

GOD'S "GREATER THINGS"

A Calling - A Lifestyle - A Journey



"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." John 14:12

Word Training - 2020

— THE —
WORD
MINISTRY
"It's a lifestyle!"

Contents

GOD'S CALL TO "WHOMEVER"	Page 3
WEEK ONE – Team Practices & Small Group Breakout	Page 7
GOD'S GLORIOUS LIFE	Page 9
WEEK TWO - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout	Page 13
TRAIN WITH JESUS	Page 15
WEEK THREE - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout	Page 27
DOING THE WORKS OF JESUS	Page 29
WEEK FOUR – Team Practices & Small Group Breakout	Page 33
DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY	Page 35
WEEK FIVE - Small Group Breakout	Page 40
ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES	Page 43

Week One – (Read before Team Meeting)

GOD'S CALL TO "WHOEVERS"

Many voices promise to give the "good life," but none so powerful as the voice of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who speaks directly to the deep desires of our souls, souls that desire more than existence, souls that desire to become whole. As Jesus talks about the "abundant life," His words awaken in us the realization that we have often settled for less. Unlike other voices offering answers, programs and seminars, Jesus offers Himself as the means to this life.

For three short years, Jesus cast a vision of what this new life would encompass. He called people to become His apprentices so they could learn to live this "abundant life" through a relationship with him.

Even more remarkable, God's love for you has nothing to do with your past. Neither your faithlessness nor unfaithfulness alters God's love in the slightest degree. As the father's love in the parable of the prodigal son, God's love is absolutely unconditional, unlimited, and unimaginably extravagant.

The call of Jesus is astonishing as you consider who He offers His call to. Look closely at these quotes below that come from Jesus and notice what word jumps out of these passages.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. — John 3:36 NIV

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. — John 4:14 NIV

Whoever comes to Me, I will never drive away. — John 6:37 NIV

Whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. — John 11:26 NIV

Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. — Revelation 22:17 NKJV

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. — John 3:16 NIV

Max Lucado says, "Whoever makes it clear: God exports His grace worldwide. For those who attempt to restrict it, Jesus has a word: whoever. Whoever unrolls the welcome mat of Heaven to humanity. Whoever invites the world to God, Jesus could have so easily narrowed the scope, changing whoever into whatever. "Whatever Jew

believes" or "Whatever woman follows me". But He used no qualifier. The pronoun is wonderfully indefinite. After all, **who isn't a whoever?** The word sledgehammers racial fences and dynamites social classes. It bypasses gender borders and surpasses ancient traditions. We humans aren't prone to this "whoever" policy. We're inclined to pecking orders. We love the high horse. The boy over the girl or the girl over the boy. The affluent over the destitute. The educated over the dropout. The old-timer over the newcomer. The Jew over the Gentile. Whoever! It's a powerful word. It includes all of us."

***"The pronoun is wonderfully indefinite.
After all, who isn't a whoever?"***

What a fantastic call Jesus extends to us all. There is no reason for staying away because this call is for everyone. And here is what is truly staggering about this call to the "whoever". This call of Jesus isn't intended just to get us into Heaven but offers much more. It opens the door to a glorious new identity and future for all who answer His invitation to put their faith in Him.

There is a phrase in Acts 4:13 that always stops me dead in my tracks. The phrase "they took note that these men had been with Jesus." The point made in this passage is although these disciples were uneducated, ordinary men, because they had been with Jesus, they were changed. Their strength and boldness reminded the Jewish Council of Jesus. It is inspiring to know that the source of the disciples' courage and confidence was a direct result of the time they had spent with Jesus. They had lived with Jesus, learned His ways, and observed His interactions with people. For three years, they sat at Jesus' feet, followed Him from town to town, watched Him live His life in relationship to God His Father and to other people. For three years, He trained them to be like Him in behavior, purpose, and character. The authorities looked at these men and realized they had been with Jesus. Suddenly it made sense—the only reasonable explanation for their behavior.

We, too, can be with Jesus. We can sit at His feet, follow Him from morning to night, and become His apprentices today. He wants to train us to become increasingly more like Himself in our behavior, love, purpose, and character. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many of us aren't comfortable with our life and all that we hoped to become as Christians. We love Jesus and believe in Him, but our belief hasn't taken us as far as we expected. The "abundant life" Jesus promised seems like something that belonged to a different era, but sadly, not to ours. We profess faith but have a hard time demonstrating the abundant life personally. We live with a version of Christianity that assures us, without hope of freedom in our relationships and our life. For many Christians, this leads to quiet despair and deep frustration.

Dallas Willard aptly described the futility of our present version of Christianity with this statement, "I would rather have a car that runs than a good insurance policy on a vehicle that doesn't."

So how does a "whoever" who has put their faith in Christ experience all that Jesus offers? The simple answer is one day at a time from morning to night. Brother Lawrence, a lay brother who was a cook and dishwasher in a Carmelite monastery in Paris, called it "Practicing the Presence of God". He learned to practice what he called "a habitual, silent, secret conversation of the soul with God". The Apostle Paul offers us the advice of doing everything in Jesus' name, meaning to do everything the way Jesus would do it if He were in your place. The only way this is possible is to train and grow in our relationship with Him daily.

Discipleship to Jesus Christ isn't a static state but a dynamic, ongoing, faith-based relationship with Him. To the weary and heavy laden, Jesus said, "Come to me ... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). To the thirsty, He said, "Come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'streams of living water will flow from within him'" (John 7:37-38). To the fishermen, He said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). The first step of discipleship is coming to Jesus in faith.

A journey that started with the most fantastic invitation to all the "whoevers" who place their faith in Jesus Christ moves us toward our true identity and glorious calling. It's a partnership. We never are asked to go it alone. Our journey is entering into a process of building a relationship with Jesus and His people. As disciples of Jesus, we become obedient to everything that Jesus taught. Many believe this life is beyond them or isn't possible. But Paul told the Ephesians (5:1), "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." That is the goal, and with God's Holy Spirit in each of us, we should never settle for less. Ordinary people in everyday surroundings can live from the abundance of God's Kingdom, letting the Spirit and the actions of Jesus be the natural outflow from their lives. "The 'tree' can be made good, and the fruit will then be good as a matter of course" (Matthew 12:33). This new life that God imparts and Jesus called the "abundant life" is available to each of us who put our faith in Jesus.

"C. S. Lewis writes, our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and "trying to carry it out." Rather, "The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to 'inject' His kind of life and thought, His Zoe [life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live person. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin."

Jesus says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me – and I in him – bears much

fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing." The life Jesus describes isn't impossible, according to Him. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to empower our lives and finish this journey.

Our world has lied to us, and we have come to believe that the way we find meaning is through the things we have, what we look like, and our accomplishments in life. The world offers us a fragile identity and offers us nothing substantial to build our life on.

David Benner says in his book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, "Christians affirm a foundation of identity that is unique in the marketplace. Whether we realize it or not, our being is grounded in God's Love. The generative Love of God was our origin; the embracing Love of God sustains our existence; the inextinguishable Love of God is the only hope for our fulfillment. Love is our identity and our calling, for we are children of love. Created from love, of love, and for love, our existence makes no sense apart from Divine Love. Neither knowing God nor knowing self can progress very far unless it begins with a knowledge of how deeply God loves us. Until we dare to believe that nothing can separate us from God's Love — nothing that we could do or fail to do, nor anything that could be done by anyone else to us (Romans 8:31-39) - we remain in the elementary grades of the school of Christian spiritual transformation. For our knowledge of God's Love to be truly transformational, it must become the basis of our identity. Our identity is who we experience ourselves to be — the "I" each of us carries within. An identity grounded in God would mean that when we think of who we are, the first thing that would come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God."

