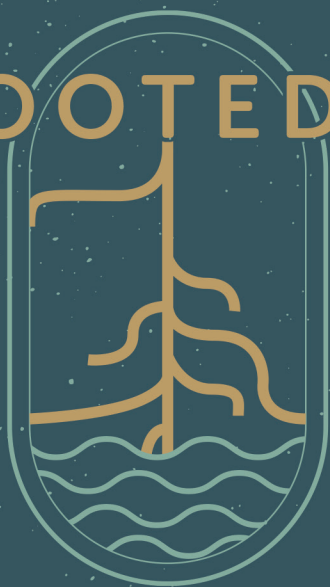
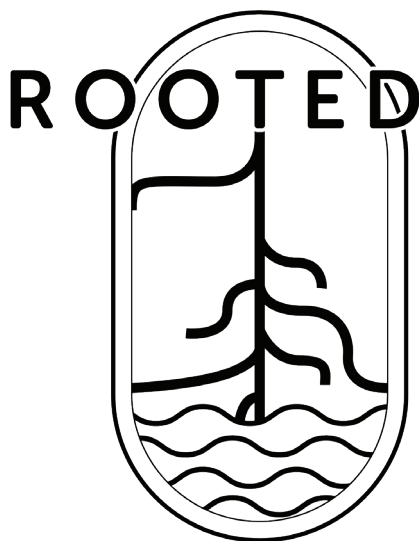


# ROOTED



A Student Ministry  
Discipleship Guide





Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.

He is like a tree planted by water,  
that sends out its roots by the stream,  
and does not fear when heat comes,  
for its leaves remain green,  
and is not anxious in the year of drought,  
for it does not cease to bear fruit.

JEREMIAH 17:7-8

# AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Student,

I feel like I have spent my entire life writing this discipleship guide. Not that it took a lifetime to actually write the words, but I had to recall stories and lessons that I learned when I was a child, a teenager, and even an adult, to illustrate the principles and disciplines that you are about to dig into. Because of that, I feel like I am walking you through my own personal discipleship journey.

I am passionate about discipleship. John 15 says that we are to abide in Christ; apart from Him we cannot do anything. I believe with every fiber of my being that is what discipleship is—abiding in Christ, like a branch to a vine...or an oak planted by a stream of water.

I am so excited for you as you start this new life in Christ, and I am passionate about you becoming a disciple of Christ, fully rooted in His word, so that in times of drought you do not wither or fade, but you continue to produce fruit. It is an honor to be able to lead you through a few weeks of discipleship as you learn how to become a mature Christian, rooted in the Word of God. I want to encourage you to not stop at the end of this guide but to continue to collect your own stories of God's goodness in the sunny days and the stormy season as you stay rooted in Him. It is with those testimonies that the Lord will use you to bear fruit!

Make sure you stop by to say hi when you see me in the Student Building!

Traci Hall

Girls Ministry Associate

# HARMONY HILL VALUES



## **Christ is the Catalyst**

Christ's love for us ignites our love for others. He is the head of the Church, and apart from Him, we can do nothing of eternal consequence. We depend on Him to lead us, and we glorify His name in all that we do.



## **Time in the Word**

God reveals Himself through the Bible; therefore, proclamation of the Word and submission to the principles of scripture define our faith community.



## **Stand in the Gap**

Christ pursued the marginalized; therefore, we illuminate the light of Christ by advocating for the vulnerable and alienated in our world.



## **Together in the Faith**

Christ said that the world will know we belong to Him by how we love one another. We work to create a culture in the church that fosters a true atmosphere of being a spiritual family that is united in purpose and expresses love to one another.



## **Invest in the Next**

Christ invested in twelve men and changed the world. Our desire is to take every opportunity to invest in the next generation and effectively steward a leadership pipeline to ensure the future of the church.



## **Labor in the Harvest**

Christ is at work in the world and commissions believers to join him in the field.

# OUTLINE

## WEEK 1: TOPICAL STUDY EXAMPLES

Day 1 – Removing the sin and weights from our lives

Day 2 – Abiding and pruning through the scripture

Day 3 – Perseverance in reading scripture even when you don't feel it

Day 4 – Prayer

Day 5 – Quiet time structure

Flex Days – Scripture and space

## WEEK 2: CHARACTER STUDIES AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Day 6 – Endurance in the faith

Day 7 – Community

Day 8 – Worship

Day 9 – Rest

Day 10 – Celebration

Flex days – Scripture and space

## WEEK 3: EXEGETICAL STUDY EXAMPLES

Day 11 – Serving to find your place

Day 12 – Seeking first the kingdom of God

Day 13 – Finding your gift and calling

Day 14 – Sowing in the spirit and not giving up

Day 15 – Write and share your story/preparation to bear fruit

Flex Days – Scripture and space

## APPENDIX

Study tools

Podcast suggestions

Scripture reading plans

Next steps for discipleship

# INTRODUCTION

Let's gooooo!! You did it! You went from death to life in Christ, and you have made the biggest and best decision you will ever make! We are so excited about you making the decision to give your life to Jesus. I know that your mind is probably full of questions as you try to figure out this new life and how it works. Do not worry, we are here to help.

