

HOW TO CHRISTIAN: A 21-DAY STUDY

This 21-day study has been created to help you understand "How to Christian." This study may not answer ALL of your questions, but our prayer is that it will help guide you to a better understanding of the hope we find in Jesus. In this study, we will focus on:

- The Basics of Christianity (Days 1-6)
- The Benefits of Spiritual Disciplines (Days 7-18)
- The Bible and Your Destiny (Days 19-21)

The Basics

The basics of Christianity are important for us to understand as we build our foundation on God's Word and begin to build a relationship with God. These basics will give us a lens that we will look through as we journey together and understand what it means to be a Christian in today's world.

Day 1 – The Bible

The Bible can be intimidating. It's large and complex. I often hear people say things like, "I don't know where to start." Or "I don't understand The Bible." Those are valid challenges so if that's you, don't feel bad. You're not alone. Let's begin with an explanation of what the Bible is, and how it was written.

The Bible is the story of Jesus. That's it. You might be asking, "but doesn't Jesus only show up like three-quarters of the way through The Bible, in the New Testament?" Well, kind of, but the entire Bible is the story of Jesus. The characters we read about are not just random people of history. They are a part of the lineage of Jesus. Starting in Genesis with Adam, all the way to Joseph and Mary, it is about the ancestry of Jesus, the prophetic words of His coming, and why we need Him in our life. It's important to understand that the Bible is not a comprehensive book of world history but rather a small portion of the most important part of history.

The Bible consists of 66 books, including more than 40 authors written over 1400 years, covering roughly 3,000 years of history. When you begin to understand the harmony and unity of Biblical literature, this fact is amazing!

The Bible is divided up like this: the first 39 books are the Old Testament (before Jesus was born). The first five books are called The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Next, we have 12 historical books (Joshua-Esther). Wisdom literature, or poetry (Job-Song of Solomon). Major Prophets (Isaiah-Daniel). Minor Prophets (Hosea-Malachi). The next 27 books are considered the New Testament (after Jesus was born), consisting of The Gospels (Matthew-John), The Early Church (Acts), Paul's Epistles (Romans-Philemon), General Writings of New Testament (James-Jude), End Times (Revelations).

The Bible, as we know it, was put together into one book around the time of 200 A.D. by a group of early church leaders. We believe the Bible was written by man and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The process of canonization was inspired by the Holy Spirit, from Genesis to Revelation, and is free from flaw.

The Bible is like our instruction manual on life. Although it does not give us answers to all of our questions or have a verse for every situation, it teaches us something even better. It teaches us about the heart of God. Once you know someone's heart, you understand the context of what they are saying, what they desire, and love. You can even know how they see the world. That's why many times, The Bible doesn't have to say something specific for us to know God's desire for our life.

For example, those who are married, if you know your spouse's heart, you can surprise them with a gift you know they'll love, or anticipate a need. You can do things for them you know will fill their soul. As you work to understand your spouse better, you can honor them and serve them without them having to tell you what they desire, specifically.

The Bible gives us a glimpse of God's heart. The more we understand the Bible, the more we know Him, and the more we can live according to His will and understand His longings for our life. For example, the Bible never says, "Don't run a red light." We know the heart of God honors authorities and cares of others; then we understand that the heart of God is for us to stop at a red light.

There are countless examples I could give, and the heart of God is an infinite well of wisdom and knowledge. We will never fully understand everything about God, which is good news! That means our journey of growing in relationship with Him is an endless journey full of good things.

Scripture of the Day:

"14 But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. 15 You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 17 God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." – 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Day 2 – Jesus

The Bible is the story of Jesus. It is important that we understand the person of Jesus. First, Jesus was a man. He was the manifestation of God. He was the walking and talking image of the invisible God, the firstborn in all creation. There is no Christian or Atheist historian who would argue that a man named Jesus lived in Israel during the first century. There is also no argument that Jesus was a significant influence, teacher, and leader.

John describes Jesus as the Word of God. As if God's words came to life, to build relationships, and to send a message. As you have probably heard the story in the past, Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was 100% man and 100% God. I know that does not add up with earthly math. Think about that for a while. 100% man means when he was born, he cried, he pooped, he sneezed, he had feelings and emotions, he went through puberty, he went to school and had friends, he played. He was tempted in every single way that you and I are tempted. That's why he can empathize with us. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as your Christmas nativity scene reminds you. Although he probably was not born on December 25th, sorry if that hurts your feelings. December 25th was chosen by the church of Rome in 336 A.D. during the rule of Constantine when he made Christianity the religion of the empire. He probably chose December 25th for some political reason. The best guess is that Jesus was born sometime in late spring or early summer.

Jesus' parents fled to Egypt for a few years to hide out because their life was in danger by Herod the Great, who heard about the coming king and felt threatened. After all, he was expecting a literal king. Herod the Great had all the children under the age of two killed to avoid any risk of dethronement. Therefore, Jesus' parents ran.

After a few years, they settled in Nazareth, which is southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was well known in his small town. When word started getting out that He was the son of God, the people that knew him growing up had a hard time believing it. However, this should not be discouraging to you, because by the end of Jesus' life, even his half-brother who wrote the book of James strongly believed he was the Son of God. I mean, it would have taken a miracle for my brother to believe I was the Son of God, and even then, I'm not sure he would buy it. So, we can know with confidence that something happened that was strong enough evidence for James not only to believe but be willing to die a martyr in the name of Jesus.