One of the key tasks of our discipleship to Jesus is the discovery of our identity and calling. This calling is realized by us answering the call of Jesus to abide in Him - daily, weekly, and for the rest of our lives. Have you reaffirmed that call in your life?

REFLECTION:

WHAT DO YOU WANT? The very first thing Jesus asked his soon-to-be disciples was, "What do you want?" (John 1:37). Over and over again he asked them about their desires: "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6). If Jesus were to ask you this very question as you start your journey on the Word Team, how would you answer this question in your own life? If you have a hard time with this question, stop and ask the Holy Spirit to help you answer it.

Write your answer here:

WEEK 1 - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout

PRACTICING PRAYING - TEACH US TO PRAY

I love the fact that the Lord's Prayer comes to us through a disciple's desire to connect with God as Jesus did. "Lord, teach us to pray " (Luke 11:1). Jesus gave the disciples a spiritual practice to learn and do. He offered them a prayer to say. There was no seminar on prayer. No steps or techniques for talking to God. Through praying this prayer, the disciples had access to the same relationship with the heavenly Father that Jesus did.

Question: What is Jesus teaching the disciples in this prayer He gave them and us?

Practice praying this prayer to yourself. Then, as a group pray it together.

“This, then, is how you should pray:
‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’”
(Matthew 6:9-13)

Small Group Breakout - Week 1

Discover - Read this passage: John 1:35-39

Work through these discussion questions:

1. In vs. 35, John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. Why did the disciple immediately follow Jesus? What were they looking for in Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus ask the disciples of John what they wanted? How is the question also important today in our lives?
3. What does the answer of the disciples of John reveal about themselves and what they think about Jesus?
4. If Jesus was to ask you this very question as you start your journey on the Word Team, how would you answer this question in your own life?

NOTES:

Week Two – (Read before Team Meeting)

GOD'S GLORIOUS LIFE

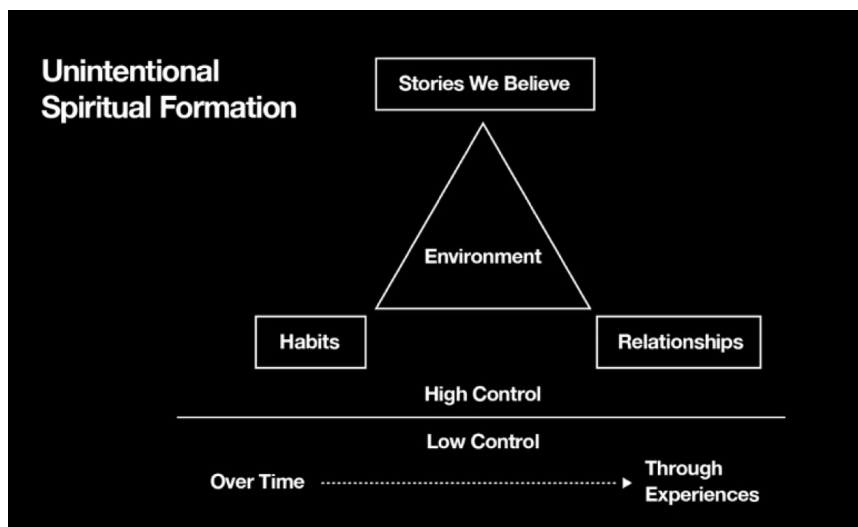
God offers to all who put their faith in him, the lifestyle of Jesus. It's the easy yoke of the Kingdom of God present in our life now and forever. Jesus says,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

The offer of the easy yoke, like his call to follow him, is made to us in the middle of this life where we labor and bear impossible burdens and cry out for rest. So how are we to experience the “abundant life” Jesus offers? We must understand “saving faith” is to be confident in Jesus Christ, the whole person, and not just in some part of what He did or His teaching alone. The secret of the easy yoke: the secret involves living as He lived in the entirety of His life—adopting His overall lifestyle. Following “in His steps” cannot be considered with behaving as he did when he was “on the spot.” To live as Christ lived is to live as He did all His life.

What I am describing is choosing to become intentional in how we live in relationship with Jesus Christ. John Mark Comer, in his series of messages called *“Practicing the Way”*, offers two diagrams that help explain why many Christians never experience this full and abundant life that Jesus promises we have through Him.

This first diagram is called Unintentional Spiritual Formation.



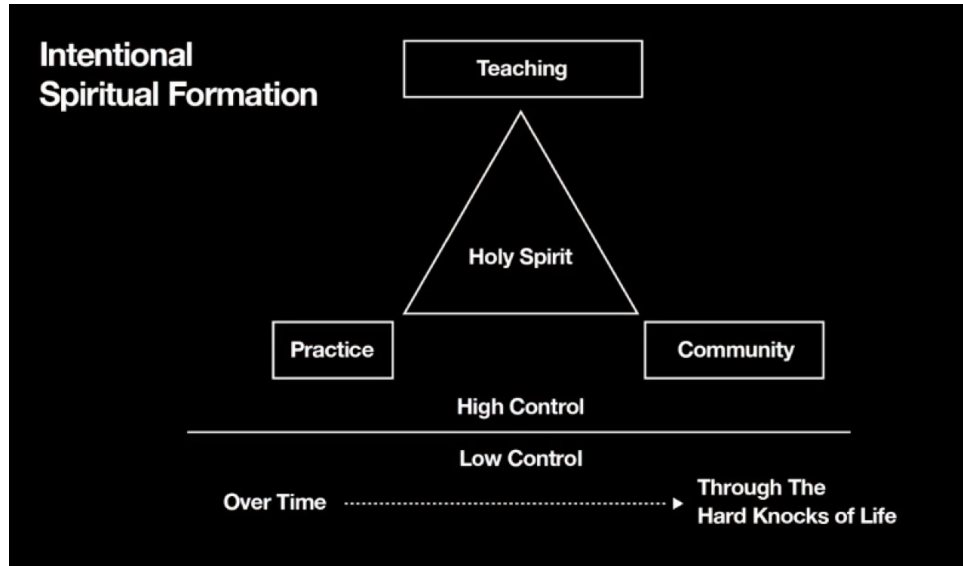
We all experience Spiritual Formation, the process of being changed and shaped spiritually is happening to each of us. The issue is, what kind of spiritual formation are we experiencing? The above diagram shows what happens when we are unintentional in our spiritual formation. We all have stories we have come to believe. These stories come from our family history, culture, and our ideas. These stories shape our understanding of who we are and what we believe about ourselves.

For example, if you believe the story that the world and life is an accident that happened billions and billions of years ago, how does that shape you intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually? The stories we believe all shape who we are becoming in our life. Besides, we have also developed certain habits and practices in life that we believe help us accomplish what we see as important. These habits reflect our beliefs, and they also shape us spiritually. Add to this picture our different relationships in life, it becomes easy for us to see how the three elements in John Mark Comer's diagram create an environment that is shaping and developing us into the person we are becoming spiritually.

Unintentional spiritual formation is a dangerous lifestyle, and it is not the kind of lifestyle Jesus calls us to. Yet in some Christians, that is how they have been living. Dallas Willard summarizes the outcome of living in an unintentional life with these words, "Your present system is giving you the kind of life it is designed to. Our world lives by its kingdom, and Man's kingdom produces exactly the kind of person and people we see all around us. We rejected God's rightful rule in the garden, and now we daily live with the result of living our lives separated from our God and Creator." (*The Divine Conspiracy*, by Dallas Willard)

Our primary goal as followers of Jesus is intentionally learning to live in a constant state of connection to the Father through the Holy Spirit. How do we accomplish this in our life? We must invite Him into everything, and in every moment. And we must choose to be, "At home and with Jesus; at work and with Jesus; talking with a friend and with Jesus; texting a family member and with Jesus." (Quote from John Mark Comer's *Practicing the Way* - week 5) To accomplish this, we must become intentional with our spiritual formation.

