

Discipleship in a Distracted Age

MAKING SPACE FOR GOD

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More of God

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Scripture

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Community & Mission

Discipleship in a Distracted Age

A Six-Session Guide to Making Space for God

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MINISTRY
THAT MATTERS

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How to Use This Guide

This guide grew out of a sermon series called Making Space, preached at Redeemer during the season of Lent. Its aim is simple: in an age engineered to bombard us with digital distractions, daily demands, and worldly desires, God has still given his people real, ordinary means of grace to know him: Scripture, prayer, gathered worship, sabbath, community, and mission.

You can work through this guide on your own, with a small group, or with a discipleship partner. Each session includes a short article and five reflection questions designed to move you from understanding to honest self-examination to prayer.

A Suggested Rhythm

READ

Read the session on your own before you gather, or aloud together if you're meeting as a group.

REFLECT

Reflect using the questions at the end. There's no need to rush through all five if one question opens up real conversation.

PRACTICE

Practice one small, concrete step from the session before your next gathering.

PRAY

Pray for one another, especially around whatever felt most exposing or convicting.

There is no scorecard here. Every session in this guide rests on the same foundation as the first one: your standing with God was never based on your consistency with any of these practices. It's based on Christ. These are simply means of grace he's given us to know him more, not requirements for him to love us more.

01 SESSION ONE

Making Space for More of God

Making Space: Why Your Relationship with God Feels Stuck (and What to Do About It)

I want to know more of God in my life. I want to experience more of him in the church. I want to walk daily with a greater awareness of his love and presence, in greater dependence on his power, more fully alive for his glory in everything.

I know that's what God wants too. It's why the Father sent the Son, and the Son gave us the Spirit. Through the gospel, God doesn't just save us from our sin; he saves us for a relationship with him.

That's what this book is about: equipping believers to experience more of God in daily life. Over the next several chapters, we're going to work through six practices, or means of grace God has given his people, that can help us make space for him in a season when almost nothing else is making space for him.

But before we get to any of that, we need to get one thing straight, because any time Christians start talking about growing closer to God (spiritual disciplines, spiritual practices, spiritual formation), we become vulnerable to losing the gospel.

The Trap Hiding Inside Every “Get Closer to God” Conversation

“Spiritual formation” is trendy right now. Books on it are flying off the shelves. Podcasts about disciplined, rooted Christian living are everywhere. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. But I do think we need to be careful, because it's remarkably easy to wade into the waters of legalism without ever noticing you've stepped in.

Legalism is an earning-centered way of relating to God: the belief that you can secure his favor by keeping the right rules and rhythms rather than resting in faith and grace. It whispers: if I do more, if I do it right, if I do better, then God will love me more. God will be happier with me. God will give me more.

But the gospel was never about earning or achieving. It's about admitting and receiving.

When we start talking about spiritual disciplines without a firm gospel foundation under them, they get twisted into a scoreboard. And a scoreboard only ever produces one of two things: pride ("because I'm disciplined, I'm a mature Christian") or shame ("because I stink at this, I must be a lousy one"). Either way, we've lost the gospel.

So before we talk about practices, we need to talk about position.

1 Union with God Is the Ground You're Standing On

The doctrine of union with Christ runs through the entire New Testament. Paul's favorite way of describing what it means to be a Christian is simple: you are in Christ. That phrase, "in Christ," "in him," "in the Lord," shows up well over two hundred times in his letters.

Here's what that means practically: your past doesn't define you. Your present performance doesn't define you. Your future uncertainty doesn't define you. If you're a believer, the truest thing about you is that you are in Christ. When the Father looks at you, he sees you clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Because you are in Christ and Christ is in you, everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to you.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

COLOSSIANS 3:3-4

Union with God is one-way traffic. It's entirely his work. You didn't earn it, you can't take credit for it, and, this is the good part, you can't lose it. He dealt with your sin, called you out, awakened your faith, applied his grace, and will keep you as his own until the end.

You cannot lose what you did not earn.

If you've never received this gift, it's available to you today, simply by trusting that Jesus is who he says he is and has done what he says he's done. And if you're already a believer, hear this: your relationship with God is a gift meant to be enjoyed and cultivated, not a debt you're perpetually trying to pay down.

2 Communion with God Is the Relationship You Get to Build on It

Here's the principle that holds this whole series together:

It is our union with God in Christ that is the basis for our communion with God in life.

Union is one-way traffic, all grace, all gift. But communion is two-way traffic. It's the actual, lived, day-by-day experience of walking with God. And Scripture calls us into it constantly:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

JAMES 4:8

A relationship with God is a gift. You can't earn it, and you can't lose it, but you can absolutely neglect it. Let me show you what I mean with two people.

Jim has been a Christian for thirty years, and he's enjoying God more now than ever. His life isn't easy: a tight budget, a frustrating job, the normal weight of everyday life. But he's regularly aware of God's presence and sustaining grace. After three decades in the Bible, he's still finding truths in it that move him to worship.

Jan has also been a Christian for thirty years. She's never doubted her faith, and she shows up faithfully at church. But her relationship with God has gone quietly bland. Her phone gets more of her attention than her Bible does. Her church attendance is strong, but her heart is unsettled, and her passions have drifted elsewhere.

Jim and Jan share the exact same status in Christ: the same Father, the same inheritance, the same secure place in glory. But one of them knows more of God, is more satisfied in God, and is more shaped by God than the other.

That's the point: your union with God is settled and secure. Your communion with God is something you either cultivate or let atrophy. And the daily posture of your heart, what you're giving your time and attention to, either feeds that communion or starves it.

None of us are neutral here. Something is filling the space in your heart and mind that God wants to fill. The question isn't whether something will occupy that space. It's what.

Why This Matters Right Now

We live in an age engineered to bombard us: digital distractions, daily demands, worldly desires, all constantly forming us whether we notice it or not. Your phone is shaping your heart more than you realize. Your schedule is shaping your family. The value system all around you is quietly shaping what you want.

So if we want to experience more of God, we have to make space for him on purpose. We have to put away, put off, or repurpose the things crowding him out, and take up practices that actually renew our minds and purify our desires.

That's the whole aim of this book: making space daily for Scripture and prayer to counteract the noise, making space regularly for sabbath worship and rest to counteract the busyness, and making space to live in community and on mission to counteract the pull toward a life that's just about us.