Despite the beautiful picture of Jesus carving wood, he was likely not a carpenter. More evidence shows that he was a builder, construction worker, possibly even specialized in mason work.

Some of these facts are just fun to know, but some of them are crucial to our relationship with God. First, it helps our understanding of what he experienced on the cross. Because of our sin, we deserved the harshest punishment that ultimately leads to death. For Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice that would take the place of all future sacrifices, he needed to experience the same pain that we would experience if we were to pay for our sins. So, when Jesus was on the cross, he was in pain, he cried, he bled just as you and I would. It was excruciating beyond belief. Then he died.

Second, because of Jesus' humanity, he can become a perfect example of what our life should resemble. If he was not human, then we could call it quits on trying to live like Him, but everything

Jesus did in His humanity, we are capable of doing. Living with compassion, love, humility, patience, kindness, and serving others. Jesus came to earth to recapture the authority we lost in sin so that he could give that authority to us. You have been given all of the power to live as Jesus lived, no matter how hard.

Scripture of the Day:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him, all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." – John 1:5

Day 3 – Sin

We read a lot about sin in the Bible, and that might make you cringe. You've probably sat in a church pew, heard a preacher bang a pulpit and yell, "The wages of sin are death!". It sounds scary, and without knowing the pastor, I'm guessing that was his or her goal. This is all true, the wages of sin are death, but those words come from Romans 6:23. The second part of that verse says, "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." More pastors should bang the pulpit and scream that part!

The word "sin" literally means to "miss the mark." If you can imagine an archer shooting an arrow at a target and missing, maybe by a little, maybe by a lot, but either way, he missed. Even the best archer in the world can't hit a bullseye every single time, yet that is what would be required of us to not experience death if it wasn't for the saving grace of God.

You see, God brings sin to the surface so that we can recognize our need for God. God desires more than anything to be in a relationship with you and me, and the only way we can be in a relationship with him is if we are willing to admit that we "miss the mark." It's the first step of the 12-steps for any recovery program, "The ability to recognize and admit that one is experiencing an addiction problem." Because it's only after we recognize and admit that someone can help us that we begin to heal. Have you ever been around someone unwilling to admit they are wrong? It's impossible to have a relationship with those types of people, and it's impossible for them to ever change.

Sin is not good, but the recognition of sin is very good. Because the recognition of sin is the first part of repentance, there is power in confession. It is the key that unlocks our relationship with the Lord. We see this in Genesis when God created Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. Adam and Eve hid in the garden after they sinned because that's what we do. We hide in shame when we sin and run away from community with God. When God came walking in the garden looking for his friends, he asked, "where are you?" God knew exactly where Adam and Eve were located. I mean, he is the creator of the universe. What he was asking was, "what is going on in your heart?". That is when Adam stepped out and confessed, "I am naked and afraid because I have sinned."

After Adam confessed, God punished them because there are always consequences to our sin. They were banned from the perfect garden. Yet what we see is that God followed them outside of the garden. He continued to be in community with them. Why? Because they were willing to recognize and admit they were in sin.

When we recognize and confess our sins, there may be some consequences, but that is the first step to being in community with God. Being in community with God repenting is better than not being in community with God because of denial.

We are always going to sin because we are human. No matter how hard we try, no matter how good an archer we are, we will miss the mark. But God has grace for us because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul addresses this, he says "look, you are going to sin, and God will forgive you, but don't use this as an excuse to keep on sinning, try your hardest not to sin and be a good ambassador for God."

When we sin, we recognize and admit it, then we turn them away (repent) and continue to obey and trust God.

Scripture of the Day:

"5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." – 1 John 1:5-10

Day 4 – Salvation and Baptism

Let's continue our discussion about sin and the grace that God has given us through his son Jesus Christ. When Adam and Eve brought sin into this world by disobeying God, this was known as the "fall of man." We broke our covenant with God and were no longer allowed to be in perfect community with Him because of our impure hearts. God is a perfect God. He cannot be around sin. It is impossible for Him. Yet he desired a relationship with us and our sinful hearts, so he had a plan. He planned that if Adam sinned and caused a separation between God and man, then He would send his one and only son, the second Adam, to live a perfect, sinless life and die as a sacrifice for our sins. When Jesus died on the cross, God was able to take out all of his wrath and our deserving punishment on his son so that we wouldn't have to receive the same punishment of death. But Jesus rose from the grave three days later and beat death. The Bible says if we believe and receive that, then we will be forgiven.

We are in need of a savior. The most important thing we can do in our life is to recognize our need for a savior. Not just once, but daily. We need God's grace. We can't do it without his grace. Sometimes screwing up is the best thing that can happen to us because it gives us an opportunity to be reminded that we aren't perfect, so we need to be forgiven. Salvation is when we recognize our need for a savior and believe that Jesus is that savior. Baptism is a public profession of that inward decision. Baptism is important for us because it does three things:

1. Baptism solidifies our decision publicly. There is something powerful about saying what we believe out loud. Baptism is symbolically proclaiming our faith out loud.
2. Baptism allows for accountability by proclaiming our faith out loud. We are telling our church family that we have committed to surrender our life to Jesus. That allows our family to help when we're struggling and gently remind us of the decision we have made.
3. Baptism is an opportunity to celebrate! Our church family wants to celebrate with us, and we should be celebrated. When we are baptized, it's an opportunity for our loved ones to encourage us and be excited for our step of faith.