The second diagram shows what intentional spiritual formation looks like for the disciple of Jesus.



We must choose to accept and believe in the true story of God concerning who we are, where we have come from, and who we are in God's kingdom. God's Word reveals one unified story from Genesis to Revelation that leads to Jesus.

We need to intentionally put ourselves under the teachings of God's Word and let it shape how we see ourselves, each other and our world.

We are called to adopt the practices of Jesus and how He lives His life and make them ours. And we need God's kind of community and relationships. What is fundamentally different from this approach to spiritual formation for the disciple of Jesus is we intentionally choose it but never by our strength alone. What makes it truly Christian is that we are in union with God's Holy Spirit, who brings all these elements into a life-changing transformation in Christ. Change will take time, but God is patient and filled with grace. Our part is to be intentional, but it is never something we do alone.

In Philippians, Paul describes the right balance, "So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort – for the sake of His good pleasure – is God." (Philippians 2:12-13)

To Paul, those who follow Jesus must be intentional so they can become fully trained. And Paul also points out that God helps us to make this possible in each of our lives. We never do this alone but in partnership with our loving God.

Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrased version of Romans 12:1-2, says this, "Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:1-2, The Message)

I love Peterson's way of expressing the intentionality Paul encourages in Romans 12:1-2 to all who put their faith in Christ. The writer of Hebrews simplifies our need to be intentional by saying, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before Him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

"The disciple of Jesus is someone who has become so overcome with Christ, that they want to be like him. And when they look at Jesus and His kingdom all they can say is, "I must have all of Jesus."

God's call to us is nothing short of a full-on transformation. And this call will involve us surrendering ourselves to the life, teachings, and love of our gracious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Indeed, God has given us a glorious calling.

REFLECTION:

Read Philippians 2:12-13. When you consider your relationship to Jesus, are you comfortable describing it with the word, "partnership?" What word would be descriptive of how you see yourself in your relationship with Jesus?

Write your answer here:

WEEK 2 - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout

PRACTICING READING GOD'S WORD

Reading of God's Word is rooted in the assurance that every part of the biblical story, letters, parables, Gospels, Prophets, and history is inspired and can give voice to God's particular word to us. Below is an example of reading God's Word with intention.

Using Mark 10:46-52

• **Silence** - Become quiet and offer yourself to God before you start reading the passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

¥**Read** - Read Mark 10:46-52 out loud (at home), slowly allowing the words to resonate and settle in your heart. Linger on the word or phrase that catches your attention and lights up for you. Sit with the word or phrase and savor it as a word of God for you. Write it down: _____

¥**Reflect**. Read the passage again and listen to where the Word connects with your life right now. Enter into the scene in your imagination. Imagination is a God-given gift. Envision the scene. Carefully watch the people. Listen to how they interact. What do you hear and experience as you watch and listen?

¥**Respond** - Deeply receive God's Word and rest in His presence and love. Is there something that God is asking you to change or do in your life or relationships? Ask Him to help you follow through with what you have heard God say today.

Small Group Breakout - Week 2

CONNECT - Read Mark 10:46-52

1. What did you think about this weeks reading?
2. What are you thankful this week?
3. Did you share what you learned with anyone? How did it go?

Each week please rotate who leads the Discovery Bible Study questions listed above.

NOTES:

Week Three – (Read before Team Meeting)

TRAIN WITH JESUS

When we take on the easy yoke of Jesus we will experience the life transformation power Jesus promised was possible. The idea of a “yoke” to Jesus is for us to join ourselves to His life, teaching, and become a lifelong disciple. Jesus assures us in John 15:5 that He isn’t asking us to follow Him in our own strength but to join ourselves to Him. Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” It is this loving relationship that makes true transformation possible and an easy yoke for a disciple of Jesus.

John Ortberg says, “Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he encourages his young protégé Timothy to ‘Train yourself in godliness. Exercise for the body is not useless, but godliness is useful in every respect, possessing, as it does, the promise of Life now and of the Life which is soon coming.’” (I Timothy 4:8 WNY) This thought also lies behind his advice to the church at Corinth: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (I Corinthians 9:25 NIV - *“The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People”*, Zondervan.)

Our primary goal as followers of Jesus is learning to live in a constant state of connection to the Spirit. How do we do this? Does God’s Spirit do it all for us as some believe? Do we let go of all effort and trust God to do it all for us? Maybe it’s studying God’s Word and growing in knowledge and spiritual wisdom that comes from knowing God’s truth. Is that how truth sets us free?

I believe it isn’t just letting God do it all for us nor is it all up to us. Actually, it’s going to be different for each of us as we respond to God’s Spirit working in our life. Yet, there is one simple and straightforward principle: **to experience the life of Jesus, we must adopt the lifestyle of Jesus.**

We see in Jesus certain practices that kept Him connected to His Father in Heaven. Prayer was a very important part of His life and at times He would break away and pray all night. We know it was His practice to attend worship services each Sabbath. Jesus served, taught people, met with believers and had meals with many different kinds of people, and He was a disciple-maker. Jesus practiced certain spiritual disciplines and we must learn to do the same. There is much confusion over what spiritual disciplines are or what there are not. John Ortberg in *“The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People”* has a chapter entitled, “TRAINING VS. TRYING - The Truth About Spiritual Disciplines”. Here is what he says:

“Imagine a group of people coming to your home and interrupting your Twinkie-eating, TV-watching routine with an urgent message: “Good news! We’re from the United States Olympic Committee. We have been looking for someone to run the marathon in the next Olympics. We have statistics on every person in the entire nation on computer. We have checked everybody’s records—their performance in the President’s physical fitness test in grade school, body type, bone structure, right down to their current percentage of body fat. We have determined that out of two hundred million people, you are the one person in America with a chance to bring home the gold medal in the marathon. So you are on the squad. You will run the race. This is the chance of a lifetime.”

“You are surprised by this because the farthest you have ever run is from the couch to the refrigerator. But after the first shock passes, you are gripped by the realization of what’s happening in your life. You picture yourself mingling with the elite athletes of the world. You allow yourself to imagine that maybe you do have what it takes. At night you dream about standing on the podium after the race and hearing the national anthem, seeing the flag raised, and bending low to receive the gold medal.”

“You begin to feel a sense of urgency. It will be your body wearing those little racing togs, with a billion people watching on television. But greater than any external pressure is the internal drive that says, ‘This is the race I was created to run. This is my destiny. This is why I was born. Here’s my chance!’”

“Trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious...you will have to enter into a life of training.”

“This race becomes the great passion of your life. It dominates your mind. It occupies every waking moment. To run the race well—to win it if you can—becomes the central focus of your existence. It is what gets you out of bed in the morning. It is what you live for. It is the chance of a lifetime.”

“Then it dawns on you: Right now you cannot run a marathon. More to the point, you cannot run a marathon even if you try really, really hard. Trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious about seizing this chance of a lifetime, you will have to enter into a life of training. You must arrange your life around certain practices that will enable you to do what you cannot do now by willpower alone. When it comes to running a marathon, you must train, not merely try.”

“This need for training is not confined only to athletics. Training is required for people who want to play a musical instrument or learn a new language or run a business. Indeed, it is required for any significant challenge in life—including spiritual growth. “

Training Vs. Trying to Be Like Jesus

“I devote this chapter to the single most helpful principle I know regarding spiritual transformation. It is by no means original with me. People who are wise in the ways of spiritual growth have understood it for centuries. I came across it at a time when I felt frustrated and stagnant in my own life with God, and through it I gained a firm hope that I really could grow. Through it—in a way I didn’t recognize at the time—God was speaking to me. Here is the principle: **There is an immense difference between training to do something and trying to do something.**”

“I wish I could describe the hope I felt when I first came to understand this truth. I found it in Dallas Willard’s book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, and most of this chapter flows from the spirit of understanding that underlies his work. For much of my life, when I heard messages about following Jesus, I thought in terms of trying hard to be like him. So after hearing (or preaching, for that matter) a sermon on patience on Sunday, I would wake up Monday morning determined to be a more patient person. Have you ever tried hard to be patient with a three-year-old? I have—and it generally didn’t work any better than would my trying hard to run a marathon for which I had not trained. I would end up exhausted and defeated. Given the way we are prone to describe “following Jesus,” it’s a wonder anyone wants to do it at all.”

“Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely. This is what the apostle Paul means when he encourages his young protégé Timothy to “train yourself in godliness”. (1 Timothy 4:8) This thought also lies behind his advice to the church at Corinth: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (1 Corinthians 9:25)”

“Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what He alone can do.”

“Athletics was familiar imagery to Paul’s audience. Corinth was the site of the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics in prominence in ancient Greece. Paul himself had probably been in Corinth during the games of A.D. 51 and, according to Gordon Fee, may even have made tents for the visitors and contestants needing accommodations. That a competitor would strive for the crown by simply “trying really hard” apart from training was unthinkable. In fact, any athlete who entered the games was required to undergo ten months of strict training and could be disqualified for failing to do so. Paul said he, too, had entered a life of training, “so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.”

“Respecting the distinction between training and merely trying is the key to transformation in every aspect of life. People sometimes think that learning how to play Bach at the keyboard by spending years practicing scales and chord progressions is the

“hard” way. The truth is the other way around. Spending years practicing scales is the easy way to learn to play Bach. Imagine sitting down at a grand piano in front of a packed concert hall and having never practiced a moment in your life. That’s the hard way.”

“This need for preparation, or training, does not stop when it comes to learning the art of forgiveness, or joy, or courage. In other words, it applies to a healthy and vibrant spiritual life just as it does to physical and intellectual activity. Learning to think, feel, and act like Jesus is at least as demanding as learning to run a marathon or play the piano.”

“For me, this truth brought light to the darkness. For the first time as an adult, I found the notion of following Jesus a real, concrete, tangible possibility. Following Jesus simply means learning from Him how to arrange my life around activities that enable me to live in the fruit of the Spirit.”

Following Jesus simply means learning from Him how to arrange my life around activities that enable me to live in the fruit of the Spirit.

“The traditional term for such activities is “spiritual disciplines.” But for many people, that term carries associations of legalism, or attempting to earn God’s goodwill, or something like New Year’s resolutions—good intentions that are neither practical nor world-changing. Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*, discusses twelve such activities for spiritual growth.”

“When I read that book years ago, my immediate response was, “I already feel guilty about not reading the Bible and praying enough; the last thing in the world I want is ten other things to feel guilty about not doing.”

“My next response was to draw up a very ambitious plan for spiritual advancement that would immediately incorporate all twelve practices into my life so I could feel good about my spiritual growth. I tried this strategy for a few weeks, but I soon felt overwhelmed and exhausted by it. And my response after that was to give the whole project up as something practical only for monks and saints.”

“So before getting into what spiritual disciplines are, let’s consider a few things spiritual disciplines are not:

1. Spiritual disciplines are not a barometer of spirituality.

“Many people become burdened because they think God measures their spiritual performance on the basis of certain disciplines. The truth is both challenging and liberating. Martin Luther begins his book, *The Freedom of the Christian* with this paradox: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Nowhere is this more true than with spiritual disciplines. As we have seen, the true indicator of spiritual well-being is growth

in the ability to love God and people. If we can do this without the practice of any particular spiritual disciplines, then we should by all means skip them. We are free of having to impress God or anyone else with our spiritual commitment. Spiritual disciplines are to life what calisthenics are to a game. Once the game starts, basketball players get no bonus points based on how many free throws they shot in practice. The only reason to practice them is to be able to make them in a game. It is possible to spend every waking moment “practicing spiritual disciplines” but doing them in such a way as to make us less, rather than more, loving. In that case, of course, we would be better off if we did none at all.”

2. Spiritual disciplines are not necessarily unpleasant.

“What makes something a discipline depends on what we are training for. If we are training for a triathlon, we will pursue one set of practices. But if we are training for a pie-eating contest, our preparation will look like something else—mostly consuming vast amounts of pie. If we keep at it long enough, we will be amazed at how much pie we can eventually put away compared with what we can now. What counts as “training” can only be determined when we know what it is we are training for. Many of us got the impression somewhere that for an activity to count as a spiritual discipline, it must be something we would rather not do. However, if we are in training for a life characterized by joy, peace, and affection, we should assume that some of the practices are going to be downright enjoyable. Many of us need to discover “disciplines” such as celebration that will regularly produce in us rivers of wonder and gratitude.”

3. Spiritual disciplines are not a way to earn favor with God.

“Spiritual disciplines are not about trying to be good enough to merit God’s forgiveness and goodwill. They are not ways to get extra credit, or to demonstrate to God how deeply we are committed to him. They exist for our sake, not God’s. They have value only insofar as they help us morph.

In particular, spiritual disciplines don’t oppose or exist in tension with grace. People who live under the bondage of legalism and then hear the message of grace are sometimes leery that talk of disciplines might lead to another form of religious oppression.”

Spiritual disciplines...are not ways to get extra credit, or to demonstrate to God how deeply we are committed to Him.

“But spiritual disciplines are simply a means of appropriating or growing toward the life that God graciously offers. This is why they are sometimes called a “means of grace.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer seemed to have this thought in mind when he wrote, “We must therefore attempt to recover a true understanding of the mutual relation between grace

and discipleship.... Happy are they who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship. Happy are they who have become Christians in this sense of the word. For them the word of grace has proved a fount of mercy. “

A Few Key Questions

“What makes something a discipline? ***Any activity I can do by direct effort that will help me do what I cannot now do by direct effort. People will sometimes speak of the “discipline of humility” or the “discipline of patience.”***”

“Strictly speaking, however, such things are not really disciplines; they are the objects of the disciplines, the things we want to acquire through the disciplines.”

“In the children’s book *Frog and Toad Together*, the two central characters discover the limits of mere trying when Frog bakes a batch of cookies. ‘We ought to stop eating’, they say, as they keep eating. ‘We must stop’, they resolve, as they eat some more. ‘We need willpower’, Frog finally says, grabbing another cookie. ‘What is willpower?’ asks Toad, swallowing another mouthful. ‘Willpower is trying very hard not to do something you want to do very much’, Frog says.”

Spiritual discipline: Any activity that can help me gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modeled it.

“Frog discusses a variety of ways to help with willpower—putting the cookies in a box, tying the box shut, putting it high up in a tree—but each time Toad points out (in between bites) that they could climb the tree and untie the box. In desperation, Frog finally dumps the remaining cookies outside on the ground: ‘Hey, birds!’ he calls. ‘Here’s cookies!’ ‘Now we have no more cookies,’ says Toad sadly. ‘Yes’, says Frog, ‘but we have lots and lots of willpower.’ ‘You may keep it all,’ Toad replies. ‘I’m going home to bake a cake.’”

“Disciplines are valuable simply because they allow us to do what we cannot do by willpower alone. This insight lies at the heart of Alcoholics Anonymous. The first of the Twelve Steps is to acknowledge that I cannot stop drinking by willpower alone (‘trying really hard to stop drinking’). Then I must arrange my life around certain disciplines or practices—such as taking a ruthless moral inventory and confessing my faults—that will enable me to do what willpower can’t. I must enter a life of training for sobriety.”

What makes something a spiritual discipline?

“Disciplines that are spiritual are simply those that help me live in the fruit of the Spirit.”

