the book of Esther, the word "God" is never mentioned? But though God appears invisible, He was very busy working to bring about his purposes for her and her people. Our lives may often be like Esther's life where God chooses not to reveal himself in obvious ways. That is why it is helpful to spend time to pause and think about where and how God might be at work for us.

God may be at work in many different things such as:

1. Personal times of Bible study and prayer
2. Attending Church or other religious meetings
3. Conversations with people
4. Reading books or listening to music
5. Things that happened at work or school
6. Small things that seemed unimportant at the time

Secondly, it is also useful to reflect on our lives to become conscious of how we are growing as Christians. Socrates said that the "unexamined life is not worth living." In other words, we have to first recognise what we are really like inside in order for us to have a chance to grow and change.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to act like a mirror to our souls—so we can see what we are really like on the inside. When we spend time to pause, think, and be silent before God, it gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to communicate to us about the progress of our lives, and the plans God has for us to increasingly reflect His character.



Using your Journal

First, find a quiet place where you can be by yourself. Second, pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your thoughts, and bring to mind anything that He wants to share with you, for He is the one who will “guide you into all truth” (John 16:12). Then use your Journal to write down your thoughts, questions, conclusions, and prayers from what you think about. Depending on where you want to concentrate, work through either section A or B.

A) To reflect on God's involvement in your life, you can do the following:

1. Think about what has happened to you recently. You can take time to reflect at the end of every day, or at least at the end of each week. Use the questions below as a guide:
 - What have been my best and worst times? Why was that?
 - How aware have I been of God's presence in my life? Did I go through all or most of my day without thinking about him? If yes, why was that? What could I do to change this in the future?
 - What has happened that me would want to share with someone else?
 - How have I helped someone that has made a difference? Or how have I been helped by another that has been important to me?
 - What has happened to build or reduce my enthusiasm for God's kingdom, and to reflect him?
 - Use your Journal like a diary to record what has happened to you and your thoughts about it.
3. Next, look over what you have just written and ask yourself, “What lessons can I learn from what happened today / this week?” In your Journal, make a list of things you have learned about God's work in your life or in the life of others. After each thing you have learned, write how this could change the way you will think and act in the future.
4. Thank God for what he has done, and share what he has been doing in your life with a friend!

B) To reflect on the development of God's character in you, respond to the following questions: (Adapted from Russell Gough, *Character is Destiny*.)

- Do I really believe that it is possible to change the way I am?
- Have I clearly seen the character of God revealed in the Bible so that I am inspired to grow to be like Him? If not, what can I do about that?
- Do I really care about being more like Jesus?
- How much time do I spend thinking about my looks, popularity, possessions, playing computer games, or watching movies, compared to the amount of time I spending thinking about and developing my character?
- To what extent am I willing to spend time, thought, and energy to improving my personal character to more fully reflect the character of Jesus?

You can go back to these questions at various times during the year. If you and a friend or mentor can regularly share your reflections together, it makes the habit of reflection even



Connection Point 1

connecting to
the mind of Jesus
by allowing his words
to shape my life

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE MIND OF JESUS

Connecting to the Mind of Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



The words of Jesus connect us to the mind of Jesus

God speaks to us what is on his mind. So when we hear God speaking to us, we can know his thoughts for us. The question is, what has Jesus spoken to us that he wants us all to know?

If you have travelled to different countries, you will notice that each country has different customs and rules. People from these countries think and behave very differently from each other. As Christians, we are called to be citizens of a different country than the one in which we are living now. This was how Abraham and the people of God saw their lives on earth, "they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own... they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one." (Hebrews 11:14-16)



Thinking about another kingdom

When God spoke the words that we read in the Bible, he wanted to show us what this heavenly country is like. Jesus, the living word of God, walked on earth as a personal representative of this heavenly country. Jesus referred to it as the "kingdom of Heaven", and in this kingdom, Jesus is king.

When we begin to understand Jesus' words to us, we can begin to understand his thoughts about his kingdom. We can begin to understand the principles, values, and laws on which his kingdom is built. We can begin to see the purposes, plans and promises God has for us as citizens of his kingdom. And through all this, we can know the character our king.



God's thoughts written down

Since the garden of Eden, Satan has tried to misrepresent God by twisting his words out

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of context or else by trying to remove the knowledge of God's words from our lives. But while we are living on this earth, the written word of God provides a clear and complete revelation of his thoughts to us that we need. God's written word is how we can measure all other teachings in the world about who God is and his purposes for us.



Jesus' words made alive!

This learning is not intended to be theoretical or boring, because the words of Jesus provide the foundation for a real, personal, relationship with him. But this can only happen when God's words begin to take root in our lives by the power of God's Spirit.

When we speak, we need breath to ensure that our words can be heard. If there is no breath in our mouths, the words will simply stick in our throats and no sound will come out. It is a similar thing with God. When God speaks, his breath—the Holy Spirit—causes his words to be heard, understood and ultimately applied.

For this reason, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is the one whom he has sent to convict us of sin, to reveal the truth about Himself, and His triumph over Satan—even though we have never seen Jesus in person. Indeed, the Holy Spirit comes to teach us “all truth”. (John 16:5-15) So without the presence of God's Spirit as we study God's word, we will never truly hear God speak or be able to apply his words to our lives.



Using Habits for the Heart...

In this section on God's words, you will learn how to reconnect and stay connected to the mind of Jesus. As you grow in your understanding of Jesus' words, you will learn about his thoughts -- about the principles, values and laws of his kingdom, and the purposes, plans and promises that Jesus has for your life. By allowing his words to shape your life, you will reflect his character. And as you reflect his character, you will be living as a citizen of his Heavenly kingdom.

Reading for Wisdom

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



It's about a person

Wisdom is not found in knowing about things, but knowing a person — Jesus. This was Paul's desire for the Colossians, that they would “*know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*” (Colossians 2:2b-3)

Therefore, as we invite the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us wisdom in our Bible study, he will teach us about Jesus, and what is on Jesus' heart and mind for us to learn. As we apply what we learn, continually gaining wisdom, we will become like the One who is Wisdom — Jesus Christ.



Promises for us

James promises us,

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

This is an amazing promise! No matter who you are, or what you may have done, God promises to give you instruction for your life. All you have to do is ask! As Jesus himself urges us,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8).



Here is how Reading for Wisdom works

1. **Prayerfully choose a Bible passage to study.** A good place to start would be the beginning of the New Testament, or at the beginning of one of the gospels.

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2. **Claim James 1:5** and pray that God will honour his promise to give you wisdom as you study.
3. **Beginning reading the text slowly and thoughtfully.** If you don't understand something, try reading it again.
4. **Keep reading until God alerts you to something he wants to teach you.** When God calls your attention to something, STOP! Don't go any further!

God can stop you in different ways. It may seem like:

- ▶ Thunder - "This is it!"
- ▶ A nudge - Have you thought about.....?"
- ▶ An encouragement - "This will help with...."
- ▶ A soft whisper - "How about.....?"
- ▶ Comfort - "This is right."

5. **After God has shown you something, pray.** Ask God how to apply what he has shown you to your life:

- a) Listen to what God says
- b) Thank God for what you have learnt



Using your Journal...

Use a spiritual journal to write down what God has taught you each day. If you date each entry, you can look back at how God has taught you over the weeks and months.

The next time you study, continue reading from where you stopped the last time you studied.

NB: This Habit is based on the work of Evelyn Christiansen.

HOW to USE YOUR IMAGINATION to ALLOW GOD'S
WORD to TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

Imagine Being There

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



Using our imaginations

The Holy Spirit works through our minds to teach us about Jesus. He can also teach us important truths about Jesus using our imaginations.

When writing about Jesus giving the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Ellen White encourages us,

“Let us in imagination go back to that scene, and, as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts.” (Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing 1)

The reason for God using our imaginations to help us understand how the people in the Bible thought and felt, is simple. By *“Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons.”* (Ibid.)



Example: the story of Zacchaeus

1. Pray that God will teach you through the story.
2. Read through Luke 19:1-10 at least a couple of times so you are really familiar with what happened.
3. Now choose one of the people in the story and think about the story from their perspective.

For example, imagine you are Zacchaeus:

1. What is it like to be small and can't see in a crowd?
2. What sort of view do you have up the tree? Can you see Jesus clearly?
3. What was it like to have Jesus ask to come to your home? Were you embarrassed?
4. What was it like to hear Jesus say “Today salvation has come to this

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house"?

Or, imagine you are Jesus:

1. What did you think when you saw Zacchaeus up the tree? What sort of look did he have on his face?
2. How did Zacchaeus respond to your request?
3. Why did you pick Zacchaeus to visit out of all the people around you in the crowd?

Or, imagine you are someone in the crowd:

1. Would you have preferred Jesus to come to your home instead of going to Zacchaeus'?
2. What do you think of Jesus going to a tax collector's house? Do you think that is strange?



Using your Journal...

Use your Journal to write about what you have learned from the story. And most importantly, what did you learn to help you reflect the character of Jesus? How will this change the way you live from now on?

You can use this way of Bible study with any of the Bible stories. The stories in the Gospels and Acts are a good place to start. But do remember to always pray for the Holy Spirit to guide in you as you choose a text to study.

Asking Questions 1

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



Jesus loved asking questions

Indeed, his parents lost him for three days and Luke writes that *“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”* (Luke 2:46)

Even when he was older, he asked lots of questions. It wasn't because he didn't know the answers, but his questions helped people to find the answers quicker.



Learning by asking questions

When we study, we can also use questions to help us learn. The more questions we ask, the quicker we will understand God's truth so it can mould and shape our lives.

As you know, the “Big 6” question words begin our questions.

What? ► When? ► Where? ► Why? ► Who? ► How?

They can then be used with people, places and objects.

People	Places	Objects
Who are they? What are they thinking? What do they want? Where are they coming from or going to?	Where is it? Why is it important? Who lives there?	What is it? What does it do? Who uses it? Why is it there?



Using your Journal: Example

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you study.
2. Read the story a few times. In our example, it is about Jesus talking to his disciples in Mark 8:27-30.
3. In your Bible Study Journal, write as many questions about the passage that you can think of. For example:
 - What was Jesus doing in the villages?
 - Where was Caesarea Philippi?
 - Who was John the Baptist or Elijah — what did they preach about?
 - What does the word “Christ mean?
 - Why would Jesus not want anyone to know who he was right then?
4. Now try and answer as many of the questions as you can. You may need to read the text before your story also, as it may help answer some of your questions.
5. Next, ask, what can you learn from the passage. As always, the most important question to answer is, what can I learn from this story? NB: For more help with applying the story to your own life, see the Bible Study Tool entitled, “Asking Questions 2”.
6. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you wisdom, power, and courage to apply what you have learnt to your own life.

If you find yourself stuck for answers, you may like to buy a good Bible encyclopaedia and dictionary. Your Sabbath School teacher and church pastor will also be very happy to help you with answers.

Asking Questions 2

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



How does this apply to me?

Sometimes when you have read the Bible you may think to yourself, “But what has this got to do with me?” or, “What difference does this make?” And of course, if we don’t learn anything that will shape our lives to become more like citizens of Heaven, we will have wasted our time studying.



Eight important questions

Applying the Bible to our own lives is the most important part of Bible study. Here are 8 questions to help you apply the meaning of the text to your own life.

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
3. Is there a command for me to obey?
4. What does this particular passage teach me about God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?
5. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
6. Is there a promise for me to claim?
7. Is there something that shows me how to more fully reflect the character of Jesus?
8. Is there something in the passage for me to pray about today?



How to use the questions

1. Prayerfully choose a passage to read or continue on from where you finished reading yesterday.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you as you read, that your life will be increasingly shaped by the truth that is in the Bible. This truth reflects the principles and laws of God's kingdom, which is a reflection of his character.
3. Read through your chosen Bible text a few times until you really understand what you are reading. NB: To help you understand the text, you can go through the exercise in the Bible Study Tool entitled, "Asking Questions 1".
4. Once you have read through your passage, begin to ask questions that will help you to apply the meaning to your own life. Write your questions and answers in your Bible Study Journal. You can go through the 8 questions one at a time.
5. As always, praying at the end of your study is really important. Pray for that the Holy Spirit will remind you of what you have learned, and that your life will reflect the priorities and purposes of Jesus more and more!



Bible texts to start with

The stories about Jesus in the Gospels are great places to begin studying. Pray that God will guide you in the choice of a passage. You can start at the beginning of a Gospel and work your way through to the end.

If you want to move outside of the gospels, you can also use this way of studying to explore Acts and the writings of Paul. His letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are great texts to study.