When two people marry, they put on a wedding ring. They're still married without the ring, but the ring symbolizes to everyone else that they have made a covenant with their spouse. That is exactly like baptism. When we surrender our life to Jesus, we get baptized. We are saved without baptism, but baptism symbolizes to everyone else that we have made a covenant with God.

Scripture of the Day:

"And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." – Acts 2:38

Day 5 – The Holy Spirit

Do you cringe when you hear “Holy Spirit?” Maybe you imagine someone flopping around on the floor like a fish out of water. Let's be honest. The Holy Spirit has gotten a bad name in the circles of religion. We tend to treat Him like the crazy uncle of the family. We invite Him to the Christmas party because he's part of the family. Still, the whole time everyone is nervous about what He's going to do or say. But the Holy Spirit shouldn't be scary or weird. It is the greatest gift God has given us. To put it simply, the Holy Spirit is God's presence. Before Jesus, the only time man was able to experience God's presence was in the temple. A Holy Priest would have to make the proper sacrifice to enter into the Holy of Holies where God's presence resided. Jesus came as the perfect and final sacrifice. The Bible says the thick curtain that separated the Holy of Holies and the world was torn in two, allowing God's Spirit to now be available to all who receive Him.

When Jesus left the earth to ascend into heaven, he told his disciples that it was much better for him to leave. His leaving is what allowed us to enter into a relationship with the Holy Spirit. It's better because now everyone who has the Holy Spirit can experience God's presence where ever and whenever.

We receive the Holy Spirit whenever we surrender our life to Jesus. Still, the Bible makes it clear there are times when God will bless us with more of His presence to get us through difficult times. This matters because God's presence is the force that gives us strength, guidance, and the Fruit of Spirit. Ok, "fruit" is kind of a weird term. The Bible lists nine characteristics that we have when filled with the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Everyday we need at least one of those to get us through life!

We should not only embrace the Holy Spirit but also frequently ask the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit.

Scripture of the Day:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." – Galatians 5:22-23

Day 6 – Following Jesus

We talked about salvation and surrendering our life to God. But what does it mean to follow Jesus? When you read the Bible, we see the word "follow" a lot. This is in reference to a student following or learning under a "Rabbi" or a teacher. It was common practice in the Jewish community for young men to follow a Rabbi of their choosing to learn all of the Jewish ways and traditions. When we say, "follow Jesus," what we mean is to learn from Him so that we can accomplish the end goal, which is to become like Him.

Learning from Jesus:

When we want to learn from Jesus, the best place to start is to study about Jesus. That is why we read and become familiar with the Gospel books in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). These books are all different perspectives and accounts from Jesus' original followers. They talk about who Jesus was, how he spoke, how he acted, what his response was in different situations, how he treated others, who he loved, and who he rebuked. We also read important things he said about how we should live our life.

Becoming like Jesus:

To imitate Jesus in your life is the daily goal. The way we become like Jesus is by receiving the Holy Spirit. The act of sanctification (a very "churchy" word for becoming a new person) takes time. It is not a microwave meal. It's a crockpot meal. There will be days you feel like you are taking steps backward, there will be days you feel like you're taking small steps forward, there will be days you feel like you're not moving in either direction. I promise that if you practice following Jesus by learning about him and becoming like Him daily, you will not only see a transformation in your own life, but others will see it as well.

Scripture of the Day:

"12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk-in darkness but will have the light of life." – John 8:12

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

This section on spiritual disciplines helps you understand the reasoning behind the practices that we are called to as Christians and hopefully guide you in how we practically live these out. Spiritual disciplines can play the role of building a healthy lifestyle, continually recalibrating our soul back to God.

Day 7 – Prayer

Prayer is one of those things that we talk about all the time in church, but if we are honest, many of us don't know how to pray or even understand the point of prayer. Our best effort can sometimes be a wish list to God once a week, hoping one of them lands.

Even though God wants to hear from you and give you the desires of your heart, asking God for things is a small portion of prayer and is not even the primary point.

Prayer is about building a relationship with God. I build a relationship with my wife when I tell her about my day, my feelings, my lunch, and my meetings. I build a relationship with God by talking to Him about my day. My wife probably knew I went to work that day. We were likely texting each other about the events of the day, but there is still a connection that happens when I get to see her that evening and process through life. It's the same thing with God. Even though He knows exactly how my day went, there is a connection that happens in my relationship with Him when I take time to talk to Him. My marriage would inevitably suffer if I never spoke to my spouse. It would be a ridiculous thought to believe I could have any relationship with anyone I never spoke to. Unfortunately, some days we never talk to God yet wonder why we aren't growing in our faith.

Prayer is communication. Communication strengthens relationships. Communication with God builds a relationship with Him.

Don't let any of this intimidate you. I often say, "if you know how to worry, you know how to pray." When we worry about something, we think about our day, past, future, and process through our emotions. Well, that's precisely how we should pray, direct your thoughts and worries towards God, and you got it down. Worrying with God is encouraged in the Bible. God promises that we will find rest from our stress when we bring Him into our world of worries.

There are some really practical ways we can pray that helps guide us. Whether you are just starting out or having a rough day and need to go back to the basics, I would encourage you to use the A.C.T.S. acronym for prayer.