“How many spiritual disciplines are there? As many as we can think of. Certain practices are basic, such as solitude, servanthood, confession, and meditation on Scripture. We

will look at all these in the remaining chapters of this book. But we can turn almost any activity into a 'training exercise' for spiritual life. How do we know what spiritual disciplines to practice? In a sense, the answer comes from thinking backward:

***First**, we must understand clearly what it means to live in the kingdom of God. Jesus spent much of His time helping people see what true spirituality looks like.*

***Second**, we must learn what particular barriers keep us from living this kind of life.*

***Third**, we must discover what particular practices, experiences, or relationships can help us overcome these barriers."*

"For instance, we know that we are called to be loving. One thing I discovered when I spent a day trying to live in a loving fashion is that love requires an enormous amount of energy. And I was just too tired to give it. So I realized that—as unspiritual as it sounds—if I was serious about becoming a more loving person, I was going to have to get more sleep."

"I have discovered I have a very hard time thinking and feeling and acting like Jesus when I lack sleep. An article in Time magazine suggested that America has a sleep deficit that is worse than the national budget deficit, and it results in everything from increased irritability to fatal car accidents."

"I was surprised to find that the Bible has much to say about what John Ballie called the theology of sleep. Sleep is a gift from God: 'I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.'"

"It is an act of trust: I am reminded when I go to sleep that the world is in God's hands, not mine. The world will get along very well even though I am not awake to try to control things. At the appropriate time, my eyes will open and I will receive the gift of wakefulness once again. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the LORD sustains me."

"Have you ever tried to pray when you are lacking sleep? Before Elijah was to spend a prolonged time in solitude and prayer at Mount Horeb, the angel of the Lord had him take not one, but two long naps. Contrast this with the disciples at Gethsemane, who could not pray because they kept falling asleep. Sleep is a gift from God. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives sleep to His beloved."

"For some of you reading this book, perhaps the single most spiritual thing you could do right now is to put it down and take a nap."

What is a disciplined person?

"The link between disciple and discipline is obvious. But getting the definitions right is very important, lest discipleship become rigid and mechanical.

“A disciplined person is someone who can do the right thing at the right time in the right way with the right spirit.”

“Notice what a disciplined person is not. A disciplined person is not simply someone who exercises many disciplines. A disciplined person is not a highly systematic, rigidly scheduled, chart-making, gold-star-loving early riser. The Pharisees were rigid and organized, but they were not disciplined persons in the sense required by true discipleship.”

“Disciplined people can do what is called for at any given moment. They can do the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reason.”

“This definition applies to artists and athletes and astronauts as well as to followers of Jesus. A disciplined follower of Jesus—a ‘disciple’—is not someone who has ‘mastered the disciplines’ and never misses a daily regimen of spiritual exercises. A disciplined follower of Jesus is someone who discerns when laughter, gentleness, silence, healing words, or prophetic indignation is called for, and offers it promptly, effectively, and lovingly.”

Signs of Wise Spiritual Training:

“At this point you may be wondering, What about God’s role in spiritual growth? After all, the Bible speaks of transformation as the work of God. It’s always a miracle when it happens. To speak of spiritual growth only as the product of training could make it sound like something we can engineer. Anytime a frog is turned into a prince—or even just a gentler, kinder frog—there is always something mysterious and awesome at work. In spiritual growth that “something mysterious” is the work of the Spirit. So another analogy from Scripture is helpful. “The wind blows where it chooses,” Jesus said, “and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

“Consider the difference between piloting a motorboat or a sailboat. We can run a motorboat all by ourselves. We can fill the tank and start the engine. We are in control. But a sailboat is a different story. We can hoist the sails and steer the rudder, but we are utterly dependent on the wind. The wind does the work. If the wind doesn’t blow—and sometimes it doesn’t—we sit still in the water no matter how frantic we act. Our task is to do whatever enables us to catch the wind.”

“Spiritual transformation is that way. We may be aggressively pursuing it, but we cannot turn it on and off. We can open ourselves to transformation through certain practices, but we cannot engineer it. We can take no credit for it.”

“It is profitable to see this. This truth saves us from pride and misdirected effort. Fist-clenching, teeth-gritting exertion is usually not productive. Indeed, feeling a constant sense of strain or burden probably indicates that we are off course. Jesus offered His yoke—His way of life—to tired people because He said his way of life involved ease and lightness and “rest for your souls.” This theme is echoed by many of His followers. Frank Laubach writes, “The sense of being led by an unseen hand which takes mine... grows upon me daily. I do not need to strain at all to find opportunity.... strain does not seem to do good.”

“Another analogy from sail boating concerns the fact that wise sailors know that their main task is being able to “read” the wind—to practice discernment. An experienced sailor can simply look at a lake and tell where the wind is blowing strongest, or look at the sky and give a weather forecast. A wise sailor knows when to raise and lower which sails to catch the wind most effectively.”

“Spiritual growth requires discernment. We must learn to respond to the fresh wind of the Spirit. Moses didn’t ask or arrange for the burning bush. But once it was there, he had to make a choice: whether to turn aside and pay attention to the work of God. God’s responsibility is to provide the burning bush. Our responsibility is to turn aside. Often I forget this.”

“Some time ago I bought a devotional book and set a goal of finishing it by the end of the year. Several times as I read, it was clear that something was happening in my heart; I felt I should stop and study a certain passage for a while. But such delays would have kept me from my goal for finishing the book. So, I kept going.”

“I should have realized that getting through the book “on time” was not, as I thought, the way to demonstrate my devotion. The purpose was to put myself in a place where transformation could happen. If God should speak to me through one passage—if I am being convicted or healed or challenged—then my role is to stay there until the wind dies down. Then it’s time to move on. I was motor boating instead of sailing. I failed to turn aside.”

Wise training respects our unique temperament and gifts.

“There is good news here: Whatever your natural temperament may be, it is not a barrier to your spiritual growth.”

“Do you tend to be spontaneous, or are you a well-organized-plan-ahead type of person? Often people who are highly spontaneous think they are at a disadvantage for spiritual growth because living according to a predictable routine is difficult for them. (If you are still trying to decide which type you are, you can pretty much eliminate spontaneous.) In many ways, however, people with a gift for spontaneity have a great advantage in being able to give a good response promptly.”

“The particular combination of practices, relationships, and experiences needed for growth will be different for everyone. The life of Abraham Lincoln is by most accounts an amazing study in character formation. Yet he was notoriously disorganized; he even had a file in his law office labeled “If you can’t find it anywhere else, try looking here.”

“We need the freedom to discover how God wants us to grow, for his design will not look quite the same for everyone. Perhaps God speaks to us in special ways through nature. Perhaps he made us to be formed by music. We may have an above-average capacity for silence and prayer. Or we might respond most strongly to images, symbols, and the fine arts. C. S. Lewis once surmised that each person is created to see a different facet of God’s beauty—something no one else can see in quite the same way—and then to bless all worshipers through all eternity with an aspect of God they could not otherwise see.”

Wise training will take into account our season of life.

“There is more good news in that our season of life is not a barrier to spiritual growth.

A mother in our small group suggested that it was easier for her to ‘work on her spiritual life’ before she became a mom. As we talked, it became clear what she meant. To her, reading the Bible and praying were the only two activities that counted spiritually. As a mother she felt that ‘time alone’ was an oxymoron.”

“In this the church had failed her. She had never been taught to see that caring for two young children, offered daily with expressions of gratitude and prayers for help and patient acceptance of trials, might become a kind of school for transformation into powerful servanthood beyond anything she had ever known. Somehow having a ‘quiet time’ counted toward spiritual devotion, and caring for two children did not.”

“It took creative effort for this mother to carve out time for solitude and stillness, and even then, she could not free up the amount of time she had in college. But as a mother she had new opportunities for growth she did not have back then. *Our season of life—whatever it is—is no barrier to having Christ formed in us. Not in the least.*”

“Whatever our season of life, it offers its own opportunities and challenges for spiritual growth. Instead of wishing we were in another season, we ought to find out what this one offers.”