The Four Columns

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



It's not always easy...!

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field." (Matthew 13:44a) Not everything about God is easy to know or find. Sometimes it takes a lot of time and energy. But like digging for treasure, spending time to know more about God and his purposes for you is always worth the time and effort. And the more we find out, the more clearly we will be able to reflect God's character.

Here is one way to study the Bible at a deeper level than you might have studied before. You will notice that this study focuses on a single text, and teaches you how to apply it to your own life.



Here's how it works

1. Make four columns in your Journal and give them the same headings as you see in the example over the page.
2. As always, before you open your Bible, pray that the Holy Spirit will teach you. Claim God's promise in James 1:5.
3. Prayerfully choose a passage to study. Some good places to start might be the letters of John or Peter, James, or Philippians.
4. Taking the first text in your passage, follow the instructions at the top of each column in the example. Remember, the most important question to answer is in column 4!



An example from 1 John 1

1. Text	2. Original Meaning	3. Application in Today's World	4. How Can I Change to be more like Jesus?
<p>Write down a verse or part of one, or even a significant word</p>	<p>What would the original readers have understood this verse to mean?</p>	<p>What does this verse mean for people today, in the church, or in our world?</p>	<p>How am I personally going to be different because of what I have learnt today?</p>
<p>1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning</p>	<p>Similar introduction to John's gospel. The Word—Jesus—has always existed.</p>	<p>People need to know that Jesus/God is eternal</p>	<p>I need confidence in a God who has always existed. I don't need to worry that he won't be there when I need him</p>
<p>which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched</p>	<p>Jesus was someone very real - not a figment of some else's imagination</p>	<p>Jesus is real today—not just for pastors — someone who really is alive!</p>	<p>I need to remember that Jesus is real—all of the time—not just someone who is alive on Sabbath only</p>
<p>1:2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us.</p>	<p>—John saw Jesus and told others — “proclaim” means to share with enthusiasm!</p>	<p>Sharing Jesus depends on seeing/experiencing him. This is what the church needs - a vibrant experience of Jesus.</p>	<p>I need a closer relationship with God, then I will be able to tell others. I need to be more open about what God is like.</p>
<p>NB: This Habit is based on the work of Evelyn Christensen.</p>			

Praying God's Promises

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



The secret to change: the power is in the promise

Have you ever prayed to be different inside, but ended up staying just the same? If so, what can we do about that? Here's a promise from God to you that can help:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Someone calculated that there are 1260 promises in the Bible. And did you know that God's promises are all ultimately focused on what Peter is describing—for us to reflect Jesus and escape being infected by sin. For these promises to work however, James tells us very bluntly that when we come to God, we must believe that God will do what he has promised, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." (James 1:6-8)

But how can we ask God and be confident that we are asking for the right things? We could ask God for a Ferrari sports car, but there is no power in that prayer! Why? Because nowhere in the Bible does God promise to give any of us a sports car! However, when we know what God does promise us, then we can pray with complete confidence that God will answer. The answer may not come immediately, but it certainly will come.

So when we pray according to the God's words, our faith will grow, and our lives have power to change. As you may know from the miracles Jesus does in the gospels, Jesus is always able to change people's lives because of their faith in his words. So how can our faith be made powerful like this? Paul tells us clearly, "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) In other words, our faith will grow as we trust what God has promised us in the Bible.

And the consequence? Not only will we receive God's answers but because we have total certainty that God is answering, we will have peace and joy—for God is at work for us!



Looking for promises to claim

So where can we find God's promises? First, in the Bible there are promises that begin with words like, "I will...". Here are some direct promises from God:

Abundant life, John 10:10	Gifts of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 12	Resurrection, Rom. 8:11
A crown of life, Rev. 2:10	Glory after death, Man. 13:43	Rich rewards, Matt. 10:42
A heavenly home, John 14:1-3	God's protection, 1 Pet. 5:6-7	Spiritual fullness, John 6:35
A new name, Isa. 62:1-2	Growth, Eph. 4:11-15	Spiritual healing, Hos. 6:1
Answers to prayer, 1 John 5:14	Guidance, Isa. 42:16	Spiritual light, John 12:46
Assurance, 2 Tim. 1:12	Hope, Heb. 6:18-19	Spiritual treasures, Matt.6:19-20
Cleansing, John 15:3	Inheritance, 1 Pet. 1:3-4	Strength, Phil. 4:13
Clothing, Zech. 3:4	Joy, Isa. 35:10	Temporal blessings, Matt.6:25-33
Comfort, Isa. 51:3	Knowledge, Jer. 24:7	Understanding, Ps. 119:104
Companionship, John 15:15	Liberty, Rom. 8:2	Victory, 1 John 5:4
Deliverance, 2 Tim. 4:18	Peace, John 14:27	Wisdom, James 1:5
Divine sonship, 1 John 3:1-2	Power for service, John 14:12	
Everlasting life, John 3:16	Renewal, Titus 3:5	Willmington, H. L. (1987). Willmington's
Fellowship of Jesus, Matt. 18:19	Rest, Heb. 4:9, 11	book of Bible lists. Wheaton, Ill.:
Fruitfulness, John 15:4-5	Restoration, Isa. 57:18; 1 John 1:9	Tyndale House.

Secondly, descriptions of God himself are also promises. Romans 8:29 tells us that it was God's plan that we become like his Son, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...", Romans 8:29. So when we read descriptions of Jesus, these can become promises for our prayers to become like him. (This does not include descriptions of God that belong to God alone, for example, that he is all powerful, all knowing, or everywhere at the same time etc.)

Characteristics of God alone—that can give us confidence that our prayers will be acted upon	Characteristics of God that we share with him—as people whom he longs to restore into his image	
Almighty, Isaiah 6:1-3; Isaiah 14:27	Love, Exodus 15:13; 1 John 4:11-17	Wise, Ephesians 1:17; 2 Timothy 3:14-15
Always present, Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 28:19-20	Kind, Isaiah 63:7; Ephesians 2:6-7	Pure and Holy, Exodus 3:2-5; 1 John 3:2-3
Sovereign, 2 Samuel 7:22; Daniel 4:34-35	Compassionate, Psalm 103:13-14; Mark 1:41	Truthful, John 14:6; Psalm 119:160
Creator and Re-Creator, Isaiah 44:24; Isaiah 44:2-3	Gracious, John 1:6	Righteous, Psalm 119:75-76; 1 John 2:1
Eternal and Infinite, Isaiah 26:4; Hebrews 1:10-12	Merciful, Ephesians 2:4-5	Protecting, Isaiah 43:1-3; 2; Thessalonians 3:3
Praiseworthy and Glorious, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Psalm 145:4-5	Patient, 2 Peter 3:9,15	Persevering, Judges 2:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:4-5
	Long-suffering, Matthew 23:37	Joy, Nehemiah 8:10; Zephaniah 3:17
	Peace, Isaiah 9:6; 2 Corinthians 13:11	Gentle, 1 Kings 19:12; Luke 18:15-16
	Humble, 2 Corinthians 10:1	Self-controlled, Galatians 5:22-23
	Meek, John 13:1-5	Good, 1 Chronicles 16:34; Nahum 1:7
	Just, Psalm 45:6; Isaiah 5:16	Faithful, Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 71:22-23
	Saving and Restoring, 2 Samuel 22:3; 1 Peter 5:10	Sacrificial, John 3:16; 1 John 4:10-11
		Forgiving, Exodus 34:5-7; Psalm 86:5



Using your Journal...

You can use your Journal to write down your prayers together with the promise that assures you that God will answer—just as he has promised! And there are lots more for you to find.

Listening to God's Words

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



Savouring God's words

We can study the Bible and ask questions about the text like a man digs up the ground to find treasure. With time and effort, the treasure is finally discovered.

But there is another way to hear and understand God's word which is more like tasting an expensive chocolate. You don't just gobble it down, but keep it for as long as you can in the mouth, to sense it's texture—how it feels—and the different flavours. The Psalmist says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103) We can learn how to savour God's words as we learn how to meditate.

As Joshua takes over from Moses to lead God's people into the Promised Land, Jesus appears to Joshua and says, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Joshua 1:8) Notice two things in the text. First, that God's word was to be in Joshua's thoughts continually. Secondly, as God's words were in Joshua's mind, it would lead him to obedience. Then Joshua would be as successful as God had called him to be.

This sort of meditation is very different from what is found in Eastern religions. For example, in Buddhism meditation is a way of emptying the mind. Biblical meditation is just the opposite. In Biblical meditation we learn how to fill the mind completely with God's words. We do this as we learn to listen to the words God speaks to us.



Listening to God's words

Here is one way of learning to listen to God's words through scriptural meditation.

1. Pray for the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit before you begin reading.
2. Read a passage in the Bible. You may want to do this out loud. (It is suggested that you don't take more than 10 verses to begin with.) As you listen to the passage, try to become aware of a particular word or phrase that stands out.

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE MIND OF JESUS

3. Read the passage a second time. Return to the word or phrase that you noticed after the first reading. Take time now to "listen" to its meaning. Don't rush or hurry. Don't try and force the text open but rather allow time for the Holy Spirit to open up the text to you. This is a time to pause and listen, observe, watch.
4. Read the passage a third time. Based on what you have seen and heard, respond back to God in prayer. It could be a prayer of praise, thanks, or a specific request.
5. Read the passage a final time. Take time in silence to wait a little longer in God's presence. This prevents us hurrying off quickly to do the next thing on our agenda, and lose what God has just been teaching us.

You might find it more helpful to read the passage through an extra time at the very beginning so you become familiar with the passage before you start focusing in on a particular word or phrase. With practice, you do not have to follow the specific order for meditation, but you can move backwards and forwards between reading, listening, praying and resting.

If you use this in a group setting, it is possible to share what people have learned with a partner or group after the third and fourth sections.



NB This form of biblical meditation can be done with a reader in places where people are not able to read the Bible for themselves.



Using your Journal

You can use your Journal to jot down your thoughts or prayers at any time during your mediation.

Why do I believe?

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE



Why do I believe that?!

Have you ever thought about why you believe the things you do? Is it because it's what your parents taught you? Or a teacher at school? Or the movies? Do you know?!

Often we go through life without thinking much about why we believe what we do. We believe because—well, we do! But if someone challenges us about our beliefs and we don't know what to say, it can be quite disturbing.

Peter writes to the churches, "if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." (1 Peter 3:15, NLT) Peter wanted the Christians he was caring for to be prepared. If someone asked, "Why do you believe that God created the world", he wanted them to give a strong witness for why they believed the things they did. Only then could they make an impact for God. In the same way, we prepare to witness to others by knowing what we believe ourselves, and why.

Let's see how we can do this.



In your Journal...

As always, before studying about spiritual things, pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your mind. Then in your Journal, make two columns. At the top of the left hand column, write the title, "What I Believe". In this column make a list of the things you know you believe. It can include anything you want, about life, it's purpose, God, or yourself.

At the top of the right hand column, write the title, "Why I Believe This". For each item you listed, try and identify the source of what you believe. Is it because that is what you have always believed and never thought to question it? Is it because you are certain that this is what the Bible teaches and that is true?

Here are some suggestions to help you get started thinking:

What do I believe and why, about...?

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE MIND OF JESUS

1. the origins of the earth
2. Jesus
3. the reason for suffering in the world
4. the second coming of Jesus
5. the reasons why God loves me
6. the purpose of my life, and the purpose of the universe

You may not have thought about some of these things before. That's ok. Now you have an opportunity to do so.



The Critical Question

Here is the critical question: for everything you have written that you believe, can you see where it is rooted in God's word? Is there a text that gives you a reason to believe? For everything you believe, make sure you can find a place in the Bible that gives you a strong foundation for your faith. You can write these faith building texts in your Journal.

This is what faith is—knowing and believing what God has said, even when we can't always understand why. So to live a life of faith, we need to *know* what God has said.

It is good to regularly think about you believe and why as you continue through life. For when you can see that your faith is firmly rooted in God's words, it will give you peace, confidence, and joy.

Sanctuary Restoration

in the series
CONNECTING to the MIND of JESUS by ALLOWING his WORDS to SHAPE my LIFE

The Old Testament tabernacle and sanctuary services were God's way of teaching his people how to have their sin removed, so that they could enjoy the life that God intended for them—a life of joy in close relationship with him. Their sin had to be removed in order for them to clearly reflect his character. Though these services were to explain to the Israelites what Jesus would do for them when he died on the cross, the process of forgiveness that was used for God's people then, is the same for us today.