A – Adoration: Start your prayer off by praising God. Tell Him how good He is, how powerful He is, how gracious He is. It's important to make sure that when we pray, we are most definitely beginning a conversation with the creator of the universe, and that's a big deal! Let's make sure we recognize His awesomeness.

C – Confession: Take time to confess to God. Although this can be a sin that needs to be confessed to Him, it doesn't have to be. It can just be the state of your heart or emotions in that given moment. It's a time of authenticity, transparency, and truth. We come to God as our raw selves, and it lays the foundation for a healthy relationship surrounded by intimacy.

T – Thanksgiving: The Bible says that "thanksgiving is the gateway into his presence." Since prayer is about a relationship and a relationship is built on time together and intimacy, then let's enter into his presence by giving thanks! Take some time to tell Him all the things you are grateful for in life. This will also help change your Spirit for the day and give you a more positive perspective on just how good you have it. Prayer doesn't always change your circumstances but will always change your perspective.

S – Supplication: As you end your time in prayer, make sure you express to God the desires of your heart. He wants to hear them. The Bible says to ask, and you will receive. Which could also be written, "you may not get everything you want, but you won't get anything you don't ask for."

Scripture of the Day:

"1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." 2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:" 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'" – Luke 11:1-4

Examples of Prayer:

*(A) God, you are amazing. You are so good and gracious. I come to you completely humbled by your power. (C) I confess to you that I have been struggling with a negative attitude, my heart has not been in a good place lately, and I am sorry. I pray that you help me change that, for I know you have given me so much to be thankful for. (T) I thank you for my family, my job, my house, my safety, and my health. (S) I ask that you help me love my family well today and be productive at work. I give you all the glory, Amen.

Day 8 – Scripture Reading

Few things can transform a life, like reading scripture. Most people have a Bible lying around their house, yet The Bible is the last book they would pick up on any given day. It can seem intimidating, complicated, or even boring, but it doesn't have to be. Let's discuss why we should read scripture, and then we will look at some practical ways to begin reading the Bible.

The first reason we should read scripture is to hear God:

There are lots of ways we hear God's voice. He can speak to you my thoughts or ideas, He can speak to you through a friend, He can speak to you through a song. God can speak to you any way he'd like, He is God, and if He wants to use a talking donkey as He did in the book of Numbers, then He will. The Bible is a way God speaks to us. Often it is the most accurate. Why the most accurate? Because my thoughts can be ungodly, my friends can give bad advice, but the Word of God is always true, accurate, and consistent. So even when we hear God through other means, using scripture to cross-reference what you believe God is saying to you is always a good idea. If it lines up with scripture, great! If it doesn't, you know it wasn't God because He will never speak contradictory to the words He has already spoken in the Bible.

The second reason we read scripture is to be reminded of the truth.

When we read the Bible, it reminds us of what is true. Without a doubt, we live in a time where we need to hear the truth and hear it often. We have so much changing and conflicting information saturating our lives daily that we need to turn to the truth that will never change. The Bible reminds us of truths like who we are, who God is, and how we should live our life. Without biblical truths, our standard for living will always be changing. We will chase after a moving target of our purpose in life.

Now that we have covered why we read scripture let's talk about how to read scripture.

1. Read the Gospels: It's a good idea to start off reading one of the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Our lives should exemplify the heart of Jesus. Scripture helps us understand who Jesus was and how he responded and acted to the events of life. It will also give you an excellent filter for the rest of the Bible.
2. A little at a time: Reading the Bible is not a race. There is no need to read more than you can process. Read a few verses, then put it down and think about it.
3. Trust your heart: People always ask the question, "what does this verse mean?" – and the correct answer is, "what does it mean to you?" – That does not mean the Bible is relevant truth. However, each time we read it, God reveals something different to us, personally. God may want to reveal something to you about a verse that others would not see because they are not walking in your shoes. Don't underestimate your intelligence and ability to hear from God on what a specific verse means to you.
4. Ask practical questions: What does this verse say about mankind? What does this verse say about God? How can I practically apply this verse in my life today? These are all great

questions to ask after reading a verse or passage in the Bible. It can help take it from a good idea to something applicable in our life.

Scripture of the Day:

"16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Examples of Scripture Reading:

*Read 1 Chapter from the Old Testament and 1 Chapter from the New Testament (i.e., Genesis 1 & John 1)

*Use a Bible app for a daily devotional or 365 Bible Reading plan

*Read a few verses from one of Paul's books (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy)

Day 9 – Meditation

When you think about meditation, you typically think about some barefoot weirdo sitting with their legs crossed, hands out, humming like a generator with some incense in the corner. Yet, the Bible talks about meditating a lot. So, is this what God wants us to do?

There are two different types of meditation: Transcendental Meditation and Focused Meditation.

Transcendental meditation is where you try to completely rid your mind, body, and soul of any thoughts or noise. The goal is to empty yourself until you are just a "being." Although I can appreciate the discipline this would take, I think it can be unhealthy. Whenever we are quiet and empty, we open ourselves up to hear anything whispered into our hearts, including the lies of the enemy. As believers, I don't want to be empty. I want to be full of God's presence, joy, peace, and Spirit. Focused meditation is a healthier practice that can bring us closer to the Lord.