Where to Start

If your relationship with God feels weak or neglected right now, if you're tired, worn out, hungry for more of him but not sure how to get there, start here: no matter how much you've drifted or neglected your walk with him, you can always begin again, because your standing with him was never based on your consistency in the first place. You are always united to Christ. That ground never moves.

And from that sure ground, we get to seek him.

SESSION ONE · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for More of God

What would it look like for you to make space for more of God this season?

- 1 Read Ephesians 2:1-9 together. What stands out to you about how thoroughly this passage describes grace as unearned?

- 2 Think about Jim and Jan in this session. Which one do you more naturally resemble right now, and why?

- 3 Where might legalism, an earning-centered way of relating to God, be quietly shaping how you approach spiritual disciplines?

- 4 None of us are neutral. What's currently filling the space in your heart that God wants to fill?

- 5 Close in prayer, thanking God for the security of your union with him before asking him to grow your communion with him this week.

02

SESSION TWO

Making Space for Scripture

Think about your morning routine. It probably looks a little different for each of us depending on when we wake up and what our day demands, but there are things most of us share in common: an alarm, a toothbrush, getting dressed, maybe a coffee.

I want to make the case that an open Bible needs to be part of that routine.

The Gift We've Been Given

The earliest Christians were called people of “the Way” because they let the word and teachings of Jesus so permeate their daily life that they lived differently than everyone around them. Acts 2:42 tells us the early church devoted themselves to the word and to prayer. Paul instructs Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Timothy 4:13). Colossians commands us to “let the word of Christ dwell richly in you” (3:16). God’s people have always been word-people, and one of the primary ways we live that out is by regularly reading the Bible.

But here’s the thing worth slowing down on: the Bible isn’t just information or theological data. It’s a relational book. Through it, God speaks, forming and forging a real relationship with his people.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

Every time we come to Scripture by faith, we get the chance to hear God speak. Tim Chester puts it well in *Enjoying God*¹:

The Bible is an accurate record of what God has said and done. But it's more than that. It's alive. It's the living voice of God. The Spirit who worked in the hearts of the writers of the Bible to ensure what they wrote was God's word is the same Spirit that works in the hearts of readers of the Bible to ensure what we hear is God's word.

TIM CHESTER, ENJOYING GOD

That means you and I can wake up each morning and treat the Bible as the primary means by which we commune with God. As we approach it prayerfully, by faith, God speaks.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

HEBREWS 4:12

The Bible is living. It's the very word of God spoken, and still speaking, to us. When we open it, read it, hear it, the living God speaks.

The Bible is active. It speaks into our lives in a variety of ways, the way any real relationship does. My wife's voice works in a variety of ways in my life: she makes me laugh, reminds me to take out the trash, tells me it's my turn to put the kids to bed, reminds me she loves me, reminds me why I love her. Her voice is dynamic in my life, and mine in hers. The Bible functions similarly. It doesn't say the same thing to us every time. It actively meets us where we are.

The Bible is sharp. It has a penetrating power like a two-edged sword, cutting through our foolishness, our discouragement, our blindness, our ignorance, our shame. Honestly, more often than not, it feels less like I'm reading the Bible and more like the Bible is reading me. As we slow down and tune our ear to it, the Spirit speaks with precision into our actual lives.

The psalmist describes it this way:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul... More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

PSALM 19:7,10

That's the gift. But here's the honest question: are we opening it? Can we say, with the psalmist, that Scripture is sweeter than honey and more desired than gold? Or do we need to admit it's time to relearn how to meet with God through his word?

The Crisis We're Actually Facing

If you've ever been to Disneyland, you know how overwhelming it can be. The rides, the crowds, the shops, the shows, the food, the characters — around every corner is a new experience inviting you in. We live in a digital Disneyland. Smartphones, social media, streaming, algorithms, AI, notifications all the time. Our screens and devices are impressive in what they can do, and they can also leave us overwhelmed, tired, and a little emptier than when we picked them up.

The average person picks up their phone somewhere between 150 and 350 times a day. Americans spend roughly seven hours a day on screens, over four and a half of those hours on phones alone, with nearly two and a half hours of that on social media. We haven't just grown dependent on our devices; we've grown dependent in a way that's actively reshaping us.

This isn't a fringe concern anymore. A 2019 Harvard Medical School publication on the brain and digital media summed up over a decade of research:

The human brain is constantly building neural connections while pruning away less-used ones, and digital media use plays an active role in that process. Much of what happens on screens provides 'impoverished' stimulation of the brain. Virtually all apps work on what's called a variable reward system, which is exactly what you get when you pull a lever on a slot machine... We need to be more aware of what's happening \[in the brain\] when we're staring at a smartphone so that we can enhance the positive and mitigate the negative.

MICHAEL RICH, MD, HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL²

Since then, study after study has shown the same pattern: shortened attention spans, a brain rewired to favor quick, fragmented information over sustained focus, a growing compulsion to check notifications, decreased reading comprehension, and a diminished capacity to sit still and deeply process anything.

One professor describes our moment as a "post-literate society," not because people can't read, but because they don't. And often it's not for lack of desire (book sales are actually up); it's that people try to read and find themselves too distracted to stay with it.

If that's true of reading in general, what does it mean for us as people of the Word? If we're rarely reading Scripture and constantly scrolling, how do we expect to cultivate a relationship with God, to hear his voice? Because if it's not his voice shaping us through his word, something else is doing the shaping by default. Usually an algorithm.

I want to be clear about where I'm landing this, though. My hope isn't that you walk away thinking "phones are bad." My hope is that you walk away thinking "Jesus is better": that you'd become more aware of what your phone is quietly costing you, and more aware of what God's word actually offers in its place. That you'd pray, with the psalmist, "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways" (Psalm 119:37).

Making Space for It

If any of this is landing on you, here's a starting place: resetting your relationship with your phone and renewing your relationship with God's word.

ON THE PHONE SIDE:

Set a screen time limit. Both major phone platforms now build this in. None of us actually need hours a day on what is functionally a slot machine.

Use focus modes to limit notifications. My phone stays on "personal" mode until 9 a.m. every morning and switches back at 5 p.m.; only calls or texts from family and our elders get through during the day. I check in at natural transition points rather than living tethered to it.

Put your phone to bed. In *The Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch recommends giving devices an actual bedtime³: everyone in the house plugs their phone in around the same hour each night, and it stays there until morning.