If you are reading this, then I guess that you have an adult who is ready and willing to pour into you<sup>1</sup> and walk you through the next four weeks of digging into the Word<sup>2</sup> and rooting your life in Christ<sup>3</sup>. Can I just tell you that you are blessed to have someone who is praying for you, available for you, and ready to answer any questions that you have<sup>4</sup>? We know there will be lots of questions, so don't be afraid to ask.

Francis Chan says, "We never grow closer to God when we just live life. It takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness." No one starts their relationship with Jesus thinking that it will fizzle out in a few years, but so many do. My prayer is that this short discipleship guide will not only help you to root yourself in scripture<sup>2</sup>, but it will also teach you several different ways to study the Word long after you have completed the work here. It is important to start here because God has given us scripture to help us, guide us, correct us, and encourage us in our Christian life, not only for our benefit, but so that we will know Him more intimately by knowing His character<sup>1</sup>. Living a life free in Christ starts with rooting yourself in His Word. It is a big task, but I know you are up for it!

There are a significant number of scriptures that talk about how Christians are to be like Oaks of Righteousness. The imagery is that we are to be so rooted in the Word of God that we grow through any season or storm that we are in. That is the imagery that we are using for this discipleship guide. We are going to spend three weeks digging in and growing your roots, trunk, and fruit so that you can be called an Oak of Righteousness.

Psalm 1:1-2 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the

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1 HHBC Value: Invest in the Next

2 HHBC Value: Time in the Word

3 HHBC Value: Christ Is the Catalyst

4 HHBC Value: Together in the Faith

wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, not sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” The first week we are going to focus on growing your roots as you dig into the Word of God.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, “Blessed in the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” The second week we are going to dig into spiritual disciplines that will grow you into the mature Christian that you are called to be.

Luke 10:2-3 says, “and he said to them, ‘the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way...’”<sup>5</sup> The last week we are going to spend some time digging into ways that you can bear fruit<sup>6</sup> and harvest where you are, so that you can bloom where you are planted.

So, are you ready to dig in and start this new life rooted in Christ?

**Before you start the week, talk with your adult leader and decide on a scripture to memorize this week. Write it in the space below. A few options are Galatians 5:22-23, 1 John 1:9, Jeremiah 17:7-8.**

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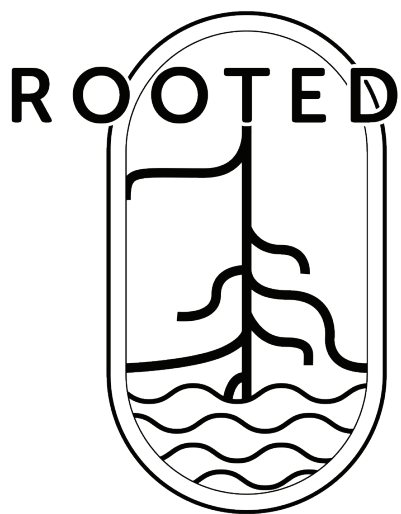
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<sup>5</sup> HHBC Value: Labor in the Harvest

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 5:22-23





## **WEEK 1: ROOTS**

TOPICAL STUDY EXAMPLES



## DAY 1

# WEEDS

One of my favorite scriptures is Jeremiah 17:7-8, which says, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by the water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

What a picture, right? This reminds me of two pecan trees that we have on our family property. They are planted directly beside each other, but just a couple of hundred feet apart. When you stand back far enough to see both at the same time you can see that one is mature and full of pecans and green leaves and the other...well, he has a name—Stick. Because even though he was planted 20 years ago, he still stands a few feet tall and only has a couple of branches on him. One good kick from my 8-year-old daughter and Stick will be on the ground.

As we walk through questions you have about being a Christian and cultivate spiritual disciplines, my prayer is that you will not be like Stick, scrawny and weak, but that you will be like the tree described in Jeremiah 17—mature, grounded and flourishing even in times of drought.

Just like there are three parts to a tree, you are going to spend the next few weeks developing your roots—grounding yourself in the Word of God as you learn how to study His word and apply it to your life— and then we will move on to the body of the tree to help you to develop some spiritual disciplines that will further your spiritual maturity. We will end by working to develop the branches of the tree as we prepare you to reach out with your spiritual gifts and produce kingdom fruit.

Before we start with the roots, let's clear any weeds that might be suffocating us. What happened when you gave your life to Christ? If you have been through baptism counseling you have already answered this question once, but I would like for you to write it down so that you can go back and read it again in case you forget. Please write it in the space below.

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When you prayed that prayer, repenting of your sins and placing your faith in Jesus, you became a new person. The old you died, and you were made new in Christ<sup>7</sup>. Did you know that this was not something that you did on your own? In fact, because of our brokenness, we cannot choose good on our own. The Holy Spirit has been working on you and calling you to repentance through the conviction of your sins. He gave you the faith you needed to turn from your sins and run to Jesus. I hope that excites you as much as it excites me! The God who created the world and everything in it loved you enough to chase after you and call you to Him<sup>8</sup>.