Focus meditation is what we read about in the Bible. It's where we choose something that is "excellent and praiseworthy" and spend time focusing on those holy things. For instance, this could be a Bible verse we want to repeat in our minds. Thinking about those scriptures over and over again help recognize them as truth and solidify them in our heart. Or sometimes, I like to do breathing exercises as I am practicing focus meditation. This is where I will breathe out slowly, verbally saying a phrase that encourages me, and then slowly breathing in verbally saying another phrase that will encourage me. I put this on repeat. Again, this helps me focus on true and Godly things. It recalibrates our soul to keep our lives focused on Jesus.

Scripture of the Day:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."
– Psalm 19:4

Examples of Meditation:

*Meditate on specific verses:

"For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." -
Philippians 2:13

"The joy of the Lord is my strength." - Nehemiah 8:10

*Breathing exercise on encouraging phrases for 5 minutes:

Breath in saying, "God is with me." – Breath out saying, "I am not alone."

Day 10 – Worship

No matter what denomination or theological belief, the common denominator in all Christian churches is that we sing. However, singing can be awkward, especially if you are a terrible singer. What's the point of singing, how does it help our faith, and why does every church do it?

Singing is an expression of joy. It is a way that we worship God, and it is a way God enjoys being worshipped, even if you don't have a good voice. Possibly the most powerful thing about singing is that you sing. You are required to open your mouth and actually speak the words.

You can meditate, pray, confess, celebrate and read scripture without ever opening your mouth. But singing is impossible unless you say the words. We know from The Bible that there is a great deal of power in our words.

But this isn't just a theory in the Bible. We know this from life experiences, too. We have all been very hurt by words that still keep us up at night, and we have also all been lifted up by words from others that still put a smile on our faces. We believe lies and insecurities are one of the reasons we have spoken those words to ourselves repeatedly. Likewise, the way we believe truth and good things is by speaking them to ourselves over and over again.

Singing words that are God-honoring is a great way to proclaim biblical truths in your life.

I often say that it's even more important to sing to God when you don't believe them because it is the act of singing them that will move you closer to believing them.

There is also something powerful about doing it with other people. Whether it's in your home, online, or a church building when we gather together and proclaim those true words in unity, it not only glorifies God, but it encourages us. It reminds us that we are not the only one who believes those true words but also needs those true words in our life.

Scripture of the day:

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation." - Psalms 91:1

Examples of Worship:

*Put worship music on in your house, sing loudly with your family and kids.

*Join a church service online, when the church worships, don't just watch but participate in singing along

Day 11 – Fasting

"Fasting" is like a curse word for many of us. When we think about not eating for a period of time, it can make our stomach hurt, literally! Fasting is a discipline that has been practiced for as long as humans have been around, and the Bible mentions it a lot.

Fasting is not about withholding something from yourself but instead eliminating a distraction so that you can hear God more clearly.

You can fast from your phone, T.V., a hobby, food, drink, and anything else that might be a luxury or something you indulge in. The point is to take the time you would typically spend doing that activity and instead pray or listen to the Lord. When we fast, we are emptying our flesh so that the Lord can fill up our Spirit.

Fasting from food is something we often see in the Bible. We have to consider that in the Bible, there were not as many distractions as we have today. Otherwise, I believe Jesus would have talked more about fasting from social media and T.V.!

Although food is a great option, it would not be wise to fast from food unless you feel physically capable of not eating for a time. You can fast for weeks, days, hours, or however long you feel led by the Lord.

Fasting is about surrendering your heart to God so that we turn to Him instead of the other idols we tend to turn to in time of need or stress.

Scripture of the Day:

"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4

Examples of Fasting:

- *24-Hour fast from digital devices (TV, Phone, Computer)
- *3-day fast from food (use the time you would normally eat to meditate and pray)
- *7-day social media fast (walk through a specific bible study during this week)

Day 12 – Confession

In Genesis, when Adam and Eve were in the garden and disobeyed God, their relationship was broken. God came to the garden to look for them. As Adam and Eve hid, God said to them, "Where are you?" Let's be honest, God, the creator of mankind and creator of the universe, knew precisely where they were. He was not asking, "Where is your location?" He was asking, "What's going on in your heart?"

Adam and Eve came out of hiding and spilled the beans. They told him everything, they confessed. It was at that moment that God punished them for disobeying and banned them from the garden. Still, God left the garden with them so that he could pursue a relationship with them through the redemption plan of Jesus Christ.

Confession is a powerful tool. Without confession, we will spend our whole life doing exactly what Adam and Eve did, running and hiding from shame and embarrassment and never being able to experience a true relationship with God or others.

Confession is the bridge that connects knowing about someone to knowing the heart of someone.

Confession of our sin is important because it is the response to recognizing sin in our life, which opens the gate to forgiveness. But confession is much more than just giving God or a priest a list of all your wrongdoings. It is the opening of our heart and soul so that we can be filled up with the presence and grace of God.

When we live a lifestyle of confession, it keeps us from hiding in isolation. The danger of isolation is being hidden. When we isolate, we are not accountable to anyone. Most of the time, the "lowest points" in our life happen in hiding and isolation. Likewise, our most extraordinary moments in life occur in openness and community.

Scripture of the Day:

"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)

Examples of Confession:

- *Go to God and verbalize the areas of disobedience in your life so that you can receive his forgiveness.