Consider a season without social media. If you sense it's diminishing your communion with God, put it away for a defined stretch of time. Let it show you how dependent on it you've actually become, and relearn what it's like to be present with God and with people.

ON THE SCRIPTURE SIDE:

Because your standing with God is secure, because you're standing on the finished work of Christ, not your own consistency, you can always start fresh. We've all renewed commitments before around spending, or eating, or exercise. Consider doing the same with Scripture: make it part of your morning routine before anything else claims your attention.

I like the shorthand "Bible before phone." Roughly 90% of people check their phones within the first ten minutes of waking up. A simple starting practice is leaving your phone on the nightstand or charger until you've spent time in God's word first. It's the heart of the practice that matters here, not the letter of it; this isn't about a new rule to feel guilty over. It's about giving the first, freshest attention of your day to the voice that actually knows you.

SESSION TWO · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for Scripture

What would it look like for you to make God's word, not your phone, the first voice you hear each morning?

- 1 Read Psalm 19:7-10 together. What language does the psalmist use to describe Scripture, and how does it compare to how you typically describe your own Bible reading?

- 2 Be honest: how many times a day would you estimate you pick up your phone? How does that compare to how often you open your Bible?

- 3 Of the four ways to reset your relationship with your phone, which would cost you the most to try, and why might that be the one worth trying?

- 4 What would "Bible before phone" actually look like in your specific morning routine this week?

- 5 Pray Psalm 119:37 together as a group: "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways."

NOTES

1. Tim Chester, *Enjoying God: Experience the Power and Love of God in Everyday Life* (The Good Book Company, 2018).
2. Michael Rich, MD, director of the Center on Media and Child Health, Boston Children's Hospital, and associate professor, Harvard Medical School, quoted in Harvard-affiliated reporting on adolescent brain development and digital media (2019).
3. Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Baker Books, 2017).
4. Trevin Wax, "Reading the Bible When Nobody Reads," *Reconstructing Faith* podcast (North American Mission Board).

03

SESSION THREE

Making Space for Prayer

Even saying the word “prayer” out loud, I can almost hear the sigh. Ahh, another one of these... I know I should do it, but I don’t. It’s hard to remember. Nothing really happens when I do it. I can almost feel you starting to tune out already.

Here’s why you shouldn’t.

Prayer isn’t a duty. It’s not a box to check in the Christian life. It’s an ongoing conversation with the Creator God of the universe, who deeply desires an actual, personal relationship with you. At its core, prayer is about relationship, and because God is deeply relational, we’re invited into a life of constant prayer, a place where he promises to meet us, anytime, anywhere.

So how do we actually pray constantly? That’s what I want to get into.

Why This Is Even Possible

The Bible paints prayer as a way of connecting with the living God. Stop and sit with that for a second: the same God who spoke light into existence, who formed water and earth and humanity, has made space where you and I can actually connect with him.

And what’s even more staggering is that he wants to. It’s one thing to want to connect with God. It’s a completely different thing to realize he wants to connect with you.

That’s the message of the gospel: there is a God who exists, and he desires a relationship with you. Because of your sin, that relationship is broken, and there’s nothing you can do on your own to fix the damage. So God says, in effect, I’ll fix it. He enters into your brokenness in the person of Jesus, takes the penalty your sin deserves, and defeats the death that sin brings. In Jesus, God shows you exactly how relational he is: willing to step into your mess to repair what you broke. Trust that, and the relationship you severed is forever healed through the blood of Christ.

That truth, that God would go to those lengths, is the clearest evidence you'll find that the God of the Bible is a relational God.

And nobody understood the relational nature of the Father better than the Son. In Luke 11, the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to teach them to pray. He gives them a prayer, then tells them two parables. Most of us read that and immediately start looking for the formula: okay, how do I pray? But that's not really Jesus's point. He's far more concerned with who you're praying to than how you're doing it. Prayer connects you to your Father.

You're not approaching a distant deity who requires the right formula to get his attention. You're coming to a loving Father who delights in everything you say to him. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that because of the Spirit, we get to call God "Abba, Father," the same intimate address Jesus himself used:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba\! Father\!'

ROMANS 8:15

Paul is showing us something remarkable: once you trust Christ, the Spirit draws you into the very same relationship with God that Jesus himself has. You're brought into sonship. He is your perfect Father, and if your relationship with your earthly dad complicates that picture for you, ask the Lord to help untangle it. God is a perfect Father. Ours, on our best days, are not.

Prayer is you, in relationship with your perfect Father. Not someone merely putting up with you, someone who loves and cherishes you the way he loves your older brother, Jesus. And he wants you running to him constantly, with everything. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

Why We Need This More Than We Think

Scripture doesn't tell us to pray occasionally; it tells us to pray constantly. "Continue steadfastly in prayer" (Colossians 4:2). "Be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12). "Pray at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6-7), a promise that ends with peace that surpasses understanding guarding our hearts and minds.

And we are a people desperately short on peace. Consider what's happened since 2010:

A 121% increase in anxiety among 18-34 year-olds. A 153% increase in depression among 12-17 year-olds. A 167% increase in suicide rates for adolescent girls, and a 91% increase for adolescent boys.

These are government statistics, not church statistics, and they span every age and demographic, not just teenagers. So what happened in 2010? By most accounts, it's the year smartphones and social media fully arrived in daily life. Jonathan Haidt, in *The Anxious Generation*, calls it "the Great Rewiring,"¹ the moment the social lives of an entire generation moved onto phones, with continuous access to social media, gaming, and endless content.

Many of the things filling our time are actively working against us, and quietly crowding out our Father. Maybe smartphones and social feeds aren't your particular struggle, but I'd bet your thoughts are still constantly somewhere: the news, the score, the deadline at work, whether the kids are thriving, how you'll cover the bills, whether you're enough. The pace of life itself is crushing, regardless of the specific distraction.

And into all of that noise, the relational God of the Bible says: I see you. I care about the thing you're carrying. Talk to me about it. I'm here.

Pray without ceasing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:17

I don't know that we're taking Paul seriously here. There's a scene in *Parks and Recreation* where Ron Swanson orders breakfast: "Give me all the bacon you have." The server starts writing. "Wait," Ron says, "I'm worried what you heard was 'give me a lot of bacon,' but what I said was 'give me all the bacon that you have.'" I think Paul would say something similar to us. "Pray without ceasing," I told you. I worry what you heard was 'pray a lot,' or 'pray when it's convenient,' or 'pray only when you really need something.' What I actually said was: don't ever stop. Your Father wants to be with you.