The process of forgiveness

Imagine I am an Israelite who has stolen some money from my neighbour's tent. What would have to happen in order for me to receive forgiveness from God? I would need to:

1. **Recognise my sin.** Before anything happens, I have to realise that I have disobeyed God.
2. **Decide to trust in God's forgiveness.** If I don't make a decision to trust in God, I will never go and restore my relationship with Him. But to go and do that, I have to believe that God has the power and the longing to help me. This decision to trust God would lead me to choose a bull without any markings for sacrifice and go with it to the tabernacle. (Different animals were used for different types of sacrifices.)
3. **Repent of my sin and sacrifice.** Before God I tell him that I am sorry. To remind me that sin always kills, I have to lean my whole body weight onto the animal. Then with a knife, I cut the animal's throat. I watch it die and feel its life disappear, knowing that I am the cause of its death. But repentance is more than feeling sorry. Repentance is a commitment to God to change the way I wish to behave in the future. From now on, no more stealing from my neighbour!
4. **Place my faith in Jesus to take my sin away.** My sin, confessed onto the animal, is now on the animal. The priest, also representing Jesus, takes the animal's blood (with my sin symbolically in it) and drips it inside the tabernacle before the veil separating the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.
5. **Thank God.** The sin that was powerful enough to destroy me has been taken away and I am free. That is really something to thank God for!
6. **Respond to God's grace by pursuing the character of Jesus in the future.** Now that I am forgiven of my sin and it has been removed from me, what shall I do now? Shall I continue sinning? No way! With God working inside me, I will choose to live according

to his will for my life.

You can read about this forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament times in Leviticus 4.



What about when I sin today?

You can follow the same process to allow the Bible to shape your confession to God and restore your relationship with Him. Here are the steps again.

1. Recognise my sin (this happens through the work of the Holy Spirit in us, John 16:7)
2. Decide to trust in God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9)
3. Repent of my sin (Psalm 32:5)
4. Place my faith in Jesus to take my sin away (Romans 3:22-24)
5. Thank Jesus for what he has done for me! (Psalm 13:5-6)
6. Respond to God's grace by pursuing the character of Jesus in the future (Hebrews 4:14-16)

See how these steps can shape your prayers of repentance. Here is a sample:

Dear Father,

I realise that lying about what I was doing last night was wrong (step 1). I know that you promise to forgive my sin and change my life (step 2). I really am sorry for doing this (step 3). I trust that Jesus' died in my place so my sins could be forgiven and I can be made totally clean inside (step 4). Thank you for what you have done for me (step 5). From now on, grant me the power and desire to live according to the character of Jesus (step 6).

In Jesus' name,
Amen.



Using your Journal...

You may want to use your journal to record your prayers. Like David who recorded his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 for others to read, you may want to record God's cleansing of your life from sin. However, there may be times when you may not want to write anything down, as it is extremely personal and private to you and God alone.



Connection Point 2

connecting to
the will of Jesus by
choosing his will
for my life

Connecting to the Will of Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME



What God cannot do

There's one very interesting thing to know about God — he will never — EVER — force you to do something you don't want to do.

Think about it: God never forced Lucifer to be good while he was beginning his rebellion in Heaven. When God saw that his own children, Adam and Eve, were about to go and eat from the forbidden tree, he didn't send an angel to stand in their way and stop them.

Do you think that's strange? The truth is that God wants us to love him because we really want to love him. If he forced us to love him or “do the right thing”, then we would just be like robots with no free will of our own — and God doesn't want us to be like that. He wants us to be totally free to love him.



It's my choice

As a result, the Holy Spirit will show us what is the right way to live, but he will never force us to obey. The Holy Spirit will also show us what is wrong in our lives, but he will never force us to repent. While the Holy Spirit will give us power for obedience and repentance, the choices to obey and repent are ours alone. We alone are responsible for how much we reflect the will of Jesus, and where we will spend eternity.

That's why Joshua challenged God's people to make a choice, “...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15) And later Paul urges Timothy to make a choice, “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you” (2 Timothy 1:6). Both the Israelites and Timothy had the choice to involve God in their lives, or not. God was available to them, but they had to co-operate with God before the power of God would be experienced in their lives.



Choosing can be hard

Because we are sinful people, we will not always act or speak in a loving or obedient way! If we want to live lives that are transformed into the image of Jesus, we will have to make lots of choices that will appear or feel uncomfortable for us — because we are so used to doing the opposite. But as we choose to make right choices, the Holy Spirit will change the way we feel, and we will increasingly enjoy living our lives God's way.

As you pursue living the character of Jesus, each of the Choices Connection Point Tools will challenge you submit your will to the will of Jesus.



In your Journal...

Use your Journal to write your thoughts, comments, and questions about the choices you are challenged with to submit your will to Jesus. You don't have to use all the tools at once. Take your time and work through them until the tools becomes a natural part of the way you think about God's will for your life.

LIVING the CHARACTER of JESUS is the MOST
IMPORTANT THING in the WHOLE WORLD

The Most Important Thing

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME



Why Jesus came

Jesus had one very clear goal in his life, and he also made it clear that those who choose to be his disciples have the very same goal also,

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)



What was the Father's will?

Jesus' mission on earth was to show people the truth about the loving character of his Father. For four thousand years, Satan had been lying to people that the Father was harsh and uncaring.

But Jesus showed only love, and sacrificed everything he had and was for them. John says that to know Jesus, is to know the Father, "*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*" (John 1:18) So when we reflect Jesus, we reflect the truth about God.

Jesus also said "*seek first [God's] kingdom*" (Matthew 6:33). To seek first God's kingdom is to consider God's plans for your life as more important than our own. Do you have some plans and ambitions for your life? Are they from God?

Jesus added, "*seek first... his righteousness*". God's righteousness is everything that is good and right about God — in other words, his character. Jesus encourages us to reflect the goodness and right doing of God. That was what he was doing on the earth.

Ellen White highlighted the priorities for our lives,

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WILL OF JESUS

The greatest work that can be done in our world is to glorify God by living the character of Christ. (6BC 1109)

Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. (Education, 225)

And that last quote was written in 1903!



In your Journal...

Spend some time to think and pray about God's priorities for your life, and think about the following questions:

- What are God's priorities for you to live by today?
- What can you learn about these priorities from the Bible?
- Do you see anything happening in your life that would indicate that God is trying to get you to focus on different priorities than you are now?
- Are there any priorities you are struggling with, and need to pray more about?

Find a place where you can make a list of your priorities for the next week/month/year/life. For each priority, write down what you need to do to make them real in your own life.

Check your list every now and again to see if your priorities are actually guiding your life. You will also want to update the list from time to time.

JESUS CALLS EVERY DISCIPLE of HIS
to DIE on a CROSS like HIM

Learning to Die

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME

We don't want to die. We try to avoid it with all the energy we have. But if we want to live lives that reflect Jesus, Jesus calls us to die.

Baptism is a symbol of this. When we choose to follow Jesus and be baptized, we are laid completely under the water and are then raised back up. As Jesus was resurrected to a new life, so are we when we commit ourselves totally to God in baptism. As Paul writes, "don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3-4)

But baptism is just a symbol. Baptism doesn't change us or save us. Becoming a church member doesn't change us or save us. The only thing that Jesus is watching and wanting to change is what happens inside our minds and hearts.

But what does this mean? Let's look at some texts to help us understand this.



Things to know about dying like Jesus

The decision to die like Jesus is my choice alone, and should be thought about very carefully	Luke 14:27-30 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'
The purpose of dying is to allow God unrestricted access to change my life	Romans 6:22-23 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in a Christ Jesus our Lord.
My usefulness to God only happens after I die like Jesus, but then it multiplies	John 12:24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.
Jesus never forces me to follow him and volunteer to die like him	Mark 8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
Dying with Jesus may appear like it is the end, but it is only the beginning	Mark 8:35-36 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WILL OF JESUS

The ultimate purpose of dying is to serve others	Philippians 2:4-8 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature a God... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
Understanding the will of God only happens after I become a sacrifice like Jesus	Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Dying like Jesus means to submit my will to God's will in every aspect of my life. This includes:

1. Allowing God to choose in all of the decisions of my life, including:

- a) The purpose of my life and what I should do with it
- b) How I should use my money (all of it)
- c) Who I will marry
- d) The friendships that will only encourage me to increasingly reflect the character of Jesus or spread the gospel to others
- e) The small choices I have to make, even though they appear unimportant

2. Acting according to the Bible when I feel like doing the opposite:

- a) The choice to forgive, and do nice things (showing mercy and grace) for someone who has hurt me
- b) The choice to be silent when people are against me, rather than getting angry, wanting revenge, or trying to justify myself
- c) The choice to initiate reconciliation when a relationship has broken down
- d) Obeying God's laws

3. Submitting to God's providence even though the situation is difficult or painful:

- a) Believing that even though the situation I am in is hard or painful, God is still good and working for good in my life
- b) I cannot quit what God has called me to do, just because the situation is hard or painful, because this very situation may be his choice to teach me something, or for me to help others



When do I become a living sacrifice?

The test of knowing whether we have truly died to ourselves, is if we can honestly go through 100% of our lives and offer it to God with joy. We can't do this with even 85%, because then we would be 15% still alive! To find out how things are in our own lives, it can be very helpful to sit down from time to time and think about all of the choices I am making, to see if the choices I making today are for me, or for God.

Go through this list above and pray for each item individually. Can you pray and tell God that you are willing with all of your heart to do what is listed?

You may not feel like it right now, but the best beginning you can make is to say "God, I don't feel like living like this, but I would like to choose to live following you completely. Will your Holy Spirit change my heart so long for you to choose for me, and lead me wherever, and however, you desire? Amen."

**GOD uses CIRCUMSTANCES
to GUIDE our LIVES**

Following God's Providence

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME

The Bible clearly tells us that the Bible itself (Psalm 119:105) and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) guide our lives. But there is something else that God uses together with the Bible and the Holy Spirit to direct our lives—Providence. The word Providence is not used much today, but understanding it will really help us to learn how God is guiding our lives.

Providence has been called "God's invisible hand". Providence is God guiding the events in our lives—but we don't necessarily see God clearly, or at all.

Take example of Joseph. At the age of seventeen, God gave Joseph two dreams that added to the hatred his brothers had of him. Selling Joseph to some traders, Ellen White notes that "for a time Joseph gave himself up to uncontrolled grief and terror. But, in the providence of God, even this experience was to be a blessing to him." And as Joseph reflected on his life, a new determination filled him. "His soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God—under all circumstances to act as became a subject of the King of heaven. He would serve the Lord with undivided heart; he would meet the trials of his lot with fortitude and perform every duty with fidelity." (PP 213-214)

For ten years, Joseph remained a slave. He had no contact with his family and his father believed him to be dead. Joseph could have found lots of good reasons to become depressed working so long as a slave. But he did not give in to bitterness. Ellen White comments again, "Joseph's gentleness and fidelity won the heart of the chief captain, who came to regard him as a son rather than a slave. The youth was brought in contact with men of rank and learning, and he acquired a knowledge of science, of languages, and of affairs—an education needful to the future prime minister of Egypt." (PP 217)

The next three years were spent in prison because Joseph was falsely accused of attempted rape. To add insult to injury, someone he had encouraged in prison and who promised to return the favour forgot his promise. Joseph's attitude under pressure was remarkable, and the consequences far reaching. "He found a work to do, even in the prison. God was preparing him in the school of affliction for greater usefulness, and he did not refuse the needful discipline. In the prison, witnessing the results of oppression and tyranny and the effects of crime, he learned lessons of justice, sympathy, and mercy, that prepared him to exercise power with wisdom and compassion." (PP 218)

So Joseph's 13 year journey of suffering became the very means that God used to prepare him to rule Egypt with wisdom. Yet Joseph would not have seen or understood God's guidance until he was able to see all the jigsaw pieces of his life come together. God was

at work, but invisible.

A final example of Providence is the book of Esther. God is not mentioned once in the book, yet God is continually working to free his people from the plans of the evil Haman.

How do we live inside God's Providence?