Because of our brokenness and because the enemy will not let you go without a fight, I bet there have been a few moments where doubt has crept in. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, the enemy has whispered something to you to make you doubt God or the decision that you made<sup>9</sup>. What questions or doubts have you wrestled with since the day that you ran to Jesus? Please use the space below to write your answer.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 2:4-3:24

Listen, one thing that we can be sure of is that if we have repented of our sins and been made new in Christ, you can be confident, you can know that you know that you know, that God has forgiven you of your sins and has thrown them as far as the east is from the west. You might remember your sins, but God does not. That is something that you need to firmly fix in your mind. Once you have repented of your sins, they are gone and if there ever comes a time when you start to feel guilty or insecure because of your life before Jesus, remind yourself that you can walk confidently in knowing that God wants to use you and has a purpose and plan for your whole story. God has forgiven you for your sins—you also have to forgive yourself for your sins.

What are some of the sins that you have not forgiven yourself for? It is important for you to write them out and shine a light on them so that you can work through them. The longer you hold on to the shame, the longer it holds you back from living a full life in Christ. Please use the space below to write your thoughts.

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One night at Beach Camp I was talking with a student as she wrestled with whether she could become a Christian. As she processed and talked through her decision she said, “But they will think I am a hypocrite because I used to do some awful stuff. If I go back to school changed, they will think that I am fake.” My response to her was, “They might. But how great would it be if you continue to live for Jesus and they start to see the peace and joy that He has added to your life, and instead of thinking you are fake, they start thinking that they want what you have?” She gave her life to Christ that night, and I can tell you that is exactly what happened! She went home changed and people noticed, but they didn’t judge her for it, they just wanted what she had.

A few weeks after beach camp a girl I did not know scheduled a meeting with me. She saw how her friends had changed when they got back from camp, and she wanted what they had. She gave her life to Christ in my office, and she has not looked back.

That is exactly what I want for you. That is exactly what can happen in your life if you allow the Holy Spirit to shine through you. It will take courage and boldness. You might have to ask God to make you brave at the beginning of every class change at school, but He will do it.

### **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for Jesus, salvation, and grace. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to chase after me and call me to repentance. Thank You for not leaving me in my sin. God, I believe, but help my unbelief<sup>10</sup>. Please give me the wisdom to permanently remove the weeds from my life. When the enemy tries to root them in my mind again, please remind me that You have already pulled them up. This week as I process all the weeds that might be lingering, please reveal anything that I have missed. In Jesus' name, amen.

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 9:24



DAY 2

## WEEDS & ROOTS

There are so many scriptures in the Bible that use plants, wheat, weeds, and trees as illustrations to explain our relationship with God. I have two favorites that I think about often: Psalm 1:1-3 and John 15:1-16. We are going to spend some time today digging into these two sections of scripture.

Please read Psalm 1:1-3, then finish this sentence in the space provided (found in verse 2): Blessed is the man who...

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Blessed is the teenager who does not hang out with people who are a negative influence. Blessed is the teenager who sits with people who use their words to build others up and speak positive things. Blessed is the teenager who reads the scriptures and finds joy in them as he/she thinks about them throughout the day.

Verse 3 goes on to explain what man becomes as he delights in the law of the Lord. Fill in the blanks as you read verse 3 again.

He is like a \_\_\_\_\_ planted by streams of water that \_\_\_\_\_ its \_\_\_\_\_ in its season, and its leaf \_\_\_\_\_ . In all that he does, he prospers.

There will be times in your walk with God that it feels harder to stay connected with Him because there are so many challenging things that you are walking through. If you can get this now, if you can root yourself in scripture now, you will become surer of who Christ is and because of that, you will become surer of who you are in Him. When seasons change you will only grow stronger because of how rooted you are.

My high school years were some of the loneliest years I have ever faced. It was so hard to find people who thought like me, loved Jesus, and made the same choices I made in my free time. I spent a lot of my Friday nights alone and in tears because I did not want to compromise my convictions so that I could have “friends.” One night my mom asked me to drive my younger sister to meet her friends at the movies. I decided that I would also stay and watch “Gnomeo and Juliet.” I bought a ticket and followed a small group of a twelve-year-olds to their seats, and when I sat down beside them my sister looked at me with the most horrified look and said, “Leave. Now.” So, I sat in a row all by myself, feeling quite pathetic as I watched two gnomes fall in love.

This is one mild example of what it was like for me to live for Jesus during my teenage years. I would be surprised if you experienced this because you have a church full of students who are passionately pursuing Jesus with you. Those years taught me that Jesus is a friend. As I spent time in the Word, my roots grew deeper into the knowledge of who He is and who I am through Him. I am grateful for those years because there have been times of drought in my life when I felt comfortable enough with God to ask hard questions. I had a deep enough relationship with Him that instead of withering, I felt strong like a tree planted by streams of water<sup>11</sup>.