Redeeming the Pockets

So how do we pray without ceasing while also having a spouse, kids, a yard, an overdue oil change, and dinner to make? Here's one way: throughout your day are dozens, maybe hundreds, of small pockets of time where your mind isn't actively engaged: the drive to the office, the moment before you log on, folding laundry, mowing the lawn, sitting in a waiting room, walking the dog, rocking a baby.

You already fill those pockets with something. Often it's worry. More often, probably, it's your phone: scrolling, checking scores, half-listening to a podcast. Even a good podcast about Jesus is still, in that moment, someone else telling you about him rather than you talking to him directly. We live in information overload; more often than not, it would do you more good to talk to the Lord than to listen to one more person talk about him.

The invitation is simple: take those ordinary pockets of time you already have, and make them pockets of prayer instead. Not long, formal prayers necessarily, just honest, ongoing conversation with your Father. As you do, keep three things in mind.

- 1 Constant prayer is surrender.** One of the hardest things about a praying life is that it requires dying to yourself, over and over. We don't love that, because it means giving up control. Skye Jethani writes in *With*:

...to mitigate our fears, we all seek control over our world. If we can harness and control unpredictable forces, subdue our environment, and rule over our circumstances, then we can alleviate our fears, or so we believe... control is an illusion. No amount of control will ever be enough to ensure our safety, and no amount of control will ever remove our fears.

SKYE JETHANI, *WITH*²

This is the same temptation that haunted our first parents in the garden. And the irony is that chasing control just produces more fear, because we can never fully get there. In prayer, God invites you to surrender instead, to yield your way to his. It's how Jesus prayed on the night before the cross: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). It's built into the prayer he taught us: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), which really means, Father, I want your way here. In my life, in the dirty, messy details, even if it's hard. Your way over mine.

- 2 Constant prayer is simple.** Continual communion with God doesn't require a theology degree or eloquence, just honesty. One author compares most prayers to hot dogs: about 19% real meat, 81% filler. Only a small part is real substance (confession, honesty, actual requests) while the rest is religious padding meant to make us sound appropriately righteous.

You don't find hot-dog prayers in the Bible. You find short, honest ones: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30, as Peter began to sink). "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34, from the cross). Jesus himself warns against

heaping up empty phrases, “for they think they will be heard for their many words... your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:7-8), and then gives a prayer that, in English, runs about four sentences long.

Long prayers aren’t wrong. But if you’re going to actually pray without ceasing, short, simple, and occasionally messy is how it happens in real life. Some of my own prayers walking the dog sound less like elevated liturgy and more like, “God, I’m confused, today made no sense, I feel like I failed a lot; would you help me?” And honestly, sometimes: “Lord, help me not to lose my patience with this dog.” That’s not irreverence. That’s just honesty before a Father who already knows what’s in your heart, and who prefers the real, messy you to the performed, “religious” one.

3 Constant prayer is work. Like any relationship, this one requires effort. You don’t deepen a relationship with your kids or your spouse without leaning into the work of it, and prayer is no different. Some of us avoid it because it feels like there’s no visible payoff. We’ll work hard at things where we can see results, but prayer often feels like nothing is happening.

It requires waiting and repetition: asking for the same thing again and again while wondering, God, are you even there? He’s not delaying the way we think. As pastor Warren Wiersbe put it: “God’s delays are not the delays of inactivity, but of preparation.”³ He’s working on you as you work in prayer. Paul says as much in Romans 8:26: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness,” interceding for us with groanings too deep for words, kneading the truths of the gospel into our hearts the way you’d knead ingredients into dough. You aren’t condemned. Those failures don’t change your identity. You’re still his.

Where This Leaves Us

Here’s what’s almost funny: the statistics I mentioned earlier, about anxiety and depression, come from a book written by an atheist, a social psychologist who doesn’t believe in God at all. And after laying out the problem in detail, he proposes five things we should be doing instead of the habits that are quietly destroying us. One of them is prayer. Along with communal worship, in-person relationships, dying to self, and extending grace to others.

Those are, not coincidentally, exactly the things God has already invited us into.

Whether we want to admit it or not, we’re desperate for relationship with our Father. We’re desperate for more of him. And he would love nothing more than to give it to us, through constant, ordinary, honest prayer, offered in the pockets of time you already have.

SESSION THREE · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for Prayer

What's one pocket of your day this week that could become a pocket of prayer instead?

- 1 Of the three truths about prayer- surrender, simplicity, and work- which is hardest for you personally, and why?

- 2 Read Romans 8:15. What difference does it make to approach prayer as talking to “Abba, Father” rather than performing for a distant deity?

- 3 Walk through a typical day and name three “pockets of time” you could turn into pockets of prayer this week.

- 4 Where do you tend to overcomplicate prayer, waiting until it sounds a certain way before it “counts”?

- 5 Spend a few minutes right now praying short, simple, honest prayers together, no performance required.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (Penguin Press, 2024).
2. Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God* (Thomas Nelson, 2011).
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, “The Delays of Life” (sermon).

04

SESSION FOUR

Making Space for Corporate Worship

I feel closer to God on the golf course than I do in a pew.

I'd bet you've heard some version of that line. Maybe you've said it. Maybe the golf course, for you, is a lake, a hiking trail, or a quiet porch with coffee. I want to say up front, I get it. Creation genuinely does declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). Solitude with him is not a lesser thing; it's something we should certainly make space for in our life.

But here's the question I want to press on: if private communion with God is all we're after, why did he design us to need each other?

We've spent the first two chapters talking about the means of grace God has given us to cultivate a life with him: Scripture and prayer. So far, there are things you can do alone. In this chapter, however, we are going to see that alone is incomplete.

Why Alone Was Never the Plan

From the very beginning, God said something was not good, and it wasn't sin. It was Adam being alone (Genesis 2:18). We were built for communion with God and with each other, and Scripture never really separates the two. You cannot fully love God while treating his people as optional.

The early church understood this instinctively. Acts 2 doesn't describe a scattered movement of individually devout believers checking in with God on their own schedules. It describes people who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42), together, regularly, on purpose. Verse 46 says they were "attending the temple together" daily. This wasn't an obligation they tolerated. It was the shape their new life in Christ naturally took.