- 1. Like Paul, continually pray for spiritual understanding.** Paul regularly prayed that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit a of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17) Only the Holy Spirit can teach us the meaning of the things that happen to us.
- 2. Consider your circumstances as God's will for you, and submit your will to them.** God is sovereign over everything in our Universe, including everything happening in our lives (Matthew 10:29). This does not mean that everything is from God, but God ultimately is guiding everything.
- 3. Trust that God is working for your very best, even though your life may currently be difficult or confusing** (Romans 8:28-29).
- 4. Learn to see life as a school.** God uses the things that happen to us as opportunities to grow in reflecting his character. For example, if you pray to learn meekness, you may well find yourself in a situation where you are being unjustly and falsely accused. God directs events to teach us about him and his purposes.
- 5. In the school of life, going to the next grade depends on passing the current tests.** If God wants to teach you about honesty, he may bring you into a situation which challenges you to be honest. If you fail, he will bring other things into your life to test your honesty until you pass. Obey God's directions immediately according to what the Bible and the Holy Spirit says.
- 6. Consider opportunities to work for God as personal invitations from him to join with him in his work.** We don't need to be confused if this or that is from God or not. Like the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, God always clearly leads from the front. As long as our eyes and ears are open, we just have to follow him promptly wherever he leads.
- 7. Don't try and force open doors that are closed—or remain miserable because they are closed.** When God knows when the time is right for the next part of his plan. Then he will open the closed doors for you himself.

Using your Journal

You can use your Journal to draw a time-line of your life. On the time-line, mark some of the significant events that have happened to you. Then think about the spiritual impact each of these events had. What did God teach you at these times? Where there any lessons that you didn't notice at the time that you can see now? What lessons can you learn from your past to guide your future?

ALL BRANCHES that BEAR
LOTS of FRUIT MUST be PRUNED

Trials & Pruning

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME

Why difficult things happen

A goldsmith was purifying gold in the white-hot fire. "How do you know when the gold is pure?" someone asked him. He replied, "When I can see my face in it." (Amy Carmichael, *Learning Of God*, (London: SPCK, 1983), 50.)

Sometimes God does the same with us. God allows trials in our lives so that our sin can be burned away, enabling us to reflect his character more clearly. So it is important to know that experiencing difficulties does not mean that God has abandoned you. Rather, Peter writes,

These [trials] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:7)

Ellen White agrees,

Through conflict the spiritual life is strengthened. Trials well borne will develop steadfastness of character and precious spiritual graces. The perfect fruit of faith, meekness, and love often matures best amid storm clouds and darkness. (Christ's Object Lessons 61)

We suffer in this world because of the attacks of Satan (Revelation 12:12), and the consequences of our own sinful actions (Romans 6:23). We may also suffer when we ask God to remove our sin because the sin is so deeply entwined inside us (Jeremiah 9:7). But there is another type of pain that is the result of pruning.

Pruning

Jesus says that his Father, "cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." (John 15:2) We may not have sinned in a specific way that we can think of, but as sinners, we know that we are still weak in our faith and trust and all the other qualities that God wants to strengthen inside us.

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WILL OF JESUS

In *Secrets of the Vine*, Bruce Wilkinson writes, "Are you praying for God's superabundant blessings and pleading that He will make you more like His Son? If so, then you are asking for the shears." (Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2001), 60.)

Think about Paul's thorn. Paul writes, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) Notice that Paul considers that he was "given" this painful "thorn". He considers it "a messenger of Satan" yet he sees that it is intended to carry a holy purpose, for God permits the thorn to keep him humble.

But what was this thorn? Ellen White says that it was his bad eyesight. She writes that "He was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ's glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the heavenly light, and he desired also to bear with him constantly the assurance of Christ's sustaining grace." (*Sketches from the Life of Paul*, 34) So God permitted a physical problem to remain in Paul for a spiritual benefit—that he could grow increasingly to be like him, and be useful in his service.

It is important to remember that we don't suffer alone. God has suffered since sin came into the world because his children hurt so much. And of course no-one has suffered as much as Jesus. So this is when the book of Hebrews says,

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Using your Journal

You can use your Journal to write about the same sorts of things — the things you struggle with, your questions for God — and his answers. As make choices to remain loyal to God under pressure, remember that trials come for different reasons. So as you go through difficult periods, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, and ask God, *what is the reason for this problem?*

- a) Is this situation difficult, not because of anything I have done, but because Satan is at work in the world? If so, then persevere, knowing "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)
- b) Do I hurt because I am reaping the consequences of my sin. If yes, repent immediately, trust that God that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)
- c) Could it be that God is working now to remove the sin from me? If yes, then hang on! For "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)
- d) Is this situation difficult because God is pruning me? If this is the case, keep your ears open to the voice of the Holy Spirit. God may not explain everything to you today. Be patient and hold on to him, remembering his promise to you, "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you." (Isaiah 41:13)

my FEARS and WORRIES can DISAPPEAR
when I CHOOSE to ECLIPSE THEM with GOD'S REALITY

Eclipsing Worries & Fears

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME

Every so often there is an eclipse of the sun. The moon covers the face of the sun, and the sky goes dark. The sun is still there, but it has been covered up so we can't see it. This idea will help us to understand how we can deal with or "eclipse" our worries and fears.



The choice is ours

There is an old rhyme that goes something like this,

Two men looked through old cell bars,
One saw mud,
The other saw stars.

For these two men the reality was that both mud and stars existed, but they chose to look at different things. One was inspiring, the other depressing. It's the same with us. What we see and experience in life depends on what we choose to look at. The truth is that for all of us, we have the chance to look at either the positive, or negative—for both exist.

What do you choose to look at? When you look at a rose, what do you notice first, the beautiful scented flower or the sharp thorns? When you handed a glass of water, do you see that it's more than half full, or almost half empty? When you get up in the morning, do you starting thinking of all the opportunities there are ahead, or are you quickly depressed by all the things you know are going to go wrong?

The choice is ours.



Worry and fear begins in the mind

Worry and fear occurs in our minds. Yes, there are things all around us that can make us scared or worried, but there are plenty of positive things too. So if we want to live lives that are free from worry and fear, we have to learn to think differently—and thinking differently depends on what we choose to look at.

But what if we find ourselves in really difficult situations where there is nothing around us

that we can see with our eyes that is positive? Well let's imagine that is true. Can we still live without fear and worry then?



Peace and contentment also begin in the mind

Hebrews says that "By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible." (Hebrews 12:27) In other words, Moses succeeded because he looked around him with eyes of faith. This means that when things got difficult for Moses, he was confident that the promises of God to him would keep him safe and secure—so he didn't need to worry or be fearful. He could clearly see promises so wonderful, that he didn't become depressed by the anger, gossip, and infighting of the people all around him that he was leading to Canaan. Now we must be clear: the anger, gossip, and infighting were certainly there, but Moses was looking somewhere else, and that kept him positive and confident.

It was the same with Job. Job's children died when the roof of their house fell in, he lost all his wealth—his sheep, goats, and other animals to bandits and lightning. His wife constantly nagged him to give up his faith, and he had painful boils. So how does anyone survive that?

At the end of the book of Job, God arrives to talk to Job, but he never gives one reason to explain why these things have happened. Instead, for four long chapters (Job 38-41) God describes how wonderful, powerful, great and awesome he is, and when Job sees this picture of the greatness of his God, Job is content. The greatness of God had eclipsed this most painful of situations and brought Job peace.



Practising looking up

Colossians 3:2 says "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." So this is what we are going to practice—looking up by faith at what God has promised for us.

1. First, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts. Also be prepared to be as honest as you can about how you really think and feel.
2. Next, in your Journal make three columns across your page/s.
3. In the first column, make a list of the things that cause you to worry, fear, or feel sad. For example, "I worry that people don't really like me."
4. In the second column, write how you would naturally deal with this situation, if you were not thinking about God. For example, "When I get worried about people not liking me, I go shopping for clothes so I can feel better about the way I look."
5. In the third column, write a promise, or something about God that you can think about, that deals with the fear, worry, or sadness you are faced with. For example, "Deuteronomy 7:6 reminds me that God considers me his treasured possession. He thinks that I am very special and of great worth."

The object of this exercise is to practice always looking for the goodness of God to you. When surrounded by difficulties, this can be hard to do, but if you determine to "keep your mind on things above", your worries, fears, and sadness, will be eclipsed by the great love of God.

ASKING, "WWJD?" GIVES the HOLY SPIRIT'S PERMISSION
to SHAPE our LIVES to be like JESUS

WWJD?

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME



A famous story

There is a great book by Charles Sheldon called *In His Steps*. It is about a pastor who challenged his congregation to ask one question before every decision they made. The question was, "If Jesus was in my place now, what would Jesus do?" The story describes the great changes that God made in the people's lives when they began to take this question seriously.

By asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" (WWJD?) we open the door for the Holy Spirit to come in and guide us. The more we remember to ask it, the more opportunities God has to show us how to live like Jesus.



Using your Journal...

You can use your Journal to write about the decisions you need to make. You can then write in the answers you get when you pray and ask the Holy Spirit, "If Jesus was in my situation, what would Jesus do?" You can also write about what could have happened if you did not ask God about the situation.



Example

June 13. I have a friend who really hurt me recently and I really don't want to have to talk to her ever again because it hurts to think about what she said behind my back. Yesterday I asked God, "What would Jesus do in my situation?" Today I remembered what Jesus said in Matthew,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WILL OF JESUS

unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43-45)

I think I am going to start praying for her from now on.

Lord, sorry for being hard towards her. Help me to find a way to show her kindness as you have shown to me. Amen.



Important!

Remember: the more we live like Jesus, the better we can answer the question, "What would Jesus do?"

In other words, Jesus spent much of his time praying and reading the scriptures. He was also completely devoted to following the will of his Father in Heaven. So when he had a decision to make, he was in such close contact with God, God could show him just what he needed to do.

In the same way, the more time you spend with God, the easier it will be for you to know the answer to this important question at the times you need answers from Heaven.

Working with the Holy Spirit

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME



How can I change?

Perhaps one of the most common questions Christians ask is, “How can I change? I pray for the Holy Spirit to change me, but nothing seems to happen!” It can be very frustrating because we know God has all the power, and we know we want to be changed—so why doesn’t anything seem to happen?

Part of the answer is found in what Jesus taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit has two important tasks. First, he will show us what we are doing wrong in our lives—“when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin” (John 16:8, NLT) Second, he will show us what is right—“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13) But here is the bottom line: while the Holy Spirit will show you the sin in your life, and show you the right way to go, he is not able to make you repent or obey. Our lives will only change as we choose to repent and obey following the leading of the Holy Spirit. If we don’t do these two things, we won’t change at all!

So how can we work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit?



Working with the Holy Spirit

Being transformed to be like Jesus does not happen by accident. Nor does it happen by just wanting it to happen really badly. It happens as we work together with the Holy Spirit. Here is an outline of the process that we take when wanting the Holy Spirit to change us inside. (To help you remember this process, the first letter of each word forms the word APCAT.)

Admitt your weakness. Tell God that you know that there is no way you have the strength or the intelligence to change yourself or to know what is right. (Psalm 6:2; James 5:15; Hosea 5:13)

Pray for the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. We will only change as we have help from Heaven. Ask God to show you what to do, or how to change. (Luke 11:13; James 1:5; Proverbs 3:5-6) Remember that the power of the Holy Spirit does not

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WILL OF JESUS

necessarily come with any sort of feeling, because it is by trust in Him that we grow.

Claim God's promise of help. It's one thing to pray for help, but it is another thing completely to believe that God *will* help you. But without faith—complete trust that God will do what he has promised—we won't experience a change. So it is really helpful to quote one of God's promises back to him, to show him that you do trust what he has promised to do in and for you. You may like to begin collecting God's promises for you to remember when you are in need. (John 14:26; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Isaiah 41:10)

Act. Do what you know to be right, according to God's word, no matter how you feel. Often we don't do the right thing because it "feels" hard. So don't trust your feelings to do the right thing, but trust God's direction in the Bible and his promises. (Philippians 2:12-13) If you begin doing something and are worried that it is the wrong thing, don't worry. Talk about the matter with God and trust that he will guide you the right way.

Thank God for his work in you. Again, thank God no matter how you feel because thanks is faith in action! Thank God, not because you can see how things will change, but because you are confident that God is working for you according to his promises to you—right now. (Philippians 4:4-6; Psalm 28:6-7; Psalm 56:12)



An example

Imagine that you are struggling with anger at someone who has hurt you, and you want the Holy Spirit to help you stop feeling like this. Following the APCAT outline, you could pray something like this

Dear Father, I feel totally powerless to stop these feelings of anger inside me (step 1). Please will you send your Holy Spirit to help me control my thoughts and feelings (step 2). I know that you have promised to give me the spirit of peace that Paul describes in Galatians 5:22 (step 3). Thank you for hearing. I know that you are a great God and will act in my life to help me (step 5). Amen.

Do remember that God's work in you is a process. Sometimes God does miracles for us that literally happen overnight. But most of the time, the Holy Spirit works in us over time, so we learn how to cooperate with him. After murdering an Egyptian, it took Moses 40 years in the desert before he was ready to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. So don't get discouraged if change doesn't happen as fast as you would like. God has heard your prayers. He is at work for you right now. Trust him, and he—along with the whole of Heaven—will be working for you.