I want the same for you. I want you to continue producing fruit even when life feels like a whole blizzard is swirling around you. First, you need to know that because of salvation, you are one with Christ and that means that He works through your weaknesses. John 15:1-16 is a beautiful illustration of what it means for us to be one with Christ.

Read John 15:1-16 now. Circle the word “abide” any time it appears in the scripture.

According to these scriptures who is the vine? \_\_\_\_\_

Who are the branches? \_\_\_\_\_

What are we supposed to abide in? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 17:7-8

God is the vine; we are the branches. We abide in Him, meaning we stay in His Word, in His guidance, in His will, and then we can bear fruit or have a meaningful life. Look at verse 2 again. What happens to us when we abide in Christ?

God prunes us so that we bear more fruit. Pruning is not a painless act. It means that something is being cut off, but it also means that we are being made stronger in our faith. It is similar to working out and being sore the next day—you are sore because you tore your muscles down so that when they repair themselves, they will be stronger.

Verse 5 says that we cannot bear fruit apart from Him. This means we cannot have much of a purposeful life if we do not root ourselves in His Word and grow our faith muscles. What other things stick out to you in these scriptures? Write them down now and be prepared to discuss them with your leader.

Why can you trust God that much? To answer that question, you need to know who Christ is so that you can know who you are in Him (like the vine and the branches). Read the scriptures below and write what it says about Jesus beside them.

John 3:16 \_\_\_\_\_

John 1:1 \_\_\_\_\_



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Hebrews 13:8

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John 8:12

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Ephesians 5:2

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Jesus is God's Son who defeated death so that we can live. He is the living Word of God. God promised to make a way for us to live in eternity with Him, and He provided that through Jesus. Jesus is unchanging. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is love. This just touches the tip of the iceberg, but it is exciting to know that all these things that He is, we are, too, because we belong to God. In the space below, write some of the ways that this is comforting to you. What specific stress is released by the truth in these scriptures?

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This lesson is not a super fun one, but it is an important one. There are so many times that life feels sunny and 75°. Those days are fun, and they happen often. You have lived enough life to know that there are so many times when storms roll in, relationships crumble, and you are left with the broken pieces. Friends unintentionally leave you out, and relationships with the adults in your life feel like a war zone that you are never going to get out of, sickness of loved ones causes stress and grief, school... just school, social media tells you that you are not enough and you believe it, I could go on and on... you get the point.

There is only one way to stay strong through these storms: stay rooted. If you want to have strong roots and you want to live a purposeful life grounded in the Word of God, you must learn to abide in Christ in the good times so that when the blizzards come, you are not uprooted but you continue to produce fruit.

#### **PRAYER:**

Thank You, God, for Jesus. Thank You for not leaving me in my sin, but instead loving me unconditionally. Please meet me where I am as I dig deeper into Your Word. Give me wisdom and understanding and cement Your truth in my heart and mind.



## DAY 3

# ROOTS

I have a habit of spending time in the Word before I sit down to write any kind of devotional or devotional thought. I sat down today, and I could not focus. I wanted to dig into the Word. I wanted to feel like I was spending time with God, but I just was not feeling it. Frustrated, I began to journal and pray. The whole time I was thinking that I was wasting my time and then it hit me—that was the lesson.

Sometimes you are going to open your Bible and it feels like every word is bouncing off your eyes and never actually make its way to your brain. Your prayers hit the ceiling and come right back down. What do you do then? You may want to give up, read something else, turn on a movie, or pick up the phone instead of pushing through and spending time with God. Maybe that is the lesson. That is the thing that God is trying to say to you. “You’re distracted; can you push through everything else and spend time with Me anyway?”

Have you ever spent time with a good friend, but the whole time you felt like the conversation was going nowhere and kind of boring? Did you walk away thinking, “Well, that is the end of that friendship? She was my best friend, but the conversation was boring today, so I am done with her.” No! That does not make any sense. It does not make sense for you to do the same thing when you don’t feel like your time in the Word wasn’t good enough.

There are so many scriptures that talk about running in our faith with perseverance. These are normally applied to really big, hard situations. Let’s apply it to this situation since we know that perseverance has to start somewhere, might as well start here.

If you are bored with reading your Bible, I promise you that it is not because God is bored with you. Maybe your brain is like mine and you just need a moment of creativity before you can focus on reading words. Listen to a podcast, draw a picture, rearrange your space. Do something that will wake up your brain so that you can focus on what you are reading.

Read the following scriptures and then write beside it what happens when we persevere.

James 1:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 12:1 \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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Galatians 6:9 \_\_\_\_\_  
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1 Corinthians 15:58 \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

As you can see, perseverance is a very important part of growing in your faith. The more you push through and become more rooted in scripture, the stronger you will be when storms and trials come. I don't know about you but that sounds like something I do not want to miss out on.