“*Life counts—all of it.* Every moment is potentially an opportunity to be guided by God into His way of living. Every moment is a chance to learn from Jesus how to live in the kingdom of God.”

Wise training respects the inevitability of troughs and peaks.

“One of the most basic laws of life is rhythm. Night follows day, winter follows summer, we wake and we sleep.”

“In spiritual life, the traditional language for this is rhythm. There will be times of consolation and times of desolation. In times of consolation we like to pray because God seems close, the Bible seems alive, sin looks bad, and stoplights all seem green. Times of desolation are just the opposite: The Bible seems dry, prayer grows hard, and God is far away.”

“C. S. Lewis noted that at times God will send us a strong sense of His presence, a desire to be with him, the ability to withstand temptations with ease.”

“But He never allows this state of affairs to last long. Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be.”

“When we forget the law of rhythm, we assume that whatever phase is current will last forever. In times of consolation I mistakenly think that I now have spiritual life mastered. In times of desolation I assume I must have done something wrong, or perhaps God is punishing me. In truth, both seasons are inevitable, and both seasons can bring unique growth.”

“This law of nature means it is probably a mistake to assume that one ‘spiritual routine’ is adequate to cover us for the rest of our lives. We will have times of great growth, spending enormous amounts of time in prayer or service. We will have times of desolation when prayer comes hard. Perhaps during these later times we will need more rest.”

Wise training begins with a clear decision.

“When we come to understand the nature of training to be like Jesus, we will have to face a choice. It's the same choice Jesus asked those who considered choosing to follow him and become his disciples.”

"Jesus ... came with the gracious announcement that it is now possible to live in the presence and under the reign of God—that was His Good News. It is possible to live in such a way that when people see us, they will say to themselves, 'Wow! I didn't know that life could look like that.' It indeed happens. It has happened for many who have followed Christ, and it is possible for us. This is the 'pearl of great value' of which Jesus spoke, for which any sensible person would sell everything. This is the race for which we were born. But we will not drift into such a life. We must decide." (All quotes above

taken from John Ortberg's *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People.*)

REFLECTION:

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:25. John Ortberg says, "There is an immense difference between training to do something and trying to do something." How would you define that difference in your life? Consider an area of your life you struggle with. Have you been trying to change or train with Jesus to overcome this struggle?

Write your answer here:

NOTES:

WEEK 3 - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout

PRACTICING BEING TEACHABLE

Jesus always looked for teachable people who would look beyond appearances and not make snap judgments. And He was grieved and dumbfounded by the educated who were hardhearted, unteachable and dense. He said to them, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39). Jesus is still looking for teachable disciples. How teachable are we?

1. What new things have you learned about God and yourself in the last month?
2. What positions have you re-thought and changed your mind about in the previous few years? What does this say about you and your journey?
3. Who do you know that exemplifies a person with a teachable heart?
4. How do you respond when you hear an opinion you don't agree with?

You can learn to be teachable by asking the Holy Spirit to teach you to develop this critical quality. Are you willing? Then ask Him to help you to become a teachable person.

Small Group Breakout – Week 3

Discover - Read this passage (John 15:1-8) and answer each of the questions below.

CONNECT

- 1. What did you think about this weeks reading?*
- 2. What are you thankful this week?*
- 3. Did you share what you learned with anyone? How did it go?*

DISCOVER

- 1. What does the passage say? Repeat it in your own words.*
- 2. What do you think the passage means? What did you learn from God?*
- 3. If God is speaking to you, what will you do?*

NOTES:

Week Four (Read before Team Meeting)

DOING THE WORKS OF JESUS

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works **that I do**; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (**John 14:12-14 ESV**)

These words of Jesus are perplexing, as they are at one level powerfully inspiring. They encourage us to ponder them in our life. Is Jesus really saying the “Whoever’s” who put their faith in Him can do His works? According to Jesus, the answer is yes. Do you believe you can do the works of Jesus in your life? If you’re like me, you have a few doubts. Let’s be perfectly clear where this idea comes from. It comes from Jesus Himself.

Dallas Willard says, “Perhaps we feel baffled and incompetent before this statement. But let us keep in mind that the world we live in desperately needs such works to be done. They would not be just for show or to impress ourselves or others. But, frankly, even a moderate-size ‘work’ is more than most people’s life could sustain. One good public answer to our prayer might be enough to lock some of us into weeks of spiritual superiority. Great power requires great character if it is to be a blessing and not a curse, and that character is something we only grow toward. Yet it is God’s intent that in His kingdom we should have as much power as we can bear for good. Indeed, His ultimate objective in the development of human character is to empower us to do His works. And when we are fully developed in the likeness of Jesus, and have ‘the mind of Christ,’ that is what will happen—to His great joy and relief, no doubt. Looking back over this progression, one of the most important things for us to see and accept is ... unrelenting study under Jesus, and in particular by following Him into His practices and adapting them to form an effective framework of spiritual disciplines around which our whole life can be structured. This is precisely how we ‘through the spirit do mortify the life of the flesh’ (Rom. 8: 13), and ‘put off the old person and put on the new’ (Col. 3: 9–10). Though we cannot do it by ourselves, it is nevertheless something that we do. Each of us must ask ourselves how are we doing it? What, precisely, is our plan? And as teachers of disciples, we must lead everyone we teach into developing his or her own plan.”

Let’s explore this passage and how it impacts our lives as disciples of Jesus.

1. The Work of Jesus:

John 14:12a - “...I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do.”

First, His promise is not made to the apostles alone, but to all **believers**. And second, this is a promise that we will do Jesus' works. It's not yet a promise that we will do greater works, just Jesus' works.

It's a promise to all believers. Believers, pure and simple, will do the works Jesus. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Believing in Jesus is what unites you to Him for eternal life and makes available the power of Christ in you.

So when it says, *Whoever believes in Jesus* will do this or that, it is describing the normal disciple of Jesus. Who knew those "Whoever's" that believe in Jesus would be able to do the very works of Jesus.

That's the first observation: the promise in verse 12 is not made to the apostles alone, but to ordinary everyday people who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

2. What are the Works:

Look again at this amazing passage, "... I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do."

We can create problems for ourselves by thinking first of Jesus' most amazing miracles and define them as being the works John 14:12 is referring to. In John's Gospel, there are seven miracles performed by Jesus, and John called them "signs." The question is, why did John use the word "signs" to refer to the miraculous signs Jesus performed? The Greek word for "sign" is "semeion" and can mean a "task," "mark," "a token," or a distinction of a person from others. In John's Gospel, the word "signs" refers to the miraculous acts that Jesus did that distinguished him as having divine power and authority. The seven signs recorded in the Gospel of John have a definite purpose of stirring up a response of acceptance or rejection, belief, or unbelief. The purpose of John's Gospel was for people to believe in Jesus as the Christ, according to his statement in John 20:30-31. So John used the word "signs" to refer to the miracles and the task his Father called Jesus to fulfill. Why is this point important for our discussion of John 14:12?

In John's Gospel, he used the word "works" 15 times. In many places, the term "works" refers to the signs or miracles Jesus performed. John also uses the word "works" to refer to how Jesus must fulfill and complete his Father's calling (John 9:4, 10:37-38). In John's Gospel, the word "works" is used in more a general sense to refer to Jesus doing the signs and accomplish the mission his Father has called him to fulfill.

Are miracles the only works Jesus did in his life? No! We know that Jesus taught His disciples and many others. He did the "work" of making disciples with the twelve and a larger group of followers. Jesus did the "work" of traveling throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23). We also read that Jesus was actively involved with people in their daily lives. Matthew tells the reader that some people believed Jesus to be, "A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus did the work of being involved in the social structure of people's lives and spoke into them His truth. One critical work Jesus was involved with was confronting the religious leader's corruption (Luke 5:21, Matthew 9:34, Matthew 12:14). Jesus had a ministry of prayer for people and taught His followers to develop this practice in their lives. (Luke 3:21,6:12-16,9:28). Jesus had many works, and they were not all miracles. He also accomplished the work of Salvation by his death on the cross.