And notice what's already packed into that one verse from Acts 2: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Not just singing. From the very first gathering of the church, corporate worship was never a single activity; it was a handful of means of grace, braided together, that God uses to shape his people week by week.

And the writer of Hebrews doesn't treat gathering as optional either:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

Notice what's tucked into that verse: neglecting to gather together was already "the habit of some" back then; this isn't a uniquely modern problem invented by livestreams and Sunday morning soccer leagues. But notice, too, what corporate worship is for in that verse. It's not primarily about you getting something out of the music or the sermon. It's about stirring up love and good works in each other. You cannot stir up someone you never gather with.

The Counterfeit We're Tempted By

We live in an age that has made private, individualized spirituality easier than it has ever been. You can stream a sermon from any pastor in the world in your pajamas. You can listen to worship music with earbuds in on a run. You can build a spiritual life entirely curated to your preferences (the teachers you like, the music that moves you, the schedule that's convenient) without ever having to sit next to someone who annoys you, sing a song you don't love, confess your sin out loud alongside other sinners, or be known by anyone at all.

I want to be careful here, because none of those things are bad in themselves. But by themselves, they are a counterfeit corporate worship: the sabbath conversation all over again. Just like a day off isn't the same as biblical sabbath, a curated private playlist of spiritual content isn't the same as gathered worship. It gives you information and inspiration. It cannot give you what only a body gathered together can give: the actual, physical, sometimes-inconvenient presence of other believers whom God has placed in your life to shape you, and the full, ordinary means of grace God has built into a worship service, not just the parts you'd choose for yourself.

It's Not Just the Singing

At Redeemer, we believe our Sunday liturgy is formative, not because it's elaborate, but because it's simple, accessible, and repeated. Every week, in ways you can easily miss if you're only half paying attention, God is shaping you through more than the music. Consider what's actually happening when we gather.

We sing together. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Notice the "one another." When you sing alone in your car, you experience God's goodness. When you sing next to someone in a pew, you declare it to them, and they to you. Worship in the New Testament is aimed both vertically, at God, and horizontally, at each other. You're not only there to receive; you're there so your faith becomes a gift to the person next to you, and theirs to you.

We hear the word preached. This is not incidental to worship; it is one of its central acts. In Nehemiah 8, when the exiles return and gather as one assembly, Ezra doesn't hand out scrolls for private reading. He stands on a platform, opens the book "in the sight of all the people," and reads and explains it "clearly," giving "the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:5-8). The whole assembly weeps, and then rejoices, together, in response to the word taught aloud among them. Paul later charges Timothy, "preach the word... in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2), a command given for the gathered church, not a private podcast feed. There's something the preached word does in a room full of people, hearing the same truth applied to the same historical moment together, that a solitary reading plan alone cannot fully replicate. You are not just being informed. You are being confronted, comforted, and formed alongside your brothers and sisters, in real time.

We confess our sin together, and hear the same grace declared over all of us. Private confession matters (James 5:16, 1 John 1:9), but there is something uniquely humbling and uniquely freeing about kneeling, even figuratively, next to your neighbor and admitting, out loud or in your heart, that you have both fallen short of the same glory of God, and then hearing the same gospel promise of forgiveness spoken over both of you in the very same breath. Confession done alone can quietly convince you that your particular sins are uniquely shameful. Confession done corporately reminds you that you are simply one more sinner standing in a room full of sinners, all equally in need of, and equally covered by, the same grace.

We take Communion together. Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 aren't given to individuals eating alone; they're given to a gathered church, eating and drinking together, "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). At the Table, you receive the same broken bread and the same cup as the person kneeling beside you: the wealthy and the struggling, the newcomer and the forty-year member, all fed by the identical grace. There is no version of the Lord's Supper that was ever meant to be private. It is, by its very design, a shared meal that proclaims a shared salvation.

We pray together. The earliest church "devoted themselves... to the prayers" (Acts 2:42), plural, corporate, structured prayers, not merely private devotion. When a congregation prays together, for the sick, for the lost, for one another's burdens named out loud, you are carried by faith that isn't only your own on the mornings when yours is thin. You also lend your faith to someone else on the mornings when theirs is thin. That exchange simply cannot happen in isolation.

None of this happens by accident. It's why a Sunday service isn't just "worship time" bookended by announcements; it's a whole, ordinary, repeated liturgy of grace: gathering, confession, the word sung and the word preached, the Table, and prayer. Simple enough that anyone can follow it, and rich enough to shape you your whole life, week after week, if you let it.

- 1 Corporate worship declares something private worship can't.** Whether it's through song, spoken confession, or shared prayer, gathered worship turns what would otherwise stay locked inside your own head into something spoken, heard, and shared. You are not only there to receive; you are there so that your faith becomes a gift to the person next to you, and theirs to you.
- 2 Corporate worship humbles you in a way private worship cannot.** Alone, you get to curate everything: the songs, the sermon topics, the pace, the people. Gathered, you don't. You sit next to the person whose politics annoy you, whose kid is loud, whose singing voice is not good, and you confess the same sin, eat the same bread, and drink from the same cup as they do. That's not a flaw in the system; it's the point. The church was never meant to be a group of people who chose each other because they're alike. It's meant to be a family, chosen by God, across every line that would otherwise divide us (Galatians 3:28). Submitting your Sunday to a gathered body, rather than a personalized spiritual diet, is a small, weekly act of dying to the idea that your preferences are the center of your spiritual life.
- 3 Corporate worship reminds you the gospel isn't just about you.** This might be the deepest thing at stake. A private, isolated faith can quietly convince you that Christianity is a self-improvement project between you and God. But the gospel builds a people, not just

individuals. Peter calls us “living stones,” being built together “into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). A single stone isn’t a house. You need the others around you, not as an accessory to your faith, but as part of what your faith actually is.

What This Actually Costs You

Let’s be honest about why corporate worship is hard to prioritize. It costs you your Sunday morning flexibility. It means showing up on weeks you don’t feel like it, sitting through a sermon that doesn’t scratch the itch you came in with, confessing sin you’d rather keep private, and being known, really known, by people who might disappoint you or whom you might disappoint.