That still leaves the question of what you are supposed to do when it feels like the words are bouncing off your ears and never reaching your brain. Here are some suggestions:

- Turn on worship music and sit still as you listen. No social media or scrolling is allowed.
- Write out your prayers in a journal. This helps me to focus on what I am praying for. Start with thanking God for all that He has done in your

life. Yes, you do have something to be thankful for. Start with Jesus and salvation. Then ask Him to reveal something to you as you read His Word.

- Read the next set of scriptures on your reading plan. Underline words and phrases that stick out to you.
- Look up words that you do not understand ([blueletterbible.com](http://blueletterbible.com) or [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) help me the most!)
- List what the scripture tells you about God.
- Make connections between the scriptures and your life.
- End in prayer, confident that you did the work you needed to grow stronger roots. Even if you never felt what you wanted to feel, God will reward your obedience and perseverance and one day you will see why it was so important for you to dig in despite your feelings.

#### **PRAYER:**

God, thank You for focusing my heart and my mind on You. Thank You for not staying distant, but instead having a relationship with me. Your goodness and grace are far beyond my comprehension. Thank You for teaching me and guiding me. In Jesus' name, amen.



DAY 4

## ROOTS: PRAYER

I will be the first to admit that praying out loud is one the most awkward things that we do as Christians. It is something I struggle with, and I often pray the simplest shortest prayers when others are around because I struggle so much. I want to be the first to tell you that it is okay for it to be awkward. It is okay for you to not know what to say. It is okay.

I have witnessed God move in incredible ways to answer prayers. I have so many favorites to choose from, I am not sure where to start!

I was recently having a really hard day and I sat at my desk praying this simple prayer over and over, “God, please provide,” and every time I said it, I thought of something else I needed for Him to provide. I finished my prayer and got back to work. Now, I work on the second floor, and typically no one walks upstairs to talk with me, but I soon saw a co-worker standing at my door with a smile on her face, and she said, “I don’t know why, I just felt like I needed to come to see you.”

One of the many things that I had thought of during my prayer time was that I needed a friend and there she was. She sat down and we talked for a while. It was just what I needed. It was an almost immediate answer to my prayer.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:5-14. Please read the scriptures now and write down anything that sticks out to you or confuses you.

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The people closest to Jesus, His disciples, had to ask how to pray. That is so comforting to the perfectionistic side of my personality. Jesus does not respond to them with frustration, instead He gives them a template

to follow. List in the space below what you think the different parts of the prayer are below. Be ready to discuss this with your leader.

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**Verse 9, “Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.”**

The first part is to acknowledge God as Father and praise Him. I have heard people start every prayer with the same praise. Some have said, “God, You are good, and You are holy,” or “God, You are so good.” How would you start your prayer to fit into this first part of the template?

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**Verse 10, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

The second part acknowledges that God is holy and sovereign and has a plan that is far greater than yours. I like to say, “God, You know better than I do; align my will on earth to Your will.” Write in the space below what you would say for the second part of the template.

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**Verses 11-12, “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”**

Hold up, did you catch that?! The third part is asking for forgiveness, ACCORDING TO how we have forgiven others. Listen, I do not know about you, but I have been hurt deeply and I do not always forgive as easily as I should. My prayer often is, “HELP ME to forgive as You have forgiven me. I want to forgive but help the parts of me that do not want to let go yet.”

Okay, let’s go back to the first part of this section, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This is simply asking God to provide what you need for the day—not in a prosperity gospel kind of way, because sometimes we need pruning, right? We are also asking for the events that will mold us and grow us. When you are doing this, you are completely resting on God and what He has for you. If you spill your Dr. Pepper in your lap on the way to school, miss the first half of first period and fall in a mud hole at lunch, your heart and mind will be tuned into why those events happened and how you can grow from it. If nothing else, it always makes for a funny story and now you have an icebreaker when you need one. Right?

Write your version of this section below.

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**Verse 13, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”**

The last section of the Lord’s Prayer is for protection. There will be times when you are tempted, even Jesus was tempted<sup>12</sup>. Temptation is not a sin—giving into temptation is where you go wrong. Again, turning from sin produces endurance. Write out your full prayer in the space below.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 4:1-11



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Prayer is not just a wish list that you go to God with every day. The prayer that you wrote is just the beginning; you can continue from here with requests and petitions.

Prayer also is not just for morning, meals, and bedtime. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says that we are to pray without ceasing. That means that you can start your day with this prayer, continue to talk to God throughout the day and then end the night with, “in Jesus’ name, amen.” When you do this, it helps you to align your thoughts and actions with the way that God would want you to. Prayer is not so formal that you have to sound super spiritual and use words you don’t know the meaning of. Talk to God like you are talking to a friend. If you can’t use the words you use with your friends, then change the way you talk to your friends. This is how you grow. It is okay to pray scriptures as well. A couple of examples are Psalm 42 and Psalm 103.

Instead of giving you a closing prayer today, I want you to write your own in the space below.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



## DAY 5

# ROOTS: PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

We have spent the last few days walking through the elements of having a good quiet time... can I stop right there? “Quiet time” did not sound very appealing to me when I was a teenager. It sounds so formal and boring. So, let’s not call it quiet time. I am going to call it “time with Jesus,” but I encourage you to call it whatever you would like to call it: coffee with Jesus, anything but quiet time, talking with Jesus... these are just a few ideas for you. Take a minute to think about it and write the title you are creating below.