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son..." (Romans 8:28-29, NLT)



Using your Journal

You can use your Journal to record your prayers and thanks for God's work in you. You will also be able to look back over time to see the way God has worked in you

LEARNING NEW HABITS
to CHANGE WHO we are

Choosing New Habits

in the series
CONNECTING to the WILL of JESUS by CHOOSING HIS WILL for ME

If we do something regularly, this is called a habit. And what we do regularly is who we are. Unfortunately, we are not who we dream we are or would like to be. We are what we actually think and do.

When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, he regularly will show us things that he wants to change by convicting us of sin in our lives (John 16:8) for God wants us to live joyful and useful lives in his Kingdom. However, this can only happen as we increasingly reflect the character of Jesus. So to reflect the character of Jesus, the Holy Spirit wants to guide us into new ways of doing things. We rarely change just by praying and hoping we will stand up totally different. While God gives us power to change when we pray, we still have to stand up and live differently. This also gives us a chance to understand how deep sin is in our lives.

So to be and live differently, we have to change our habits.



Peter's habits

Peter gives some good examples of what God wants to grow in our lives, and we will use his counsel as we look at our habits. Here is his counsel below. On the right hand side is a brief explanation of his words:

2 Peter 1:5-7

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your

1. faith goodness;.....
2. and to goodness, knowledge;.....
3. and to knowledge, self-control;.....
4. and to self-control, perseverance;....
5. and to perseverance, godliness;.....
6. and to godliness, brotherly kindness;
7. and to brotherly kindness, love.....

Explanation

Effort is required to work in partnership with the Holy Spirit to grow in God's virtues

- Goodness:** moral excellence in our character
- Knowledge:** of God and spiritual things
- Self-control:** to live by God's principles and not our own feelings
- Perseverance:** to keep going when it is difficult or there is opposition
- godliness:** reverence to God
- kindness:** caring for others people's needs
- love:** wanting and working for the very best for others



Creating new habits

1. Look through Peter's list of seven Christ-like virtues and ask God to show you where you need to build new habits.
2. Pick one or two areas to concentrate on. Don't choose too much, as you don't want to become overwhelmed by trying to do too much at the same time.
3. For each area that you have chosen, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in the following areas: a) Habits that I need to break because it is damaging my spiritual growth, and b) Habits that I need to form in order to grow in this area.
4. For each habit, write out an action plan of practically what you are going to do to make this a part of your life. Remember that if it to become a habit, whatever you choose to do will need to be done regularly. This can be very simple. For example, let's say you want to focus on adding knowledge. Your action plan could be, "Wake up 15 minutes earlier and read my Bible and pray every day." Or perhaps you want to develop a habit for kindness. Your action plan could be, "Spend two minutes before going to school/work, prayerfully thinking about how I can be helpful to the people I meet."

Mark Twain said, "A habit cannot be tossed out the window; it must be coaxed down the stairs a step at a time!" This is very true, so don't get discouraged if your habits are not formed overnight. The habits you are doing now may have been forming for many years, and it will take time to break them. At the same time, you will be working on new habits. These will also take time to become part of your life.

So don't give up! Continue to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit as you begin to live differently, and remember that God makes available to you "his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:19-20) Imagine that. The same power that rose Jesus from the dead is being offered to you to live like Jesus!



In your Journal

In your Journal you can keep a list of the habits you want to form, write about how things are going as you work in partnership with the Holy Spirit, as well as your prayers.

In this habit, we have concentrated on the virtues that Peter lists in 2 Peter 1. You may also want to look at the list of virtues that Paul makes in Galatians 5:22-23. In fact, any characteristic of Jesus can be the foundation for you to build new habits into your life.



Connection Point 3

connecting to
the heart of Jesus by
pursuing intimacy with
him

Connecting to the Heart of Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



Connection by design

Jesus designed us to be his friends. Back in Eden, God intended Adam and Eve and all their children to live in a close, personal, intimate relationship with himself. Jesus desired among all things to shower his people with his love and provide for their every need. It was God's plan that Adam and Eve would have experienced ever increasing joy, love, thanks, praise, because of their ever growing intimacy with him.

This intimate relationship was what Satan designed to break. Through his temptation of Eve, Satan separated the oneness that the heart of God's people shared with the heart of their Father. Since then, Satan has been busy trying to prevent any possibility of us truly reconnecting to our Father and experiencing intimacy with him again.



What Satan fears

So the last thing that Satan wants is an passionate, praying, devoted people—people longing to be reconnected to the heart of Jesus. For it is through communion with God that a living connection with Jesus is restored. It is through prayer and a heartfelt longing for God's presence that we are reconnected to the power that restores us into the image of Jesus, allowing us to experience his peace, love, and joy. Therefore, our communion with God is the foundation for a life of thanks, praise, and worship.

However, God does not force us into such an intimate relationship with him because he cannot force us to be with him. Heart communication is our choice. But he longs to be close to us. As Isaiah writes about how God longs to have us close to his heart,

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart... (Isaiah 40:11, NIV)

Unfortunately, there are even many Christians today who do not know what it is like to experience such intimacy with Jesus, and really experience his peace, love and joy—or to have hearts that are thrilled to worship him. Many do not understand the power that is available to restore their lives into the image of Jesus.



Why we need to be connected

While living as a human on earth Jesus spent a lot of time with his Father. He often prayed all night as he sought to maintain his intimate communion with his Father. So if Jesus needed to spend so much time with his Father, how much more do we need to!

This desire for intimacy with God will be difficult for us to maintain because it will always be opposed. As Paul reminds us,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)

If we are surrounded by Satan's angels who have supernatural power, how could we possibly stand against them by ourselves? We can't. We can try, but we will always fail. That's why we need to grow and maintain our intimacy with Jesus.



Habits for the Heart for intimacy with Jesus

This section of Habits for the Heart will give you some ideas of how to enter into such an intimate relationship with Jesus -- that your heart might reconnect to the heart of Jesus. It's about learning what Moses wrote about when he called on God's people to

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5, NIV)

So remember that your life as a Christian is not just about knowing good things. It is about a real, living relationship, characterised by love, joy, prayer, praise and worship for our great king!

our HEARTS will LONG for GOD
when we SEE how WONDERFUL HE IS

Longing for Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



Does your heart long for God?

Do you have a longing to go on holiday in Malé?

Perhaps you are not too sure? Is it a hot place? Cold? Windy? Who knows?

What if I told you that Malé was a tropical coral island in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The Maldives island chain around Malé has beautiful white beaches with warm water, ideal for snorkelling where you can see all sorts of beautiful fishes. It is the definition of paradise on earth.

By now, maybe you're already planning to go there for your next vacation! But as you can see, longing comes as a result of knowing. We don't long for things we don't know anything about, even if they are wonderful.

It is the same with God. Our hearts will never long to be with Jesus and spend time in his presence if we don't know much about him.



The mind-heart link

There is a direct connection between knowing with our minds and the longing of our hearts. So in that sense, the longing we have for God is not just a feeling that we can manufacture inside ourselves. These feelings of longing for God are the consequence of what the "eyes of our mind" see.

The Psalmist cried out, "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." (Psalm 84:2) Why did he do that? Because he saw the beauty of where God "lived"—the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.

So what about you. What do you see in God that creates a longing within your heart to spend more time with him?

This is a challenge for all of us, because there are so many other things in our lives competing for our attention. Television, the internet, hobbies, work, the list goes on. So if our

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

hearts are to truly long to be with God, we have to carve out time where we can be alone with God to gaze upon him.



So how does it work?

My heart begins to long for God when I see something wonderful about God...

1. In the Bible that describes his longing to be with me
2. In the Bible's descriptions of his character and seeing how he was always working for good in the lives of his people
3. When I see all the promises he has made to me in the Bible to care for all my needs
4. As he works for good in the lives of people around me
5. As the Holy Spirit assures me of his presence and love when I pray
6. As I remember God's goodness to me in the past
7. As I see his goodness revealed in nature
8. As I see his goodness contrasted by the evil in the world and in my heart, which causes me to long for God and Heaven

If our morning and evening devotions consists of quickly reading a few texts and rushing out of the door or off to bed, our hearts will never learn to long for God like the writer of Psalm 84. So try to:

1. Set aside time in the morning and evening for devotions where you will not be rushed—so you can have plenty of time to read, pray and think about the goodness of God to you.
2. As you read the Bible, keep an eye out for
 - a) Descriptions of how valuable God thinks you are,
 - b) God's desire to be with you
 - c) God's promises to care for you
 - d) God's promises to transform you
 - e) God's working for good in the lives of his people
3. Spend time in prayer to thank him for what you see—don't rush.#
4. As you pray, be sensitive to the impressions of the Holy Spirit which affirm the truth of what you have read in the Bible.
5. As you go through the rest of your day, try to remember the things you discovered in your time with God.



In your Journal

In your journal, record what you discover in your time with God, along with your prayers that express your longing to be with him.

Remember, as we said, we cannot manufacture a longing for God. But as we spend time observing his goodness, we won't be able to help it.

WHEN we LIVE CONSCIOUSLY
in GOD'S PRESENCE, we will FIND POWER and PEACE

Practising God's Presence

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



It began with Brother Lawrence

The term "Practising the presence of God" comes from a book written by Brother Lawrence. He lived in the 1600's, and having read many books about how to have a relationship with God, he found them a little puzzling. As a result of this, and his desire to live completely for God, he decided that he was going to live as though only he and God were together in the world. In a letter, he describes how

at all times, every hour, every minute, even at the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God." (The Practice of The Presence of God, 32)

He tried to make this the habit of his life, which enabled him to remember consciously and continually that he was always walking in God's presence.

Of course, Brother Lawrence wasn't trying to avoid people or living real life. Rather, his intention was to let God's presence be so real and strong in his mind, that God's way of thinking and living would shape how he lived with people.

When in prayer, Brother Lawrence would often think of himself in different ways,

Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld him in my heart as my Father, as my God.... Sometimes I considered myself there as a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue; presenting myself thus before God, I desire Him to form his perfect image in my soul, and may me entirely like himself." (Ibid., 31-37)

That was Brother Lawrence's focus — to be entirely like God. Is that your desire? Do you ever think about the reality that you are constantly living in God's presence and that God is desiring for you to reflect his image?



We all struggle with remembering

Because we all get busy and tend to forget God, Jesus was given a special name. The angel said to Joseph, *“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”*—which means, *“God with us.”* (Matthew 1:23) “God with us” — God doesn’t want you to forget that he will never leave you. And as Jesus reminded his disciples as he went to Heaven, *“surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20) This promise of his presence is for you too.



Using your Journal...

Take time regularly to focus on the presence of God in your life. You could begin with doing this for 5 minutes, and another time trying it for a whole day or more. The objective is to always be living consciously in God’s presence. Then we can always be open to the Holy Spirit’s plans and purposes for our lives, and ready to receive his power and encouragement.

In your journal describe how practising the presence of God affected your thoughts, choices, and actions. Did practising the presence of God change the way you talked to people? Did it change how you spent your time or what you thought about? Did it affect the way you experienced God? Was it hard to do? If so, why was that? This may not be easy to do at first, but the more you practice, the easier and more rewarding it will be!

GOD SPEAKS to all
who are READY to LISTEN

Hearing God

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



Why doesn't God speak louder?

Here is something to think about.

God loves us so much he allowed his only son to die for our sins. He did this so he could be in relationship with us, for he longs to restore us into his image. Would a God like this, in trying to communicate with us, speak so softly or so strangely, that we wouldn't be able to understand him at all?

Do you think God is trying to be difficult or awkward when he communicates to us? Why then do we often have such a hard time hearing him speak to us? Is God playing hard to get?

For God to have all the power in the universe, but then make it really difficult for us to hear him just doesn't make sense. So could there be other reasons why we don't hear God?

Could it possibly be that the reason so few people hear God communicate to them personally, is not because God is not speaking loudly enough, but because we are not listening carefully enough?

Perhaps so. Perhaps it's a combination of both our lack of time to listen, but also because we create our own noise, so that God's voice is drowned out in the din. Such "noise" is not necessarily literal noise that we hear with our ears, but anything which distracts our attention from the voice of the Holy Spirit.