Now, did John mean that every disciple would do all these works? I honestly don't know. Paul tells us that our faith plays a role in how effective our spiritual gifts work and impact others. In the New Testament letters where miracles are mentioned, they are a gift that some disciples of Jesus have and not others. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things." "Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all perform miracles, do they? Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they? But you should be eager for the greater gifts." (1 Corinthians 12:7–10, 29–30 NET)

What is evident in this passage is that all those who believe in Jesus will do His works. And we can trust the Spirit's leading to guide, help, and enable us to do the works God has called us all to do. Will we all do every work that Jesus did in His life? Again, I don't know, but God's Spirit can lead us to do whatever is needed for the common good. We can and must trust the Holy Spirit to help us do the very works of Jesus in our lives.

3. Doing Greater Works Than Jesus

The second part of this text ([John 14:12b](#)) is that, in some wonderful way, we will all do **something greater than the works of Jesus**. "...I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; *and greater works than these* will he do, because I am going to the Father."

Again, it is **every believer, not just the apostles**, not just pastors. **“Whoever believes in me . . . greater works than these will he do.”** This is the mark of being a disciple of Jesus, not being an apostle.

What are the “greater works” that you will do? You will receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ. Before the resurrection of Jesus, nobody in the history of the world had ever done that. And in the power of that absolutely new experience — **the indwelling of the crucified and risen Christ** — your works of love and wonders, your message of life in union with Christ, will point people to the glory of the risen Son of God, and you will be the instrument of their forgiveness on the basis of the finished work of Christ ([John 20:23](#)). **This will be new.** This will be greater than Jesus’ earthly works, because this is what He came to accomplish by His death and resurrection.

The first part of our text was: *all of us who believe in Jesus will carry on with His work.* The second part was: *we will all do something greater than the works of Jesus.*

The words of Jesus in [John 14](#), were of great comfort to His eleven disciples. He was about to be arrested and suffer a cruel and unjust death. The disciples themselves would be scattered that night. But Jesus assures them that, no matter what happens, God’s work will continue in the world. Even after Jesus’ earthly ministry ended, His work would go on. The followers of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, would continue to help and heal people. The gospel would have a worldwide impact. As God’s people pray in Jesus’ name, answers would come, and the greatest miracle of all—the spiritual transformation of a sinful heart through faith in Christ—would become commonplace, to the glory of God.

In closing, what should our response be to these words of Jesus addressed to all who would put their faith in Christ? Let’s believe them and carry on the very “works” of Jesus into our world. And remember, everything we will need, we can ask for and receive by asking for it in the name of Jesus. “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. ([John 12:13–14](#)).

“In my name!” That is, for my fame and not yours, because of my divine worth and my infinite payment on the cross. And according to my sovereign wisdom. Put every request through that filter — my fame, my worth, my purchase, my wisdom. And every prayer will be answered. You will have everything you need to do the works that I do and even the greater works.”

WEEK 4 - Team Practices & Small Group Breakout

PRACTICING PRAYING

This week please consider experimenting with three new exercises that will help you to develop new practices or habits.

1. **The daily practice 1** - takes but a moment or two. It is to stop what we are doing to pray the Lord's prayer.

2. **The daily practice 2** - a second example of prayer comes from the Tax Collector's prayer. "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'" (Luke 18:13) This is loosely based on Paul's instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

3. **The daily practice 3** is the brief examination of conscience at night before going to bed. You sit down, call on the Holy Spirit for light and for several minutes go over your day in God's presence asking if you behaved as a child of God at home, at work, with your friends. Then you make an act of **gratitude for all the good that you have done** and an act of **contrition for those areas in which you have willfully failed**. Then it is off to your well-deserved rest and sleep.

Small Group Breakout - Week 4

Discover - Read this passage - John 14:12-14

Work through these discussion questions:

1. How can we do the works of Jesus and even greater ones? Can you see this happening in your life? Who is He speaking to in this chapter?
2. What does it mean to "ask something in His name?"
3. Can you imagine doing greater works than Jesus in your life? What could these works be?
4. What kind of person do you think Jesus would be willing to give this kind of power too?

NOTES:

Week Five (Read before Team Meeting)

DISCOVERY BIBLE STUDY

There are many tools that we can use to help someone that is becoming a disciple of Jesus. We are suggesting using the tools called DBS. A Discovery Bible Study is an opportunity for people to discover firsthand what the Bible says about God, about people, and what it means to follow Jesus. A DBS is based on the belief that God's word is powerful and that God's Spirit is faithful to lead us into all truth. When you facilitate a DBS, you are essentially co-leading with God's Spirit, who is the major player in guiding seekers toward Jesus.

The Discovery Bible Study (DBS) is a helpful method used to connect yourself and others to the truth of God's word. It uses key gospel questions to help us hear from the Lord and have heart transformation.

You don't need to be a Bible or theology expert to facilitate an effective Discovery Bible Study. A successful DBS occurs because God's word is powerful (Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16), and God's Spirit is faithful to lead us into all truth (John 16:13).

When you facilitate a DBS group, remember not to take the role of a teacher or scholar and answer everybody's questions. Here are a few clues that I am dominating a DBS group:

Dominating DBS Group:

I hear the sound of my voice more than the others.

- People do not interrupt me.
- After I have spoken, the group goes silent.
- I am more concerned with correcting others than I am about hearing from God.
- The members of the group are receiving truth from me and not the Bible.

Each week in a DBS group there are questions that the facilitator asks.

CONNECT

- 1. What did you think about this weeks reading?*
- 2. What are you thankful this week?*
- 3. Did you share what you learned with anyone? How did it go?*

DISCOVER

- 1. What does the passage say? Repeat it in your own words.*
- 2. What do you think the passage means? What did you learn from God?*
- 3. If God is speaking to you, what will you do?*

MULTIPLY

- 1. How can we help one another apply what we are learning?*
- 2. Who can we tell what we are learning?*
- 3. Is there anyone you know who would benefit from being a part of this group?*

Which passage should be used each week?

It's often helpful to select a passage that addresses the issues or areas of unbelief you have observed by those within the group. Pray and ask God to show you which passage would be helpful in dealing with the heart issues confronting your group. A helpful resource in selecting scriptures is the following topical guide (follow the link <https://www.wordministry.org/pages/discovery-bible-study>)

Some of the topics include:

- *Masculinity, accountability, discipleship, attitude adjustment, performance orientation, issues men face, being a dad*
- *Singleness, love and loneliness, pressures, being a complete person, how to find a partner, sexuality, issues singles face*
- *Marriage, getting along at home, balancing work and home, communication conflict, intimacy, miscarriage*
- *Parenting, how's it done, family time, strong-willed children, adolescents, challenging issues and special needs, parents in pain*

● *Marketplace, relationships at work, too much stress, business ethics, finding the right job, bored and burnt out, entrepreneurs*

● *Self-esteem, financial stress, living with pain, caregivers, empty nesters, growing older*

Recovery, healthy habits, healing broken relationships, picking up after divorce, grief and loss, abuse, pornography. (Adapted from -The Word Ministry in Kirkland team training material).

WHY DBS GROUPS

What is the reason or purpose behind using these set of questions in a DBS group?

CONNECT

There are three key questions that make the connect time an intentional part of the discipling process. These questions not only help participants to connect on a personal level, but begin to instill the DNA of Christian fellowship into the group from the very beginning.

The first two questions lay the groundwork of worship (recognizing God's presence and giving thanks).