- *Tell someone else about those weak areas in your life so that "you will receive prayer and find healing" (James 5:16)

- *Have a confidant (friend, pastor, therapist) that you regularly talk with to recognize the state of your heart and emotions. This can be a proactive practice to avoid slipping into isolation.

Day 13 – Community

When you think about community, what do you think about? Do you think about hanging out with your friends? What do you think about accountability? Do you think about worshipping with other believers?

I often think about being fully known and fully loved. When God created us, he created us to be in community, with Him and with others. You desire relationships. Even if you are the most introverted, shy individual, you still desire deep relationships. It's just how you were made. You were made in God's image, and even God himself desires community within the trinity and with his children.

The problem is we live in a world saturated with culture, reinforced by the enemy, that tells us if we are ever fully known, we will never be fully loved. Therefore, we often find more comfort in isolation because we believe it is risk-free. But the truth is, it is not risk-free. When you choose to live in isolation, you are more at risk of being led astray from God and the destiny He has for you.

Satan likes it when you are alone because away from community, there is no protection. There is no one to remind you of the truth and keep you safe in accountability. If your anything like me, some of the worst decisions I have ever made were made in isolation.

God created community for us to be protected and so that we would have an earthly picture of His acceptance. True community is when you find the love of friends that is stronger than mistakes made. True community is when others know you fully and still love you unconditionally. It is not only a picture of his acceptance and love. It also brings great joy.

Godly community can look like all of the things I mentioned at the beginning: sharing a meal with friends, studying God's word in a small group, corporate worship, a casual hang out. But Godly community only happens when you do those things with people that know you and love you just as God knows you and loves you.

Scripture of the Day:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." – Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Examples of Community:

*Start a group text with the people you want to be in your community. Share moments and events that happen in your daily life. Begin to build family and trust so that you can be praying for each other or help each other in time of need.

*Have a monthly dinner party with your community, and each month rotate the host. Take that time to "check-in." Share what has happened in your life since your met and celebrate or pray with one another.

Day 14 – Celebration

We live in a world where criticism reigns. We have people who are professional critics of the entertainment and food industry. Adding to that, we have the internet, which gives people the freedom to be critical of anything and everything they come across, even if they have no affiliation with what they are criticizing.

Criticism is also incredibly contagious; there is a fleshly desire for us to feel better about ourselves. One of the easy but cowardly ways to accomplish that goal is to make others feel lesser than yourself. Your kids might have even experienced immature criticism, which we call bullying in today's culture.

The opposite of criticism is celebration. Celebrating one another is just as contagious. It's slightly more challenging for us to celebrate others when it seems like no one else is interested in celebrating. But like everything else in our faith, God often calls us to be counter-cultural, even if that means riding solo for a while.

We see throughout scripture that celebration is a key part of following God. The Israelites celebrated when God did miracles for them in the wilderness. The Jewish people celebrate numerous events to remember how good God had been. The angels celebrated when Jesus was born. Jesus celebrated at a wedding and attended the Jewish celebrations. Mary Magdalene celebrated the empty tomb. The heavens celebrate when one surrenders their life to Christ.

Though each of these celebrations was for different reasons and held differently, they all have one thing in common. They are all centered around the goodness of God.

Celebration is a recognition of God's faithfulness in our life.

Celebration is crucial in a world full of criticism. What we spend time thinking about and talking about will dictate the posture of our heart. So when we choose to be critical, our hearts will have a posture of criticism. But when we spend time celebrating, our hearts will have a posture of celebration.

Having a heart of celebration is good for our soul. It encourages us to keep moving in the right direction! When someone speaks negativity into my life, it makes me want to stop in my tracks and stop doing whatever I was doing. But when someone celebrates me and my work, it gives me hope and encouragement to go further faster!

When we celebrate God's faithfulness often, for ourselves and with others, it is the ultimate encouragement to our souls to keep chasing after Godly things.

So, let's celebrate. Let's celebrate more than we criticize. It will not only give us a more abundant life on earth, but it will also prepare us for heaven, where we will spend eternity celebrating God's glory.

Scripture of the Day:

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." – Psalm 118:24

Examples of how to celebrate:

*Take some time in the mornings and give thanks to God for His goodness. Celebrate how faithful he has been and remember his good works in your life.

*At the end of the day, share with your family and friends the great things that happened in your day, even if that great thing is that you are alive and well.

*Worship your guts out during a church service. Most worship songs are words of celebration. Do more than simply standing there and listening. Sing along with the worship pastor, saying the words out loud, proclaiming them over your life.

Day 15 – Solitude

Solitude. Privacy. Aloneness. For some of you, these words make you cringe. Yet, solitude is not only a spiritual discipline. It is also where we experience intimate moments with God. It's important to note that solitude is not isolation.

Isolation is spending long seasons alone and away from God's presence. Solitude is spending short moments alone and in God's presence.

Perhaps, we see one of the most powerful moments of isolation in the Bible when Jesus escaped to the garden the night before his crucifixion. Where Jesus stressed, cried, begged, prayed, surrendered, submitted, celebrated, acknowledged, grieved, spoke, and listened. Certain conversations with God can only be had in the silence of isolation. Yet, we live in a world where business and noise is almost impossible to escape, right? Maybe, isolation is just too intimidating for us to enter, so we choose to stay in the loudness of our lives. In the noise, we can blissfully ignore the words God wants to speak into our life.