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Now that we have named your time, we are going to create a template for you to follow. This is important because there will be days when you do not know what to study or how, but when you have completed this lesson, you will still know what to do.

Beginning – Start with something that will wake up your brain. Worship music, a podcast of people talking about scripture, journaling, staring at the wall, and praying quietly...

Middle – Ask God to reveal something to you and to allow you to feel His presence. (Time with God is not about warm fuzzy feelings, but about growing your relationship with Him, the same way that you hang out with a friend).

Read through a section of scripture. (You can find reading plans at the back of the book.)

Journal through the scripture.

What does this tell you about God?

What action does it encourage?

How can you apply this to your life?

What does God want you to do with it?

You will not always have answers for all of these, and these won't always be the only questions that you have.

End – Pray to end your time. You can use this list to pray through until it becomes more natural for you: Thank God for Jesus, salvation, and grace. Repent of any sins. Thank Him for meeting you where you are. Ask Him to give you opportunities to share His love and the wisdom to know how and when. Thank Him for choosing you. End with “in Jesus’ name, amen.”<sup>13</sup>

Let's put this into practice. Using the template we just walked through, have your fill-in-the-blank with your quiet time name with 1 Peter 2:1-12.

For the next two days, you have space to digest what we dug into this week, write down questions that you have, go back over a lesson that you think you can get more out of, memorize scripture, pray, and grow. Use the space provided as your creative space.

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13 John 14:16 – We ask in Jesus' name so that God will be glorified. We are surrendering our will and submitting to God's.

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Before you start week two, please decide what scripture you are going to memorize this week and write it below.

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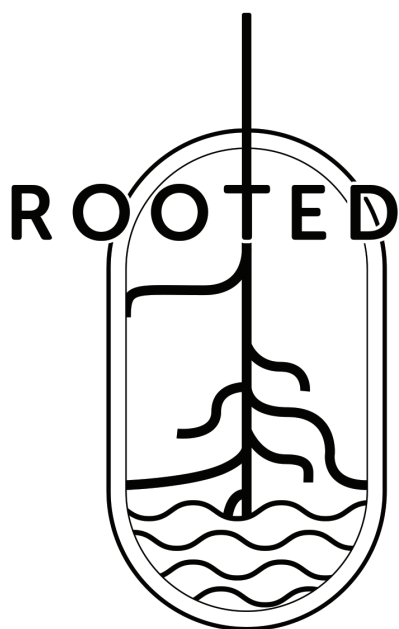
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## **WEEK 2: TRUNK**

CHARACTER STUDIES AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



## DAY 6

# TRUNK

As I think about what it takes for us to become an Oak of Righteousness, I cannot help but think about all the seasons that an oak tree has to stay strong through—not just times of drought, but also times of sunshine and cool breezes. It is easy to prepare for the good seasons. When it is sunny and 75° outside, it is easy to feel strong, but you will also experience difficult seasons as you continue to grow and become a mature Christian. My prayer is that through this study you will become rooted and encouraged through discipleship so that when something tragic happens you do not wither. That is why as we prepare to walk through several character studies this week, I want to prepare our hearts and minds to see how they endured in their faith. Throughout their stories, we can learn some spiritual disciplines that will help in our spiritual maturity. Please write in the space below your version of the definition of endurance.

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Dictionary.com says that endurance is “the fact or power of enduring an unpleasant or difficult process or situation without giving way.”

Hebrews 11 is known as the Hall of Faith. The people in these scriptures are pillars of faith... kind of like the trunk of an oak tree. If I were to name this resource something other than “Rooted,” I would name it “Endurance,” because it is vital to our spiritual maturity that we know how to endure in our faith. Remember we are a part of the broken world that is turning on itself. As long as we are alive, we are enduring something.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3 and fill in the blanks below.

Now, \_\_\_\_\_ is the assurance of things \_\_\_\_\_ for, the \_\_\_\_\_ of things not seen. For by it, the people of \_\_\_\_\_ received their commendation. \_\_\_\_\_ we understand that the universe was \_\_\_\_\_ by the word of God so that what is \_\_\_\_\_ was not made out of things that are \_\_\_\_\_.



By faith, we live and know that God created all<sup>14</sup> and is in all<sup>15</sup>.

Hebrews 11 teaches us about the pillars of faith, and Hebrews 12:1-2 gives us the game plan for how to follow their examples and live by faith.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

According to these scriptures, there are two things we need to do. What is the first?

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Verse 1 says that we are to lay aside every weight and sin. What is weighing you down? Write it below and then spend some time asking God to help you to lay it aside. Some of your weights might be toxic friendships, your identity, social media, laziness, and perfectionism.