Noise

So what noises do we create that might block our ability to hear God's voice? Here are some examples of "noises",

- ☞ **Physical noise:** playing music. Surfing the web. Watching TV or movies. Addicted to following the news.
- ☞ **Mental noise:** constant complaining, whining, feeling sorry for myself.
- ☞ **Emotional noise:** dreaming about what it feels like being in love, being successful;

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

desiring revenge or justice for people who have hurt me; following the gossip about celebrities or people I know; being hooked on following a sports team.

- ☞ **Spiritual noise:** always filling our time reading Christian books or even listening to Christian music. We may think that it is all very good and spiritual, but if we don't have time to reflect and hear God because we are busy cramming our minds new thoughts, it can still end up being just "noise".

Perhaps you have read through this list and thought, well that's not noise! I certainly don't have a problem with any of those!

Well let's see.

One of the ways to see how addicted we are to the noise around us is to take a break from it—all—a noise fast. Fasting is an important spiritual discipline because it begins to show us what we are really thinking and doing during the day. A noise fast helps show us what are own motives really are. So how does a noise fast work?



How a noise fast works

While a regular fast includes not eating, a noise fast includes choosing to take a break from the physical noise around us. Here's how you can try it.

For the next 10 days, don't listen to any music, TV, radio, or movies. Don't surf the internet at all, or read any newspapers.

In their place, spend the same time you would have spent on these things in listening to God, in prayer, and reading your Bible.

You will be surprised how very difficult this is! However, if you can keep doing this for 10 days, you may find that the things you just couldn't live without aren't as attractive as they once were. Importantly, you will get to know your own inner "noise", your own feelings and desires in a way you could never have imagined.

You may find that you want to change the way you live. Most of all, you may begin to hear God communicate to you in much clearer ways.



Using your Journal

During your noise fast, use your Journal to keep a diary of your experience. Write about your experience, the difficulties, your prayers, what you learn, and how you grow in becoming sensitive to the voice of God.

**WORSHIP is an ATTITUDE
of the HEART**

Worship

**in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM**



What is worship?

The dictionary defines worship as reverence and respect that is given to a divine being. But how do we do this towards God?

An expert in the law came to Jesus and asked him what the greatest commandment was. Jesus replied that it was to "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 12:30).

Notice two things in this verse. First, that our love for God is with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In other words, our love for God includes all our feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Secondly, notice the repetition of the word "all". We are to love God not with a part of our heart, soul, mind and strength but with all of it. In other words, there is no room at all to love anything which isn't focused on God. That's why the ten commandments begin with God saying,

You shall have no other gods before a me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God... (Exodus 20:3-5a)

Therefore, we worship God when we reverence and respect him which is to love him with everything we are, while giving the love of our heart, soul, mind, and strength to no other. Such worship is not something that we do just in a church service. Worship is a complete lifestyle.



Unpacking worship

Let's unpack this idea of worship so we can see how it works in practice. The Bible notes that worship includes a number of different aspects which are linked to worship, helping us to understand what it means to love and worship God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

1. **Acknowledging that God is our Creator.** "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." (Psalm 95:6-7)
2. **Acknowledging that there is only one true God.** "Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth." (Psalm 96:6)
3. **Praise.** "Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." (Nehemiah 8:5)
4. **Sacrifice.** "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual a act of worship." (Romans 12:1)
5. **Obedience.** "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him." (Daniel 7:27)
6. **Service.** "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" (Luke 4:8)

While we may want to do this, our hearts, souls, minds, and strength naturally tend towards putting other things in God's place. Yes, we certainly needed to be reminded to have "no other gods before me"!



Dealing with other gods

But what about now? Are there other gods that have made their way into our lives and are distracting the attention of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength away from the only true God? This is what we will spend some time to think about now.

A god is something is anything or anyone who takes our time and energy away from Jesus. What gods are preventing your heart, soul, mind and strength from giving Jesus 100% devotion?

What other gods do you also:

- ☞ allow to direct your life?
- ☞ praise?
- ☞ sacrifice to?
- ☞ obey?
- ☞ serve?

God's method of dealing with other gods was clear. "Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places." (Deuteronomy 12:2-3) So how will you destroy your gods?



Using your Journal

You can use your Journal to list the gods that have invaded your life, and your plans and prayer about how you will deal with them.

my MORAL CHOICES are SHAPED by
SOLID BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Making Moral Choices

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



How do I know?

How do I know if I am making the right decision? The Bible is clear about many things, but there are a multitude of other “grey” areas where the Bible does not give specific answers that we can easily point to as we make our moral choices. Grey areas are the parts of our lives where the decision what to do is unclear. Here are some examples: what music should I listen to? Should I read this book, or watch that movie? Is it ok to go dancing? Is it ok to do this or that on Sabbath?

When the Bible appears not to give specific laws to direct our decision-making, we have to live by biblical principles. It is our responsibility to apply the principle to our own situation. This requires us to think carefully and prayerfully.

We want to live safely inside God's kingdom, so we are going to look at 7 biblical principles that will help us to make good, God-directed, moral choices. You can use these principles to help you answer any question that you have about these so-called grey areas. We must be clear: we don't apply these principles if the Bible already tells us what to do. They are used only when the Bible itself is unclear.



Building a safe-house with God

Here are the 7 principles to help us choose. Each principle is part of a building that creates a safe-house to live in with God.

The Foundation

1. The Principle of a God-focused Life: *Because I choose to die to my own desires and ambitions, I will set both my heart and mind—my emotions and thoughts—on God alone.*

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

The Two-Sided Roof

2. The Principle of Judgement: *My responsibility is not to judge others but to judge how I am following God's radical lifestyle myself.*

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:1-4)

3. The Principle of Freedom: *My freedom is to be used to live for God, rather than only what I feel like doing.*

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)

The Four Pillars

4. The Principle of Running Lightly: *I will not do anything that will slow me down spiritually.*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)

5. The Principle of Usefulness: *I will only do what benefits myself, others, and God.*

"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. (1 Corinthians 6:12a)

6. The Principle of Slavery: *I will only do what the Holy Spirit is able to control.*

"Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Corinthians 6:12b)

7. The Principle of Example: *I will only do what can set a Christ-like example for others to follow.*

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (Romans 14:13)



Using the principles

When you have a question about a moral "grey" area, ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thinking and go through each of these principles. Can you do what you were thinking about doing, and live out all 7 principles? If yes, then go right ahead!

You can use your Journal to write about the moral grey areas you are facing, and the biblical principles that will help you decide how to deal with them.

**PURITY is NOT a PLACE
but a DIRECTION of the HEART**

Purity

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM

Jeremiah says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) So when we are thinking about living lives of purity before God, it is not our actions that we should think about first, but our hearts. That’s where the problem lies. But when the heart is right with God, then the actions will be right towards him and each other also.

The line

When we think of purity, we often think of right and wrong on two sides of a line. “Right” is on one side, and “wrong” is on the other. But this can be dangerous thinking because we think that as long our feet are on the right side of the line we are ok. But our hearts can still be on the wrong side.

Right	Wrong
Feet	Heart?

It is more helpful to think about the heart, not as being in the right or wrong box, but as heading in the right direction—further and deeper towards becoming like Jesus, for that is a direction we will continue to pursue in Heaven.



Remember that Satan and Adam and Eve were living in perfect places—Heaven and Eden—when they sinned. They were in the “right” places, but their hearts were heading in

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

the wrong direction.

Now think about yourself. What areas do you need to think about more carefully when it comes to reflecting the purity of Jesus in your heart? Has your heart been struggling with sexually impure thoughts? Impurity when dealing with money issues? Anger or revenge? Anything else?

So how do we deal with our impure hearts?

One day, a man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

"Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40)

We have been noting that the breaking of the law within our hearts covers many different areas. But Jesus says that these laws fall into just two areas, love for God and love for each other. So if we are to live lives of purity towards God and our neighbour, we must learn what it means to truly love God and our neighbour. Our hearts must learn to love. This is probably why Jesus includes in the Sermon on the Mount,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

To have a heart that is perfect pure therefore, is to have a heart that perfectly loves, even our enemies. So to remove impurity within, God's love—a love which comes from outside of ourselves—must displace our impurity. So how do we gain greater love?



Loving more perfectly

To love more perfectly is a quest we shall be on for the rest of our lives. But here is a start to loving more perfectly.

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts as you think about purity in your own life.
2. Is your struggle related to impurity towards God or a person. If it is towards a person, then begin to pray regularly for God to give you his love for that person. If it is towards, him, begin to pray regularly for God to give you his love, so you can love him more perfectly.
3. Remember that loving is not a feeling but a principle. Determine to create new habits with the power the Holy Spirit will give you to practice the love you have been asking for.
4. Remember the line. You are on a life-long quest away from evil, ever deeper towards a fully and more visible reflection of the character of Jesus.

the HOLY SPIRIT will REVEAL our SIN so we can
CONFESS it and BECOME PURE like JESUS

Confession

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



The problem with sin

Sin breaks our relationship with God. The Psalmist wrote, *“If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened.”* (Psalm 66:18) Imagine God not listening to us! The Psalmist understood that it is very difficult for God to help us when we are wanting to do the very opposite of God’s design and plans for us.

Sometimes we know what we have done wrong. At other times, we are not exactly sure what the problem is — we just feel bad inside. When this happens, it is really important to ask the Holy Spirit what is wrong, and wait for his reply.



How the Spirit works

Jesus told the disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come to *“convince the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.”* (John 16:8, NLT) If we ask him, the Spirit will also reveal our sin to us.

However, if the Spirit shows us our sin but we choose to ignore him, we prevent God from making us pure like he is pure. Changing is our choice. But when we confess our sin and allow God to purify us, we will reflect his purity.



Using your Journal

To ask the Holy Spirit about how he sees your life, you could do the following:

1. Go to a place where you can be by yourself.
2. Thank God for his promise to forgive you so that you can have a new start. John says that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9, NIV) This means that if we are truly sorry for going against God’s design for

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

our lives, God will forgive us and re-create us like new inside — no matter what we have done.

3. Pray for the Holy Spirit to show you if there is anything that you need to confess and change. Use your Journal to make a list of these things. Keep praying and writing until you are sure that there is nothing more for the Holy Spirit wants to show you. Then put a line at the bottom of your list. For example:

1. *For getting angry at John this morning.*
 2. *For looking at things on the web that I shouldn't.*
 3. *For not wanting to help those in need.*
-

4. Ask for God's forgiveness and for help to change the way you have been thinking and acting. Look at the first item on your list (Getting angry). Then pray and ask God to forgive you for getting angry and saying unkind words. When you are confident that God has forgiven you (Remember the text in 1 John 1:9), cross out that point. Then pray specifically about number 2 and do the same thing. Pray for everything on your list individually. When you have reached the line, you know that today you are ready to live in harmony with God.

Don't think there is anything you have done that God cannot forgive. Like David who confessed his sin in Psalm 51, God is eager to restore everyone who asks.

TOOLS for REFLECTING the CHARACTER GOD will ALWAYS
ANSWER our REQUESTS to REFLECT his CHARACTER

Asking God For Things

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



What God loves

God loves it when we ask him for the gifts he has promised us. But when you pray, what do you normally ask him for?

There are all sorts of things we can ask for, but they all fit in two main groups.

The first group of prayers is for physical requests. Most of our requests are for things like this. For example,

1. That we will have a good day at school or work
2. That we will have good weather
3. That God will heal a friend's bad back

The second, and most important group of prayers, is for spiritual requests. Spiritual requests are directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit in us. For example,

1. To develop a stronger trust in God's promise to guide me (Proverbs 3:5-6)
2. To become more patient (Colossians 3:12)
3. To love those who are difficult to love (John 13:34-35)
4. To not gossip about others (2 Corinthians 12:20)

Did you know that God will always answer with a "YES!" every prayer you pray for such things? He will never say "No", because these requests are about reflecting his character.

Paul writes,

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:28-29)

There is nothing more important to God than for us to reflect Jesus. So whatever God gives us, or doesn't give us, it is always for this important reason — that we can better reflect his character, and then everyone can tell that God really is alive — and living in us!

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

So Jesus advises us to choose carefully what we focus our thoughts and prayers on. He advises,

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven... (Matthew 6:19-20, NLT)

And the greatest treasure we can gain by prayer, is the character of Jesus.



In your Journal...

When you pray and use Prayer Journal to write down your requests, always think about the two groups of requests — requests for physical things, and requests for spiritual things. Make sure you have at least as many requests for the spiritual things, because these are what will really make a difference to us — for eternity!

To see the spiritual requests Paul made for other people, you can read his prayers in Ephesians 1:15-23, Ephesians 3:14-21, Philippians 1:1-11, Colossians 1:3-14, and 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.

Praying Bible Texts

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



What should I pray about?