We think of being alone with God as a scary moment where we might be disciplined or punished. When I was a kid, my dad used to say to me, "we need to talk." He often led me to a chair in his bedroom and confronted me on something wrong I did.

There are times God convicts us when we are in solitude. That is not why he desires to be alone with us. He wants to be alone with us the same way we like to be alone with the ones we love.

Spending time alone with the Lord is one of the ways we stay connected to His Spirit. It's an opportunity to listen, be encouraged, get to know who he is as our Father. I frequently hear people talk about feeling disconnected from God; my first question for them is, "how much time do you spend with Him alone?" We cannot grow in our relationship with our spouse without spending quality time with them. We can't expect to grow in our relationship with God without spending quality time with Him.

Scripture of the Day:

"36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." – Matthew 26:36-39

Examples of Solitude:

*Find a quiet place and sit down, no phone, no music, no distractions. Just listen in silence to what you hear or feel.

*Put on some worship music in a place alone. With music playing in the background, profess all the things you love about God. Then out loud, say the things he loves about you.

*Pair Solitude with scripture reading or meditation. Most spiritual disciplines are more powerful in solitude.

Day 16 – Sabbath

In the book of Genesis, we see that God created the world in 6 days, then on the 7th day, he took a Sabbath. Taking a Sabbath is a command from God and also a spiritual discipline that we see practiced by Christians. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat – meaning to "set apart as holy." The way a Sabbath is observed is by resting and worshipping God.

We rarely see Christian practice a Sabbath as it was initially intended. With work, sports tournaments, and errands to get done, finding one day a week to rest seems impossible. But what if I told you that observing a Sabbath in your life had nothing to do with rest and had everything to do with trust?

Think about this, when we aren't willing to rest one day a week, what are we saying? We are saying that maybe even the world will not continue to function without your efforts on that day. That's quite a prideful statement to make. As if the destiny of the universe depends upon your need to shop for groceries, make that work call, or attend that soccer game.

Sabbath has proven to be extremely healthy physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. It is also a statement to God that you trust he is in control. God is the one that makes the world go round. God is the one who holds the destiny of your career and the future of your children.

Scripture of the Day:

"There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the LORD." – Leviticus 23:3

Examples of Sabbath:

*Choose a day of the week. It does not have to be Sunday, where you don't work. Instead, find some relaxing activities that you restful doing by yourself or with your family. Spend all day in quality time with your loved ones, only doing what you enjoy.

*Go away to a place of solitude. Take it as a time to be quiet and peaceful, away from all the noise. It may feel awkward at first, but many of us don't know how to slow down and rest. You will learn.

Day 17 – Serving

The epitome of following Jesus is adopting an attitude of servanthood. From loving your neighbors to turning the cheek, to treating others how you want to be treated, to going the extra mile. It's the decision to put others first. Being selfless is one of the ways we show others the message of Christ. Serving others should have no agenda. It's an attitude of always loving others more than you love yourself.

There are two different ways the Bible tells us to go about serving:

1. Looking for ways to serve the oppressed: The Bible is clear that as Christians, we should pro-actively looking for a way to bless the orphans, widows, homeless, poor, hungry, enslaved, and oppressed. This is where partnering with a local church or local ministry can be helpful. It is important that we help those in need because those in need are important to God. Jesus was always an advocate for the marginalized, and so should we!
2. To serve those in our daily life: Every day in your work, in your home, and your community, we come across opportunities to serve the people in our daily lives. I believe that the people we love the most can be the most difficult people to serve. Some day's it is harder to clean the house for your family than it is to serve hot meals to the homeless. We take the people in our lives for granted, and the more you know someone, the harder it can be to serve them unconditionally. That is why it's important to understand that serving is not an agenda but an attitude.

Scripture of the Day:

"24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" – Matthew 16:24-26

Examples of Serving:

*Call a local church or non-profit that does something you are passionate about, ask them when the next volunteer opportunity will be for you to serve with them.

*Do something kind for your spouse or family that they would normally do for themselves. Remind them that you love them, and you are there to serve them.

Day 18 – Financial Generosity

Generosity is my least favorite subject because I have never been a good giver. This has always been an area that has stretched me and broken me at times. It feels like money is the hardest to be generous with when there is an unexpected bill on my counter every month. Cars break down, medical emergencies happen, Christmas always breaks the bank, and your kids need new shoes. So why would God ask me to give a percentage of my finances when he knows I need it?

Well, probably because our finances often are the hardest to give. And if we can practice giving our money, then we can give anything.

Let me first say something that may surprise you. God does not care how much money you give. God does not need your money, and God will not bless you more if you give more money.

God only cares about one thing: your heart.

God desires that we surrender our entire life to Him. It is difficult to call Him "Lord of our life" if He is only Lord of some of our life. That includes your family, your job, your future, and of course, your finances. Often, we only give God what we are comfortable with and keep the things we want to control. But that's not part of the deal. A relationship with God is not a buffet line; you don't get to choose the things you want and leave the ones you don't, no matter how unappetizing it might look.

The good news is, God is trustworthy with your entire life. He will provide for your needs in life. That's a promise. So do not fear. Trust Him. Trust Him with your future, and trust Him with your finances.