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It is important to confess our sins because sin separates us from God. Once you are saved there is nothing you can do to lose your salvation, but the longer you hold on to sin, the harder your heart becomes, the cloudier your mind will be, and the less likely you will be to hear from God. You need to remove the weeds so that you can have clear communication with God. What is the one thing you cannot put down? Why are you allowing it to hold you back? Is it worth the pain of carrying it around?

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 1

<sup>15</sup> John 1

Keep this weight at the forefront of your mind this week and do not feel shame for the struggles that you have and the weights that you carry. As you study the people of the “Hall of Faith” on your own you will see that everyone has something they are carrying that is heavy.

As we study their stories and character, we will answer these following questions:

Why did God make their story a part of the Bible?

What did they learn about God?

What were their sin struggles or weights?

How did they respond to God?

What part of their story can I apply to my life right now?

How can their story help me become more rooted?

One of the greatest Cross-fitters of all time, Mat Fraser, achieved his status because he trained his weaknesses. When his endurance was weakening, he increased the length of his cardio workouts. When his grip strength was declining, he did more peg boards and farmer walks. To train the weaknesses, he had to pay attention to the little details of his workouts. In the same way that he endured the training to become the greatest, you will also have to endure your spiritual training to become the pillar of faith you have been called to be.

### **PRAYER:**

Ask God to prepare your heart and mind for the studies we are digging into this week. Ask Him to continue to reveal to you the times when you are taking on too much weight. Ask for courage and strength that only He can give for you to put it down and walk away. Ask Him to reveal your weaknesses so that you can train them to become your strength.

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## DAY 7

# TRUNK: FELLOWSHIP/COMMUNITY

How many followers do you have on social media? How many of them are genuine friends? If I had to guess, most of them are just acquaintances, right? But how real does that community feel to you? If you post a funny BeReal and you get 25 reactions, how does it make you feel? Do you enjoy that as much as you would if you had only one friend to share your birthday with? Which one would you rather have?

Believers are not made to live alone or with a false sense of community. We are made for deep relationships. Even Jesus had multiple circles of people in His life. He had a large population of followers, 12 disciples, and his closest three disciples, James, John, and Peter. Let's call these groups A, B, and C.

Your C group could be the group of people that you have on social media.

Your B group is the group of friends that you talk with and hang out with, but they do not know your deepest thoughts.

Your A group is your two or three "ride or dies." They know the most about you. They are the ones you trust more than anyone else. These are the most influential of your friends, which is why it's important to choose your friends wisely. Choose the ones who are pointing you to Jesus, building you up, and encouraging you. If they are tearing you down, are jealous, or do not love Jesus, they do not need to be in your group.

Take some time now and identify who is in each group for you.

C – \_\_\_\_\_

B – \_\_\_\_\_

A – \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not have a healthy A group, please do not feel discouraged. That just means that God is working on getting you connected but it has not happened yet. Spend a little time praying for God to give you an A friend. Now that we have that established, let's talk about why it is so important to have these people. Why do you think you need to have different levels of friendship?

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Deep relationships take time and effort. You cannot have an A-level friendship with everyone; it is physically, emotionally, and mentally impossible. When you do find yourself in one of these friendships, it is such a gift! There are many scriptures about friendship and community because God values community. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says that we are to encourage each other. 1 Corinthians 15:33 warns us about keeping bad company. Colossians 3:13 encourages us to forgive each other. There are three very close friends in the Bible that we will study today: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Read their story in Daniel 3. These three guys were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to disobey God and worship a false god.

If you go back to the beginning of Daniel, you see that these men did not have a choice in going to the King's palace, and verse 1 of chapter 7 gives us more information about them. In the space below, write the new names that the guys were given.

Daniel – \_\_\_\_\_

Hananiah – \_\_\_\_\_

Mishael – \_\_\_\_\_

Azariah – \_\_\_\_\_

This is important because the author uses both names for this group of guys, and it can get quite confusing. Read Daniel 1:8-21 and write in the space below any inferences you can make about their friendship.

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Do you think they would have been able to stand up to King Nebuchadnezzar without a support group to lean on?

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Have you ever completed a Daniel fast? It is not easy, especially when there's bacon all over the place. There were likely times when they did not think they could continue to make a stand for the Lord, but they likely encouraged one another to persevere. That is what we need in our friendships—someone who will encourage us, walk through the hard stuff with us, and point us back to Jesus when we lose sight of Him. This is the kind of friend we need to be.

Let's revisit chapter 3: the music played, and everyone bowed to the golden image, except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Put yourself in their place for a second. What would you do?

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When I think about how this played out, I imagine the music playing and they turn to look at each other, wide-eyed and afraid. Scripture does not say this, but I picture one of them starting to cave and the others give him a “don't you dare” look. They were a community for each other and in the face of death, they stood together to honor God.

Can you imagine the celebration when those guys walked out of the furnace, unharmed and still smelling fresh? They did not have to celebrate alone,

and that made the moment even sweeter. Take some time to revisit the friend group from the beginning of the lesson. Is your friendship with them like these guys? Do you encourage each other to stand up when everyone else is bowing? Do you push each other to do the things that make you feel uncomfortable, but you know it is what God is calling you to?