But that inconvenience is exactly where the grace is. God didn’t design your growth to happen only in the moments that feel good to you. He designed it to happen, in large part, through the friction of gathered, ordinary, imperfect community, and through the steady repetition of word, table, and prayer, the same way he designed a marriage to sanctify you precisely through the parts that aren’t easy.

And here’s the gospel underneath all of it: you don’t gather to earn a place among God’s people. You gather because you already have one. Christ didn’t die to save isolated individuals who happen to believe the same things. He died to build a bride, a body, a family, and he has placed you inside it. Showing up on Sunday isn’t a transaction to secure your standing with God. It’s a weekly reminder that you already belong, and an invitation to actually live like it.

Making Space for It

If you’ve drifted into treating corporate worship as optional, something you’ll do when it’s convenient, when the sermon topic interests you, when you’re not tired, here’s the simple call this week: show up, and stay present through the whole of it.

Practically, that might look like:

Committing to a regular rhythm rather than a “when I feel like it” rhythm. Consistency is what allows a body of believers to actually know you.

Sitting somewhere new, or introducing yourself to someone you don’t know. Corporate worship stops being corporate the moment it becomes anonymous.

Actually engaging the whole liturgy, not just the parts you enjoy: singing the songs, confessing the confession, receiving the Table, praying the prayers, even, especially, on the mornings you don't feel like it. You're not doing these things because you feel them; you're declaring and receiving truth regardless of how you feel that day.

Staying through the awkward parts: the announcements, the greeting time, the coffee afterward. That's not filler around the "real" worship. It's often where the actual body-life happens.

You were never meant to walk with God alone. He gave you a family, and a rhythm of gathering, for that. So make space, not just for him in private, but for his people, gathered, in public, on purpose, through the whole shape of what a Sunday together is meant to be.

SESSION FOUR · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for Corporate Worship

What would it look like for you to stop treating Sunday as optional, and start treating it as the gift it actually is?

- 1 Have you ever thought or said some version of “I feel closer to God outside of church than in it”? What do you think is underneath that feeling?

- 2 Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What does this passage say gathering together is actually for?

- 3 This session walks through five things happening in a gathered service: singing, hearing the word preached, confession, Communion, and corporate prayer. Which of these do you tend to coast through without really engaging?

- 4 Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. What does it mean that the Lord’s Supper was never designed to be taken alone?

- 5 What’s one part of Sunday liturgy you’ll commit to engaging more fully this week, rather than just observing?

05 SESSION FIVE

Making Space for Sabbath

We spend most of our lives working. And if you're not working, you're probably thinking about it: complaining about it, fretting over it, preparing for it, or recovering from it. We feel guilty if we don't work enough and resentful if we work too much. Work dominates our lives. And even when the workday ends, more work always seems to be waiting. We are pros at staying busy. Not so great at rest.

Let me be clear about something first: work is not a curse. God created work. He made us, male and female, in his own image, and then bestowed real honor and dignity on us by inviting us into work (Genesis 1:28). Whether you build widgets, turn wrenches, care for babies, sell products, or write code, God can be glorified through your work, and he will work through you.

But work is also, almost always, frustrating and rarely soul-satisfying. Even the dream job, if you ever land it, comes with its own thorns. That's Genesis 3: sin twisting every good thing, including work. Work becomes about self. Work becomes our identity. Work strains us physically and emotionally. We're overworked, underpaid, working with wrong motives, working alongside sinners because we are sinners.

All of that frustration leaves us looking for a solution. Some people just work for the weekend: endure the week, complain as much as possible, then let loose on Saturday. Others cultivate gratitude by comparison: however bad your job is, at least you're not a sewer inspector or a bat guano collector. Neither of those is actually a way out. There has to be a better way to navigate the demands of work and responsibility.

There is. It's called Sabbath. And it's God's gracious gift to us.

What Sabbath Is Not

Our culture has actually diagnosed a real biblical problem: human beings are not limitless. We were never meant to be ruled by ceaseless activity. We need rest. Employers are more flexible than ever about time off. Some companies have done away with “vacation days” as a concept. “Self-care” content is everywhere. All of that is picking up on something true.

But we’ve misdiagnosed the solution.

Biblical Sabbath is not self-care. Self-care is what author Eugene Peterson calls a “cut-flower sabbath”: rest, rejuvenation, and joy pursued apart from God. To think that we, the weary, can revive our own souls is a little foolish. Self-care is often just a few hits of dopamine that fade fast.

Biblical Sabbath is not a day off, either. Days off are good: they give you a mental and physical break, let you catch up on errands or entertainment. But they aren’t Sabbath. A day off is what Peterson calls “a counterfeit sabbath.” Biblical Sabbath is about more than resting your body. It’s about the inner rest of your soul, a rest you receive from God on the Sabbath and then carry back into your work. When we understand this rightly, we learn to work from rest, rather than for it.

Three Truths About Sabbath from Across Scripture

1 Sabbath is created by God.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

GENESIS 2:1-3

Why would God rest? Not because he needed it; he’s inexhaustible. I believe it’s for two reasons: for delight, and for us. The Hebrew word for “rested,” *shabbat*, means to stop, to cease, to still; it’s a word about time that highlights the non-use of it. Think of it as space for the RPMs of your body and soul, revved up all week, to finally exhale.

God hardwired Sabbath into the fabric of creation itself. A day to delight, relish, and rest isn’t just good; it’s holy. It’s required if we want to actually flourish. Zoom out on the creation account, and you see the pattern: the Garden was a place where humanity worked with God for six days and rested in him for one. Relationship is at the heart of the design.

2 Sabbath is commanded by God.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

EXODUS 20:8-11

Context matters here. God had just rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt. He is not Pharaoh. He is not a taskmaster. They are no longer slaves to endless production, and neither are you. We're prone to finding our identity in what we do, so God gives a command to guide us back into his design: we are not work units, equipment, or machines of production. We are image bearers. Sabbath-keeping resets us in our true identity, giving us time to remember God's faithfulness and delight in what he's already done in our lives.

3 Sabbath is completed in Jesus.

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees accuse Jesus's disciples of breaking the Sabbath by picking grain as they walked through a field. Jesus responds by claiming to be "Lord of the Sabbath," the one who created it, commanded it, and has now come to fulfill it.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

MATTHEW 11:28-30

There is no rest apart from Jesus. But in him, there's rest for your soul. Because of Jesus, there's forgiveness, identity, purpose, and a future: nothing to earn and nothing left to prove. You aren't defined by what you do or fail to do. You're defined by Christ. Your performance was never your identity; your production was never your merit. He is.