Begin to pray and ask God how much He wants you to give out of your income. Pray for a long time, talk to your loved ones and ask them to pray with you. Come up with a number or percentage and do it. Then watch and see how God takes care of you. You will get great joy in not only watching God do miracles in your life but also you will find joy in giving to a mission and vision greater than yourself.

Scripture of the Day:

7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. – 2 Corinthians 9:7

Examples of Financial Giving:

*Ask God to give you a percentage of your salary that you should give. Ask, listen and respond. Feel free to start small. It is better to begin giving a little amount than to not give at all. Do not be embarrassed or ashamed of what you give a month. God loves progress.

*Give to a specific project or cause. Call a local church or non-profit organization that you like. Ask them what specific projects or causes you can give a one-time gift. Sometimes it is fun to give to something very specific and see that event come to fruition.

YOUR DESTINY

Our destiny and purpose in life is something that has mystified man since the beginning of time. But we have the Bible, and the Bible has made it very clear to us what our destiny is. Because of the world we live in, we can be sidetracked to believe purpose lies in success, money, fame, or relationships. I hope that this section clarifies for you that not only does your purpose have little to do with your earthly accomplishments but rather kingdom callings. Those kingdom callings will give you more joy and fulfillment than anything else you can ever seek after in life.

Day 19 – Destiny for Christians

Everyone has a destiny in life because we are all on a journey. You will arrive somewhere, the question is, will you arrive at the right destiny?

To get to the right place, you have to know where you're going. As followers of Jesus, we have two destinies in which we aim, your general destiny and your specific destiny.

Your general destiny is the destiny that God has called all followers of Jesus to arrive. It's the destiny that we find in the great commission, the last words of Jesus to his disciples before he left earth to sit at the right hand of God the Father. His words told us to make disciples or call them at Cross Timbers, difference makers. It is for us to give hope to others, exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit daily so that others can see there is a better way of life. This is something all followers of Jesus are called to do.

God has a specific plan for your life. It is what he created you to do. This can have something to do with your job, but it can also have nothing to do with your job. In the Bible, we see time and time again that people were very effective in making disciples and worked a "normal" job. Abraham was a farmer and investor. Paul was a tentmaker. Jesus was a construction worker. Peter was a fisherman. We need to break the stigma that you must be in vocational ministry to succeed at your specific calling. Sometimes your job is the very tool God wants you to use to accomplish your specific calling in advancing the kingdom. The people at your workplace, school, or home are part of your area of influence. These places are areas in which God has trusted you to steward His message.

An easy way to begin finding your specific calling in life is to consider your G.P.S. Your G.P.S. is your Gifts, Passion, and Story. What does a G.P.S. do? It gets you to your destiny.

Scripture of the Day:

For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. – Romans 11:29

Day 20 – G.P.S.

Gifts, Passion, and Story are how we begin the process of finding our specific calling in life. Our G.P.S. gets us to one of our destinies.

1. Gifts – These are the things in life that you are naturally good at doing. Don't over-spiritualize this. Just think about what are talents that you have. This could be anything like decorating, drawing, working on vehicles, speaking, singing, guitar, hospitality, teaching, kindness, sports, writing, and many more.
2. Passion – Think about something that you are incredibly passionate about. Again, don't over-spiritualize it. Are you passionate about helping others, seeing people reach their full potential, ministering to kids, feeding the homeless, rescuing human trafficking, orphans, widows, elderly, music, worship, food, art, sales, or others?
3. Your Story – Writing down our story can be challenging. Still, it is a crucial part of understanding our specific destiny in life. Everyone has a story. God has allowed you to walk through the peaks and valleys of your story so that you can use your experiences to relate to others. Your story will enable you to empathize with others currently or previously walking through similar peaks and valleys. Take some time to think about and write down your story. Of course, your story is not over, God is still at work in your life, and he will bring other experiences to you that He will use.

When you're done considering your G.P.S., look at them in one picture. Maybe you're a mechanic that is passionate about cars. Because you connected with your father while working on old cars, you desire to help other men connect with their sons over cars. Maybe God has called you to join or start a father/son program where you teach them to change a tire or oil so that they can bond in that experience.

Maybe you're good at decorating and passionate about making your home feel hospitable. Perhaps God is calling you to help single moms who are struggling to put food on the table and don't have time in the day to make their home feel cozy and warm for their family at the end of a hard week.

Maybe you're good at playing guitar and passionate about music, perhaps because you went through a difficult season of grief where you connected with God through worship. You want to help others do the same, so you join the worship band at church.

These are just examples, and the combination and possibilities are endless. These are questions only you can answer but can be precisely what you need to begin experience the abundant life of walking towards your destiny.

Scripture of the Day:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. – Ephesians 4:1-3

Day 21 – Keep going

We will have good days and bad days throughout life, but our trust and dependence are not based on our circumstances. They are based on the foundations of Christ and the greatness of our God. We can experience peace and joy even in the most challenging circumstances as long as we understand that he is our source.

I say that to encourage you in this, keep going. Don't ever give up. We won't always understand how God works, but if we understood everything about God, he wouldn't be a very good God.

God has already given you His all. He gave you his son. Still, I promise that if you give Him your all, you will not only experience an abundant and free life on earth, you will get to experience the same in heaven for eternity. He will one day look you in the eyes and say, "well done, good and faithful servant."

Scripture of the Day:

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead."

– Philippians 3:13