The third one steers participants toward intercession (expressing need) and creates opportunities to meet those needs (fellowship). Those of us in the Church are familiar with small group dynamics that include open sharing, discussion of deep life topics, and requests for support. But for many outside the church this is a foreign space. The fellowship and connection within a discovery group are things many people long for and rarely experience. The connect time is a powerful space to open hearts wider to the word of God.

DISCOVER

We've made it to the heart of a DBS—discovering God through His word! It's time for you, the coach, to send your players (people of peace) onto the field, where they can explore what the Bible reveals about God and about them. Your main tools in this process are a carefully selected Bible passage and some key questions.

Here are the steps in the discovery process:

- Read the passage.

- Ask, “What does the passage say?” (Select someone from the group to repeat it in their own words.)
- Ask, “What does this passage mean?” (Or specifically, “What does this tell me about God?” and “What does this tell me about people?”)
- Ask, “(If this is God speaking...) What will you do about it?” (Another way to ask this with a non-believer is, “If I believed this was true, how would my life be different?”) At the end of this step, everyone should have a practical “I will” statement.

Alongside the Word and the Holy Spirit, these questions start to reshape a person’s worldview—their beliefs *about God*, *about humanity*, and *about how we should live*. But a Discovery Bible Study is about more than head-knowledge or curiosity. It shifts immediately from knowledge to action, from awareness to real life. If you’ve been involved in many Bible studies before, this may feel very different or even uncomfortable to you. Many of us have not been expected or challenged to instantly put into practice what we read. This is one of the most powerful elements of a DBS. People’s lives actually start to look different as a result.

MULTIPLY

A Discovery Bible Study is the cornerstone of a strategy to bring entire networks, cities, and nations to Jesus. This strategy is gaining incredible momentum in many parts of the world, with thousands of new disciples now beginning to follow Jesus. The strategy is called Disciple Making Movements.

The multiply questions:

- How can we help one another in our group?
- Who else (outside of our group) can we show kindness to?
- Who can we tell and how can we tell what we’re learning?

These questions weave the DNA of love (for each other and for all people) into the group, and incorporate Jesus’ command to His disciples to tell others the good news. We call them multiplication questions because showing the love of Jesus and sharing

the truth God reveals to us are two of the most compelling actions we can take to draw people closer to God.

There's one extra tip for helping your group to multiply which is important on many levels. It's simple, but a little counterintuitive. We recommend that you don't keep an open-door policy in discovery groups. Don't add new members until after the first few weeks. Once the group has started to gain momentum, then have the group start inviting friends (third week). As the group starts having a transformational impact on its members, it's natural to invite.

As the Coach, invite others in the group to facilitate asking the questions each week. Make sure to establish the right way of facilitating the group. Without your example, they will naturally revert to the more traditional model of teacher/student relationship. DBS groups by design aren't teaching times, but discovery times of letting God lead and teach us what His word says. Remember - share the leadership, but model the kind of coach you want them to be in the DNS group.

Small Group Breakout (30 minutes) - Week 5

The Key to Health Teams:

Without trust there is no team. There is no effective service. There is no quality of life together. There is little blessing from God. Trust is the starting point for all healthy relationships, the fuel for team ministry, and the cornerstone of group effectiveness.

Love one another (John 13:34–35; Rom. 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12).

Confess your sins and pray for one another (James 5:16).

Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:24–25).

Greet one another (1 Peter 5:14).

Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

Encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25).

Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). Bear with one another and forgive one another (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13).

Admonish one another (Col. 3:16).

Serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13).

Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

Questions to Consider:

1. Look over the Team Treats above, and ask God's Spirit to help to know where you need to grow.
2. Think about what you can do as a team member to help build the Word Team into people who are growing in all of the treats about of a healthy team.
3. Prayer for each team member to grow strong in these treats.

Team Prayer:

"Lord of our team, we invite your presence and power to reign supreme in our shared life and ministry. We long to fulfill your mission, ministry, and message through the unique and transformative call you have given to us. We want more than anything to trust you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And we want to learn how to trust one another. Help us to build our team on the principles of community, celebration, communication, and conflict in ways that bring joy to your heart. Holy Spirit, empower us

with the resolve necessary to do this in ways that bring you glory. We recognize that building trust is inherent in developing the quality and essence of our life together. We ask for a fresh resolve and a bold determination to keep these priorities before us. Allow us to experience the richness of our common unity and the joy of our ever-deepening trust. For the sake of Christ and his kingdom we pray. Amen.”

Macchia, Stephen A., *Becoming a Healthy Team: 5 Traits of Vital Leadership* (pp. 52-53). Leadership Transformations (LTI Publications)

NOTES:

Additional Reading and Resources

Week One -

Man Lucado, *3:16: The Number of Hope*
David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*

Week Two -

Practicing the Way is a series of sermons by John Mark Comer, the Pastor of [Bridgetown Church in Oregon](#). You can find links to this series at <https://www.wordministry.org/pages/practicing-the-way>. This is a powerful series to help you grow deeper in your understanding of being a disciple of Jesus. Check it out.

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, HarperCollins.

Week Three -

The majority of week three comes from the book by John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, Zondervan.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Kindle Location 2427).

Morley, Patrick. *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines: 12 Habits to Strengthen Your Walk With Christ*, Moody Publishers.

Week Four -

A message from WaterMark Church, on doing greater works than Jesus. Check it out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J_mr9erEBM

Article: What are the "Greater Works"? This is a good example of exploring possible ways of understand this passage in John 14. <https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/what-are-the-greater-works>

Week Five -

Discovery Bible Study flier that exemplifies DBS in a very clear way, go to https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0029/0167/2049/files/How-to-Launch-a-DBS_Guide.pdf?8291407705024688104

WORD MINISTRY CORE VALUES

1. Disciple-making as a lifestyle.

We are a disciple-making movement of ordinary men and women seeking to be obedient to the call of Jesus to be his disciple-makers. (Matthew 28:18-20)

2. We are team centered.

We start with the team, and it is the team that leads and demonstrates the servant heart of Jesus to those who participate in our Word Ministry. Each team member is essential and works together to make disciples.

3. Self-replicating leadership.

The purpose of the leadership team is to train and develop their replacements. Leaders equip and replace themselves.

4. We value the local church.

The host church is an integral part of this ministry. It provides accountability, a meeting place, assists with meals, oversight, and prayer support. We seek to strengthen the local churches. We value the Bride of Christ.

5. We value small groups.

Small groups offer support, accountability, develop friendships, and disciple followers of Jesus to become disciple makers.

6. We are a shared ministry.

We desire to share this ministry and do not consider it our own. Our purpose is to give it away to those who wish to disciple others for Christ. We freely give to the body of Christ all we are learning in order to extend God's redemptive work in the world, and we partner with others of common purpose to accomplish this goal together.

WORD MINISTRY VISION

The Word Ministry seeks to join God in developing men and women into disciples for Christ. We have a vision and values based on God's Word which helps us realize our calling. **What is a Disciple of Jesus like:**

W - Worship

Jesus tells the women at the well that God is looking for worshippers who worship him in spirit and truth. We believe worshiping God is our highest calling.

John 4:23-24 (ESV)

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

O - Obedience

In the New Testament, Jesus clarifies his desire for only one kind of follower. In John 15:14 Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you."

You and I cannot say we are "abiding in Christ" without learning to be obedient to his teaching.

R - Relationship

Our relationship to Jesus impacts our connection to all people. It will help us to be better fathers, husbands, friends, and co-workers.

John 13:35 (ESV)

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

D - Disciple-making

Lastly, we are all called to be disciple-makers for Jesus wherever we find ourselves. Jesus says,

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus gave us authority and with that authority comes Spiritual power. We are to make disciples who make other disciples for Jesus.

All disciples of Jesus are a part of this significant movement of God's Spirit.



The material above has been compiled and much of it written by Myron Vierra.

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