Sometimes we want to pray but our minds go blank. We think to ourselves, "Help, what should I be praying for?!"

When this happens, it is really helpful to use the Bible to help us pray. As we pray this way, we are praying ideas that come from the mind of God. As his thoughts become our thoughts, we reflect his character.



Using prayers in the Bible

It can be very interesting to see what the people in the Bible prayed for, and allow their prayers to shape our prayers. We can use the prayers of:

- David — for forgiveness: Psalm 51.
- Jesus — to teach us how to pray: Matthew 6:9-13
- Solomon — for wisdom: 1 Kings 3:5-9.
- Stephen — when people attacked him: Acts 7:59-60.
- Paul — in praying for others: Ephesians 1:15-20, Ephesians 3:14-21



Using other texts in the Bible

But we don't have to use just the prayers in the Bible — we can use many passages to shape our praying.

Pray and ask God to guide you to a good text to guide your praying. In your Journal, write

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE HEART OF JESUS

down the text. Next to the text, write your own prayer response to God.



Example: Psalm 23:1-3

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

Thank you Lord for being my shepherd. Help me to remember that you provide everything that I need.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, restores my soul.

Lord, I don't seem to see any nice quiet place. I feel really stressed right now. Help me to trust you, that I can experience your peace.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Lord, thank you that your ways are always best – that they are designed so that if I follow you, I will reflect your character.



Example: Ephesians 1:17

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Lord, grant me wisdom as well. Help me see the things that are hidden from my understanding, so that I can know you better.



Using your Journal...

Use your Journal to write down the texts and your responses.

Prayer Lists

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



A God of order

God is a God of order. David writes that God “determines the number of the stars, and calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147:4). Imagine the memory needed to govern such a universe!

We certainly don't have as many things on our minds as God does. Even with the few things we do have to remember, it is still very easy to forget what we have been praying for. And our prayers are too important to forget!

That's when it can be really helpful to write down lists of what we pray for each time we pray. Writing down prayer lists also help us to concentrate on specific needs, and to see when God answers our prayers. It also teaches us to be as careful with our prayers as God is with his universe.

Sometimes we might see God answering our prayers almost immediately, as when Elijah prayed for fire to come from Heaven and burn up his offering (see 1 Kings 18 for the whole story). At other times, we may have to keep praying until an answer comes, as when Elijah later prayed for rain, but had to keep praying seven times before the rain cloud finally appeared (also in 1 Kings 18).

Here are two examples of prayer lists.



Option 1: A single list

In your Journal, write today's date followed by a list of all the things you want to pray for. Then pray for each request individually. Try and make your prayers as specific as you can. So rather than writing, pray for Edgar, write, pray that Edgar has confidence when he goes for the job interview. The more specific you are, the more easily it is to see when God answers your prayers.



Option 2: Lists under different topics

You can also use your Journal to make lists under different topics like this:

Date	Praise -- for who God is	Thanks -- for what God has done	Requests for others	Requests for myself
7th May	That You are great and powerful.	That you helped me with my exam today.	May you give my parents more love for each other.	Help me to remember to be kind to people who don't like me — even though it's hard.
8th May	That you are a God who never stops loving us, even when we make really big mistakes.	That you helped me to be kind to the person who was really rude to me in the shop	Teach my friend Nicholas to be more and more like Jesus	Teach me to remember to pray every day. Help me to understand what the Bible says

Prayer Maps

in the series
CONNECTING to the HEART of JESUS by PURSUING INTIMACY with HIM



Praying with God

In John 17, Jesus not only prays for himself but for his disciples, and all those who will become his disciples. "... I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (John 17:20—21a)

The Holy Spirit also prays for us, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:26)

To pray for others is to join God in his work. Praying is not just a good idea, but an activity that reflects that we are God's children — that we share his concerns. Therefore, to pray for others is to reflect God's character.

Sometimes it is helpful to see our prayers for others in the form of a picture, or "map". It is an easy way to organise all the different things we pray for.



In your Journal...

Find a blank page in your Journal. In the middle of the page write a title for your prayer map and put a circle around it. This is the centre of your prayer map.

Then, pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you in what to pray for. Next, think about who to pray for. For example, your family. Now draw a short line out from the centre circle, and at the end of it write, FAMILY. Now who do you want to pray for in your family? For each person you want to pray for, draw another line out from the word FAMILY and at the end of it, write their name. Now think about the first person you named. What do you want to pray for them today? Draw a line out from their name and write the prayer request at the end of it. Do the same for each member of the family. You can now follow the same instructions to write down prayer requests for many different things. Each time you pray, you can use and grow your prayer map.



Connection Point 4

connecting to
the work of Jesus by
joining him in sacrificial
service

Connecting to the Work of Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

Jesus' mission

Jesus stated his mission clearly,

The Son of Man came to find lost people, and save them. (Luke 19:10, NCV)

But how would Jesus do this? Paul notes something remarkable about Jesus that was the key to his ministry of service,

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8)

It's hard to imagine

Though Jesus was equal with the Father who sits and rules the whole Universe, Jesus became a servant in order to save us. But not any servant. He became a servant who served wicked, selfish human beings. And not only that; though Jesus had the body of the eternal God, he wrapped himself in the skin of sinful human beings. But there is more. Not only did he come to earth in the body of a sinful human being, but he gave himself up to die for our sins. But it was not a quiet, comfortable death — it was a violent death on a cruel Roman cross.

Working like Jesus

To serve like Jesus is to desire to sacrifice everything we have and are for others if God should ask us to do so. Therefore Paul also writes, “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” (v5)

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

Could you be willing to serve people no matter the cost to yourself? Could you be willing to serve people like Judas, to wash their feet (John 13), knowing that they will soon betray you — with a kiss? (Matthew 26-48-49). Could you serve your enemies like that?



How to be perfect

Serving our friends is one thing, but those who reflect the character of Jesus will serve those who hurt them also. As Jesus preached,

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-45, 48)

To reflect the perfection of God, is to love like God. That means to perform acts of generosity towards those who we think don't deserve it, that they may experience the revolutionary power of the gospel in action, believe it, and be saved. It's hard. It goes against what we often want to do, but it is the way of Jesus.



Habits for Connecting to the Work of Jesus

The Habits in this section are designed to give you ideas about how and why we serve others. As you begin to work with Jesus each day to serve others that they might be saved, may you "*attitude*" really become "*the same as that of Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 2:5)

Jesus is already at work all around you -- will you join him in what he is doing?

if we KEEP our EYES OPEN, EVERY DAY can be
an ADVENTURE in GOD'S SERVICE

Adventures in Service

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



What Heaven is doing

Right now, God is at work. His Holy Spirit and angels are tirelessly working to prepare people to meet Jesus — who is coming very soon. God's angels are around us all the time. They are very busy, and they don't waste any time.

God is always at work in our world. So the question Henry T. Blackaby likes to ask us is, "*Will we join God in what he is doing?*" And of course, what God is doing is to point people to see Jesus.

As we can see all around us, there is plenty of work for us to do for God's kingdom. So if you are willing to reveal Jesus for God, God will definitely use you — no question about that. As long as you are willing to work, and willing to do whatever he asks you, God can use you.



God will never say...

God will never say to you, "You are not old enough" or, "You are not clever enough", or "I can't use you because you don't know enough yet." This is because God specialises in using people who don't think they are good enough — like Moses who asked "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." (Exodus 4:13) . Or who think they are too young — like Jeremiah who complained, "'Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.'" (Jeremiah 1:6)



God chooses the weak things of the world...

The reason God chooses people who don't think they can do the job is because only such people are willing to depend on God 100% for their ideas and strength. We normally like to think we are really clever and strong, but as humans living in the middle of a battle between two supernatural superpowers, we don't have what it takes to live for God without complete dependence on his power.

This is why Paul says, "*we have this treasure [Jesus and the power of his word] in jars*

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

of clay [us] to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) Later Paul notes God's promise to him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9) So no matter who you are or how weak you think you are, God can use you. And he is willing to start the moment you are willing.



How to have an adventure with God

This makes every day an adventure with God in witnessing and service. When you wake up in the morning, pray that the Holy Spirit and the angels will guide you to serve or witness to someone that day. As you go through the day, keep a prayerful attitude, asking God to open your eyes to the service and witnessing opportunities around you.



Using your Journal

In your Journal write about your experiences in revealing Jesus. How did God use you? How did the Spirit direct you? If you couldn't see that God did, think back to the places you went to, the people you spoke with, the things you did — were there any times that God was wanting you to serve him but for some reason you missed the opportunity? Why was that? The Holy Spirit will help you to understand this.

The good news is that every time we will pray to be used, God will send people for us to serve in our direction — we can count on that!

RELATIONSHIPS are HEALED when
I REACH OUT with GRACE

Building Bridges for Grace

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



Sin breaks relationships

Sin breaks relationships. When Satan sinned, it broke his relationship with God and the whole of Heaven. When Adam and Eve sinned, it broke their relationship with God, and the relationship between each other. And this is how it has been throughout the whole of human history. Sin comes into our lives and it breaks our relationship with God, with our friends and family, and the relationships within our churches. Sin breaks things.



Jesus' model for restoring broken relationships

So how do we begin to rebuild broken relationships? Jesus gives us the model to use:

- 1. The wounded one takes the initiative to restore the broken relationship.**
The Bible tells us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Jesus did not wait for us to repent before he died for us. He died for us in the hope that we would repent.
- 2. Our unconditional love is the most powerful tool to melt hardened hearts.**
When we see this love of God for us, love which is eagerly held out to us before we have even thought about repenting—this is what melts our hearts and leads us to repentance. In the same way, when someone has hardened themselves towards us, offering them grace—a love that we may feel they don't deserve—is the most effective power to open their hearts to restore their broken relationship with us.

But doing this is so hard! This is because reaching out to those who hurt us goes against everything we are feeling inside. We think that if someone has hurt us, then they should come and apologise. That's right and just! And anyway, we feel so hurt, we don't feel like restoring any sort of relationship with them. But as Paul reminds us, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

So here are four things to remember when we face a breakdown in our relationships:

- 1. Everyone is a child of God—God still loves them, no matter what they have done to us.** Indeed, God probably feels the pain more than we do because he made them and has been caring for them since the day they were born.
- 2. Satan is behind every breakdown in relationships—he is the real enemy, not the person who has hurt us.** This is hard to remember, but if we forget this we will only feel worse inside about the other person.
- 3. The one who has hurt us, is probably in a worse situation than we are.** Sure, we are hurt, but how deep is the hurt in the one who hurt us? It is quite possible that when we offer grace to the one who hurt us, this will be exactly the medication they need for their own hurts. We may be their only opportunity for healing.
- 4. Make a commitment to act from biblical principles rather than how you feel.** Like the parting of the River Jordan before the children of Israel went into Canaan, God may wait to change our situation until after we begin to take the first step. Miracles begin when we act on faith—according to the promises that God has given us.
- 5. We cannot give to others what we have not first received from God.** If we are empty of grace and love, we won't be able to pass anything on to others except our frustrations. Sometimes we get very tired trying hard to do the right thing towards others. We are often surprised that the harder we try, the more tired we become. This is because the power to overcome our feelings and the attacks of Satan on our broken relationships will only be received when we are on our knees. The more broken the relationship, the longer we may need to spend in God's presence, depending on his power.



Using your Journal

When you have to face a broken relationship, you can record your thoughts, prayers and feelings in your Journal. But ultimately we have to live our faith. We can pray, and write, and think, but when it comes to relationships we have to take bold action. But when we do this we won't be alone—for the God who offered his grace to us, will walk with us and offer his grace through us to those in need.

You could use your Journal as a "battle plan". What relationships do you have that are broken? Who could God reach with his grace through you? What will be your first step to restore what Satan has been working to destroy through us?

GOD will SHOW me WHERE and HOW
to SERVE HIM when I PRAY

Finding My Place To Serve

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

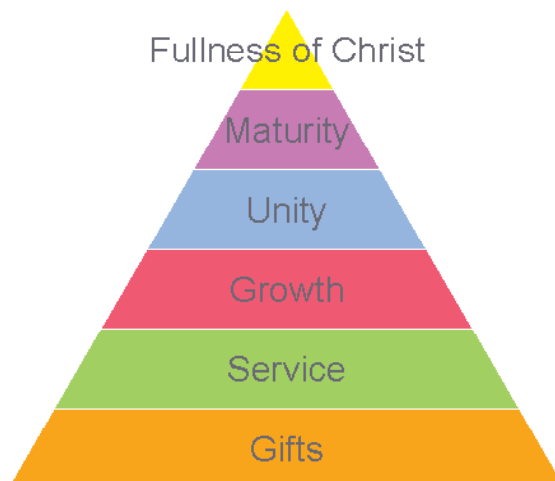
God has given us all gifts

While every Christian is called to give a verbal witness for God, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit gives special gifts to every Spirit-filled person in God's church — including you! The purpose of these gifts is for an important spiritual purpose,

“to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Paul's Pyramid

Here's Paul's text in a pyramid. Notice that God first gives the people in his church spiritual gifts. These will always lead to serving others, which always leads to growth, then unity, maturity, and finally the ultimate goal is achieved — the church reveals the fullness of Christ to the world!