That means you don't have to be afraid of slowing down and stepping into unhurried time with God. Your sins are forgiven. He calls you a friend. And one day you'll live in an eternity of delighting, unburdened, in his presence.

So in Jesus: Sabbath-keeping isn't a rigid rule you're bound by; it's a promise you're invited to enjoy. Your righteousness was never on the line. Your flourishing is. Every time you keep it, you're preaching the gospel to yourself: your identity isn't in what you do, but in the finished work of

Christ. As Tim Keller put it:

The purpose of Sabbath is to enjoy your God, life in general, what you have accomplished in the world through his help, and the freedom you have in the gospel: the freedom from slavery to any material object or human expectation. The Sabbath is a sign of the hope that we have in the world to come.

TIM KELLER²

So What Does This Actually Look Like?

One of my favorite authors describes Sabbath as taking place “between the lines of praying and playing” (Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles*).¹ Both work together to renew the soul: attentiveness to God and delight in his gifts. A purely secular “day off” neglects prayer in the pursuit of rest. A hyper-religious “sabbath” neglects play, and ends up void of delight.

Ideally, this looks like 24 hours centered on Sunday worship, a built-in “prayerground” every week. The question is what you build around it: your “playground.” What renews you and helps you delight in God? Painting, fishing, hiking, cooking, biking, board games, golf, sitting on the back porch: the key is activities that renew you rather than drain you, that let you stay attentive to God while enjoying his gifts.

No one stumbles into this. Life is too demanding and distracting for that. It takes intentionality to name a day and commit to it, and it takes desire, a genuine dissatisfaction with the unsatisfying, hectic pace the world offers instead.

Here’s what this has looked like for people in our church, because every person, household, and season is different:

Sunday evening through Monday evening: a favorite show together as a family, a slow morning after the kids are at school, yard work or a walk with the dog, no evening activities, the best meal of the week around the table.

A shifting Saturday or Sunday, due to an inconsistent work schedule: rest, recreation, church, and a simple, intentional Sabbath dinner, cooking together, reading a liturgy from *Every Moment Holy*, reflecting on the week, praising God for his faithfulness, all with a preschooler making it wonderfully messy.

Saturday at 6 pm through Sunday at 6 pm: clear bookends, a liturgy read together to begin, a time of sharing to close.

For introverts with very extroverted jobs: a family-centric day of things that fill them up: reading, cooking, a trail walk, slow Sunday mornings, saying no to phones, intentionally fighting against productivity.

I love that last phrase, “fighting against productivity.” Sabbath is a quiet resistance against the world’s insistence that you are what you do. You’re not. You’re beloved in Christ. You’re secure in Christ. Your rest is already his.

A few smaller ideas people shared: working in the garden while the kids nap, deleting social media for the day, tucking the phone away and skipping the watch, or simply Sunday worship plus a nap plus going out to eat so no one has to cook or clean.

It’s less about exactly what fills the day, and more about cultivating a Sabbath heart.

Where to Begin

What could this look like for you? Not someday, this week. Sabbath is God’s gracious gift, offered out of his loving kindness. The only thing left to do is learn to receive it.

SESSION FIVE · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for Sabbath

- 1 In your own words, what's the difference between a day off and biblical Sabbath?

- 2 Read Matthew 11:28-30. How does resting in the finished work of Christ change the way you approach a day of rest?

- 3 Look back at the examples of what Sabbath looks like for different families in this session. Which one is closest to something you could actually try?

- 4 What currently gets in the way of you keeping a regular Sabbath rhythm?

- 5 Name one thing you could do this week that is purely "pray and play," with no productivity attached to it at all.

NOTES

1. Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Eerdmans, 1987).
2. Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (Dutton, 2013), 18.

06

SESSION SIX

Making Space for Community & Mission

Gathered to Be Sent

We've spent five sessions making space for the things that grow our communion with God: Scripture, prayer, sabbath, corporate worship. All of those, in one way or another, are about what God wants to give you. This last one is a little different. It's about what God wants to give you through others, and then what he wants to give the world through you.

Community and mission might sound like two separate items on a spiritual checklist, but they're really the same movement, seen from two angles. God gathers his people in so that he can send his people out. You can't have a healthy version of one without the other. A community with no mission turns inward and stagnant. A mission with no community burns people out and hollows them out. God designed them to work together: inhale and exhale.

You Were Never Meant to Be Alone

There's something about the Christian faith that sets it apart from the start: we worship a God who exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, three persons, one essence. It's the kind of thing that, when your kids ask you to explain it, you say "go ask your mother." There's real mystery there. But what isn't mysterious is what it tells us about God's nature: he is relational. He exists in perfect relationship within himself before he ever created anything else. Relationship isn't just something God does. It's part of who he is.

That relational God then makes humanity in his image, and his image isn't just something we have; it's something we are. We were built for relationship, the same way he exists in relationship. God looks at the first man, alone, and says the first "not good" in the Bible: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Then he makes woman, and when Adam sees her, the text seems

to slip into song: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). Some scholars think that’s literally poetry, Adam so overcome with joy at not being alone anymore that he bursts into verse. When was the last time you were that excited?

That joy isn’t really about romance. It’s about the deep, built-in ache every one of us carries for real relationship. Even the most introverted among us, people who love solitude and need a month to recover from a birthday party, still long to be known by someone. And even the most extroverted among us can stand in a room of fifty people, having thirty conversations, and still feel like we’re on a desert island. We weren’t designed to just be around people. We were designed to be truly known by them.

So God doesn’t just wire that longing into us and leave us to figure it out. He gives us the very thing that satisfies it: his family, the church, and then he invites us in. And it’s in there, in actual community, not just proximity, that he shapes us and reveals more of himself to us.

But two things in our culture quietly pull us away from this.

The first is individualism: the belief that personal independence and self-sufficiency are among the highest goals in life. In practice, this often looks like having two relational walls: a low one, and a very high one. The low wall is easy for people to get over; we’re friendly, we host, we make small talk well. But behind the second, much higher wall sits the real us: our fears, our insecurities, our sin, everything we don’t want anyone to see. We let people get close enough to feel included, and then we quietly stop them from getting any closer. Because if they saw what’s actually back there, we’re convinced they’d think less of us.