So how do you become prepared to receive and use the gifts of the Spirit? Jesus says, *“how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Luke 11:13) If you ask God to be used, he will send you exactly what you need from the Spirit to serve him. So we could call prayer the foundation of Paul's pyramid.

Sometimes people take tests to try and find their spiritual gifts. While these may be helpful to see what we are already good at or like doing, they don't necessarily tell us what God is preparing us to do. Like

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

Jonah, God may call us to do something we don't want to do. Or like Moses, God may call us to do something we feel unable to do.

It is important to remember that spiritual gifts and talents are two different things. Someone may have a great talent as a teacher, but they may not have the spiritual gift of teaching that results in the church being strengthened. While both talents and spiritual gifts are from God, we can choose how we use our natural talents. However, the Holy Spirit is the one who directs how his gifts are used, as he is the one at work in our lives.



To start using your gifts

1. Begin to pray for God's direction, for a place for you to serve in the building up of his church.
2. Immediately offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) — which means to be willing to do anything God asks, not matter the cost to you personally.
3. Share your desire to serve with someone who has the spiritual gift of wisdom and discernment and share your desire to serve with them. Ask them to pray for you for God's direction. God may also use them to direct you, so be ready to listen to their counsel.



Using your Journal

Use your Journal to record your prayers, thoughts, conversations, and questions to God, as you find a place of service that will strengthen your church to reveal Jesus.

my PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPACTS
my INFLUENCE for GOD

My Body Matters

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

God is very clear about the importance of our physical health, Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) So our goal is clear: our bodies are to be in the best possible condition for the Spirit of God to live in. Indeed, because Jesus died for us, our new life has the sole focus of honouring God.

Our bodies are important because of the connection between physical health, and our ability to honour God. What I eat and how much I exercise affects my ability to think clearly. How much I sleep can affect if I am happy or grouchy the next day, and so on. If my body is in bad shape, chances are, my mind will be too. And it is my mind that enables me to connect to God. If I can't think clearly, I will struggle praying, studying my Bible, and discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit. If I struggle doing these things, I will not be growing spiritual, and so my witness for God will be limited.

Because of the direct connection between our physical and mental health to our spiritual growth, the level of our physical health can put a barrier on further spiritual growth. That's why we need to think carefully about our physical health. Our ambition is to honour God in all that we do, so we may need to think a little differently about the everyday things we do.

For example, do we eat what is healthy and good for our bodies, or what just feels good? Do I exercise when I feel like it, or because this is what my body needs?

We may also have to make some serious lifestyle decisions if our goal is to honour God in everything. Do I need to cut down work in order to have enough time with God to feed my soul? Do I need to get another job because this one is too stressful and it is impacting the way I am with God?

Though God is longing to fill us with all spiritual wisdom, his hands are tied if we are not interested in doing what we can to be as healthy as possible. Remember that spiritual growth does not happen by accident, but by our cooperation with God.

Here is a very simple chart to help you think about your health over the next week. Once you have finished the week, are there any changes you need to make so you can say you are doing "it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31)

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

This form is not intended to be a scientific survey, but a chance for you to think consciously about the way you treat your body.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Exercise	Sleep	Work & Relaxation
Day 1	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y / N			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N
Day 2	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y / N			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N
Day 3	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y / N			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N
Day 4	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N
Day 5	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y / N			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N
Day 6	Did I eat food that I felt like eating or because it was healthy? Felt / Healthy Did I eat too much? Y / N			Did I exercise? Y / N	Did I get enough sleep? Y / N Did I get to bed early enough? Y / N	Was I over-stressed today? Y / N

My Verbal Testimony

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



God needs willing mouths

We are all called to reflect the character of Jesus in our actions. But everyone who has been born again by the Holy Spirit is also called to be verbal witnesses for him. As we prepare for Jesus return, people also need to hear the importance of Jesus' life and death and second coming explained. We are God's mouthpieces, for "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9) At the end of each day it is good to ask, "Have I been a verbal testimony to God and his truth today?"



Paul's testimony

Part of declaring the praises of God is to share what Jesus has personally done for us. In Acts 26, knowing that he is facing almost certain death, Paul gives a very helpful example of how he shared his personal testimony with King Agrippa. Paul's testimony is split into 3 parts:

1. What his life was like before he met Jesus. (v4-11)
2. How he met Jesus (v12-18)
3. What his life was like after meeting Jesus. (v19-23)

Though Paul's testimony was quite short — perhaps just 2 minutes — the Holy Spirit was able to use it to impress the king's mind, for "Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'" (v28) This shows that when we are faithful in being a verbal witness, the Holy Spirit will work through us.

If you have been born again by God's Spirit, you will have a testimony to share! So when you suddenly find yourself in a situation where it is possible to talk about God, you can use your own life as a testimony of his goodness.



Making my testimony

Like Paul, think of your life in 3 sections. Use the following questions to help you develop a verbal testimony of God's work in your life. You should be able to share this experience in under 2 minutes.

- 1. What was my life like before I was born again in Christ?** What sort of person were you like without having asked Jesus to save you and his Spirit to work within you? How did you think and feel about life? How did you live and behave?
- 2. How did I come to know Jesus as my own Saviour and have his Spirit begin to work within me?** Where were you? What happened that caused you to change from not believing or trusting God, to knowing that he is real and alive, and at work in your own life? What caused you to accept Jesus as King and Lord and to follow the laws of his Kingdom rather than the habits of the world?
- 3. What difference has God made in my life?** Compare and contrast your life now with how it was before you knew Jesus. What has God done that has made the biggest impact on the way you think, or the way you behave today?



Using your journal

To help you prepare, use your Journal to write out your testimony. Ask God to help you remember the things that are most important for you to share. You can also write your prayers asking God for opportunities to share your testimony, and record what happened.

Authentic Missionaries

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



“the medium is the message”

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan wrote, ‘The medium is the message’. If we apply this idea to us as Christians, we would say that what we share about God is shaped or controlled to a large degree by the sort of people we are (for in this case, we are the medium). For example, if we say that God is love and he can change us to be like him, but are not loving ourselves, people will tend not to believe us. However, if we say God is loving and can change us to be like him, and we are also loving, we (the medium) harmonise with our message. We are what you would call, authentic Christians. When we are authentic, we what we share about God is carried with power.



Jesus was “the message”

So God speaks to our world most powerfully through *who* we are. This is what Jesus was trying to say to his disciples. He wanted them to see that they could know his father by seeing him.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” (John 14:6-10)

Jesus wants people to know the Father when they meet us too.



truth is a person

Jesus says that when people meet him, they can know his Father. It was not a question

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of people meeting people and telling them about his Father. His life was an accurate reflection of the Father. So when Jesus says, "I am... the truth", what he meant was, "who I am is really what my Father is like." Truth is a person. Truth is not simply a right idea, but is linked directly to who God is.

We reveal truth to others in the most important way by revealing who God is in our own lives. When we (the medium) match the message (the truth—who God is), there is a great power in our witness to others.



preparing the world for Jesus' return

As we prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus, the most important thing that people need to know is that God really does exist, and what sort of God he is. They will understand this most powerfully when God really is revealing himself through us. There will be times when the message that God wants us to share to prepare others may appear difficult for others to hear or believe. But when our lives reflect the truth about who God is, the Holy Spirit will be able to convict people's hearts concerning what we have to share.

a God-revealing authentic life + a God-given message = powerful impact



am I authentic?

Perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask, is to ask ourselves if we are authentic—is what I say and do the same as who I am inside? I tell people this or that about God, but is God able to validate that "truth" through who I am?

Make a list of all the things you want to share about God as you work to prepare others for the return of Jesus. On the other side of the page, think about how you will, in your own life, show others that what you are saying really is true.

things I want to share about God	how will I show this is true with my life?
eg. that God loves everyone, even though who don't care about him.	I want to grow in showing love to those who don't necessarily like me.



using your journal

You can use your journal to draw out a table like this and to think about how you will grow to authentically reveal "the truth"—the person of God, and the messages he wants you to share with those around you.

GOD GUIDES us our WHOLE LIVES to
PREPARE us for HIS SERVICE

How God Prepares Us

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



It's about our whole lives

The Holy Spirit equips us with spiritual gifts for his service. But another important part of the process that God uses to train us for service, is his providential leading of our lives. Like Jesus who was being prepared for ministry even as he worked as a humble carpenter, God guides our lives from the moment we are born through various experiences to shape us into people he can use for his glory. For

we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)



How God prepared Moses

Consider the example of Moses. God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but how do you learn to do a job like that? Look at how God trained him:

Phase 1: Time with his parents (Exodus 2:1-10). Though taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter, God enabled Moses to return to his own mother who then taught him the ways of God.

Phase 2: Time in Pharaoh's court. After learning about God from his mother, Moses then went to live in the courts of Pharaoh as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. This is where Moses learnt some of the skills of a civil and military leader.

Phase 3: Time in the wilderness (Exodus 2:11-25). After killing an Egyptian in an attempt to repay the cruelty of the Egyptians against the Hebrews, Moses had to escape to Midian. It was here that God taught him over forty years not to depend on his own strength and to learn the Christ-like characteristics of humbleness and patience — as he looked after sheep.

Phase 4: Involvement in successful ministry. When God called to Moses out of the burning bush, Moses replied, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11) It took 80 years of learning humility before Moses was really ready to

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

serve God faithfully.

Think about Joseph, David, Peter and Paul. God was preparing all of them to serve him over many years. It is also the same for us. From the moment we are born, God is leading us through various experiences to train us for the work he wants us to do.



Using your Journal

In your Journal you can examine how God may be preparing you to serve him:

1. Ask God to show you how he is guiding your life.
2. Draw a time-line that represents your life. Mark all the significant events that happened to you. How might God have been involved in these events? These may include places you have lived or visited, conversations you have had, important decisions you have made, and spiritual lessons you have learnt.
3. Look for patterns or phases where God may have been working to equip you to do what you are doing today, or to do a special work that you know he wants you to do in the future. These patterns may be more difficult to see earlier in our lives. But you will begin to notice more and more of the working of God to prepare you for service in ways you may have never imagined.

JESUS SHARED the GOOD NEWS as
he HELPED PEOPLE in NEED

Serving Like Jesus

in the series
CONNECTING to the WORK of JESUS by JOINING HIM in SACRIFICIAL SERVICE



Just before the crucifixion...

When people are hurting, and tired, and lonely, there is a desperate need for people not just to hear about Jesus through our words, but to see a revelation of Jesus character through in our actions. When they see such actions, they will know that our words are genuine.

According to Matthew, the last teaching that Jesus gives before he was taken to be crucified, contains some really important instruction about how we are to act as we wait for his second coming. This parable in Matthew 25:31-46 describes the way that Jesus will identify his true followers from those who just pretended to follow him.

What do you think makes the difference between those to whom Jesus says, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”* (v34), and those to whom he says, *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*? (v41)

Jesus is explaining that those who truly have faith in him will show it by what they do. He says,

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (v35-36)



How Jesus served

Living a life of service like Jesus, is to show real care for people in need. But how do we do this? Ellen White writes:

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His

CONNECTING TO REFLECT THE WORK OF JESUS

sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (Ministry of Healing, 143)

We can break this idea down into 3 sections. To be able to witness to the goodness of his Father through serving others,

1. Jesus spent time with people. Jesus was in close relationship with those who needed his help.
2. Jesus showed people sympathy. He wasn't distant or uncaring — people could see he cared!
3. Jesus helped people in practical ways.



In your Journal

Make a table with four columns like below. Each day, ask God the question, "Who can You serve through my hands, mouth and feet today?" Ask God to show you specific ways to serve those in need. Then, in your list, write their name and what God could do for them through you.

Family	Friends	Enemies	Others in need
Spend time to talk with my brother who has been looking sad recently.	Ask Mike if he needs to use my car while his is in the garage.	Ask _____ if I can help him in his duties at church when he is away on holiday.	Ask my neighbour if he needs help putting up his fence.