Here’s what that fear misses: the “you” hiding behind that second wall, messy, failing, imperfect, is exactly the you Jesus died for. He didn’t go to the cross for the curated version of you. He went for the real one. Paul understood this, which is why he could say, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Your brokenness, brought into the light, isn’t a liability in Christian community; it’s the very thing that points other people to grace. When we hide instead, we’re quietly telling everyone around us, “only people who have it together are welcome here,” and we end up with a room full of strangers sitting in pews instead of siblings sitting at a table.

The second pull is consumerism: the belief that life is about maximizing personal satisfaction, which quietly turns relationships into products. Individualism says, “I am self-sufficient.” Consumerism says, “I am what I consume.” We’re rewarded for constantly upgrading, bigger, better, more admired, and eventually we start treating community the same way: something we subscribe to

when it's convenient and unsubscribe from the moment it costs us anything. And if everything else in life is a product to be rated, it's not long before we start feeling like one ourselves, valuable only as long as we're liked. That road only leads one place: despair.

God offers something better than either counterfeit. Paul describes the church as a body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12:14-20), not consumers grading the experience, but participants, each one necessary, each one only able to function as designed while attached to the whole. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from inside a church under real persecution, put it this way:

The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him... He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER¹

We don't gather to consume each other. We gather to hand each other the gospel, again and again, because none of us can preach it to ourselves as well as someone else can preach it to us.

...And Never Meant to Keep It to Yourself

Here's where community and mission connect. The same family God gathers you into is the family he sends you out from.

The entire Bible tells one story of a God on mission: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. He made a world flooded with his glory, humanity broke it through sin, and from Genesis 3 onward God has been patiently, relentlessly at work redeeming what was lost, through Israel, through the prophets, and finally through Jesus, who fulfills every promise, purchases a people for himself, and then commissions that people: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). One day that mission will be complete, the dead raised, all things restored, God's glory filling the earth exactly as it was always meant to. Until then, every disciple of Jesus has been invited to join him in the work.

That's a staggering thing to sit with: God doesn't only love you, save you, and promise to finish the work he's started in you; he also wants to work through you. What we've received from him—forgiveness, new life, peace—we get to hand to the people around us.

You might be thinking: I'm no expert in evangelism or theology. Good news, you don't need to be. You're already the world's leading expert on how Jesus changed your life. Missional living isn't a specialized skill; it's ordinary people living out an ordinary, everyday witness right where they

already live, work, and play. If I had to boil the New Testament's instructions down to two phrases, it would be this: living out, and inviting in.

Living out means your everyday faithfulness is itself a witness: "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father" (Matthew 5:16). It's not about living a moral life to prove you're better than anyone. It's about living a full, faithful life with Jesus that shows the world he's better. We're most effective on mission when we're simply enjoying him the most.

Inviting in means being ready to speak when the door opens: "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you... with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Charles Spurgeon said it well: "If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself."² We naturally invite people into whatever we love. The question worth sitting with is simply: are we inviting people into him?

I heard a testimony recently from a man named Aaron, who described a coworker, Craig, as being like "a pebble in his shoe" for years, not painful enough to stop and address, but present enough that he never forgot it was there. Craig didn't lecture him. He asked real questions, remembered what mattered to Aaron, and told him he was praying for him. What actually broke things open wasn't an argument; it was watching Craig cling to Jesus through his son's cancer diagnosis and seeing something real: real hope, real peace, a presence that was actually sustaining him. "That's when I knew," Aaron said, "that what he had, I needed." That's missional living: not pulling away from people in judgment, and not blending in and staying quiet, but living so genuinely with Jesus that people notice something's different, and then being ready to name what it is when they ask.

And here's the deepest motivation for any of this: it was never really about results. As missiologist Lesslie Newbigin put it, "The deepest motive for mission is simply the desire to be with Jesus where he is."³ He is the reward. Not the outcome, not the numbers, him. Joining his mission is simply one more way of drawing near to him, right alongside making space for Scripture, prayer, and sabbath.

Making Space for It

If you've drifted into isolation, community, at its heart, is an invitation to stop hiding behind the second wall, to let yourself actually be known by a small group of people who will handle your mess with grace, and to hand them the same. If you don't currently have a group of people like that in your life, that's the single most important next step here.

And if you've drifted into a purely private faith, content, correct, but going nowhere, mission is the natural next step out of that same community. Look at the ordinary pockets of your life: your neighbors, your coworkers, the people at your gym or your kid's school. You don't need a plan to move overseas. You need eyes to see the people already in front of you, and a willingness to let your life say something true about the God who's holding it together.

Gathered in, sent out. That's the whole rhythm. God never intended for you to walk with him alone, and he never intended for you to keep him to yourself once you found him.

SESSION SIX · REFLECT & DISCUSS

Making Space for Community & Mission

Who's one person God has already placed in your everyday life, and what would it look like to invite them, in some small way, further in?

- 1 This session describes two relational walls, a low one and a high one. Who in your life, if anyone, has made it past your second wall?

- 2 Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-20. How does seeing yourself as one part of a body, rather than an independent individual, change how you think about commitment to a community?

- 3 Individualism and consumerism were named as two cultural counterfeits to community. Which one do you feel more pull toward?

- 4 Who is one person God has already placed in your everyday life that you could take a next step toward this week?

- 5 Close by praying for boldness, both to be known within your community, and to make Christ known beyond it.

NOTES

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Harper & Row, 1954; German original 1939).
2. Charles Spurgeon, "A Sermon and a Reminiscence," *The Sword and the Trowel* (March 1873).
3. Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Eerdmans, 1994), 129.

A Closing Word

If your relationship with God feels weak or neglected right now, or if you've simply drifted, here's the same word this guide opened with: you can always begin again. You are always united to Christ. That ground never moves. And from that sure ground, we get to seek him, together, in the ordinary means he's already given us. These practices—Scripture, prayer, worship, sabbath, community, and mission—are not hoops to jump through to earn his favor, but open doors into his presence.

As you close this guide, I want to gently invite you to take the next small step. Don't feel the weight of needing to master all six rhythms by tomorrow morning. Instead, pick one. Start there, and let the Spirit lead you into a journey of ongoing growth rather than a one-time fix. This is a lifelong rhythm of returning to the one who loves you perfectly, a slow and steady walk with the Savior who is with you in every distraction and every quiet moment alike.

May this be a season where you make space, and find that he was already making space for you.

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