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What changes need to be made in your friendships so that you have that?

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What changes do you need to make so that you can be that friend?

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**PRAYER:**

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to give you wisdom in your friend group. Thank Him for the friends He has given you and ask Him to give you a friend like Rad, Shad, and Benny.

P.S. One time I asked God to remove the people from my life who were adding more toxicity than wisdom. A few weeks later, my favorite friend ghosted me, and I did not understand until God reminded me of the prayer that I had prayed. Be prepared for some people to exit, but be on the lookout for the friends that you need.

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## DAY 8

# TRUNK: WORSHIP

Worship.

What does it mean? Write your definition of worship in the space below.

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Romans 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, I present my body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your act of true worship.” Most people immediately think of worship as music and singing. While that is a very big part of worship, that is not all of worship. Today we are going to dig into the spiritual discipline of worship that goes beyond singing and draws us closer to God.

According to the scripture we just looked at, we are called to live as a living sacrifice, but what does that mean?

My Uncle Charles was one of the greatest men I have ever known. He loved God with all his heart, soul, and mind. During the day he worked for Pepsi, but in the evenings and weekends, he used his time to pour into the youth of his church. His love for the Lord was so great, it spilled out of him. When he was diagnosed with cancer his friends and family were devastated, but he knew where he was going, and he had peace about it. I have a vivid memory of him in the hospital during his last days. In between random babbling caused by the cancer that had taken over his brain, he had moments of clarity and he would say, “Jesus. Tell them about Jesus.” Uncle Charles lived by Romans 12:1-2, and his life, from the moment of salvation until his last breath, was an act of worship.

My prayer for you is that as you dig into the Word, grow in spiritual maturity, and grow your branches according to your calling, your life will be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Make a list of the ways you can worship God in your life. Example: serving others, using your gifts for God's purpose.

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Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name." Worship happens when you do whatever it is that you are doing for the glory of God. Instead of bragging about your talents, recognize they are gifts from God and give Him credit for the gift He has given you. When you tithe from babysitting money or the money you were paid for mowing a yard, that is worship. When you put your phone down to spend time in the Word, that is worship. When you give up a Friday night to pass out goodie bags at the nursing home, that is worship. When you live in the mindset that everything you are doing is for the glory of God instead of yourself, you are worshipping God.

What are you worshipping instead of God?

Your phone, friends, reputation, social media, vehicle, grades, and wardrobe can all be things that you are worshipping instead of God. Why does it matter? Because God is jealous and demands we worship only Him. When you worship, you are inviting God into your situation and aligning your thoughts with the Holy Spirit, and through that you will be more in tune with God. When you worship, the weights you are carrying become lighter because you are focused on the One who is taking care of everything. When you live your life in a state of worship, you become fully who God made you to be.

**PRAYER:**

Ask God to reveal what you are putting in His place. Ask for forgiveness.

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DAY 9

## TRUNK - CELEBRATION

Luci Swindoll was an author and Bible teacher for many years. Her mission statement in life and ministry was that joy and celebration are everywhere because of who we are in Christ. As His children, we have reason to celebrate every day.

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the least and 10 being the most.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I celebrate every holiday, even the small ones.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I love any celebration that involves confetti and balloons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A celebration isn't a celebration without fireworks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdays are to be celebrated all month.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Birthdays aren't that big of a deal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The less noise at a celebration, the better.

I love it so much! After answering the questions above, how do you feel about celebrations? Does celebrating small moments ever cross your mind? I am not talking about celebrating anniversaries or winning big games. I am talking about celebrating your friend doing a really brave thing, making a B on a test when you just knew you were going to fail, answered prayers... ooh, what about unanswered prayers? Do you look for small moments to celebrate throughout the day? I know a young woman who carries a confetti cannon in her purse and her car. She is ready for a celebration at any moment of the day.

My youngest daughter taught me how to celebrate in every circumstance when she was only four years old. My favorite person in the world, my grandma, passed away unexpectedly and like any person who loses one of their closest friends, I was very sad. One day Remie saw me crying and she said, "Mom, I do not know why you are crying because Tink is with Jesus RIGHT NOW!" Even in the pain of losing someone we love very much, if they are a child of God then there is something to celebrate.

Celebration is the spiritual discipline that we are going to talk about today. If it seems off-kilter or out of the box, that is because it is. Our culture has trained us to look for social media-worthy moments and nothing else. There is beauty in the mundaneness of life. I believe that it takes spiritual maturity to look at tough situations and find a reason to celebrate<sup>16</sup>. Our life does not become easy with the flip of a switch when we are saved, but there is so much fun to be had and so many things we can celebrate along the way. We must be intentional about pursuing a life rooted in Christ.

Please read Romans 8:28-39.

I believe there is an art to celebration, and just as a tree grows from the ground up, so does our ability to genuinely celebrate. We must learn how to celebrate in the hard seasons first so then we can know how to fully celebrate in the easy seasons. I am calling celebration a spiritual discipline because we have to be disciplined to find the little moments of celebration woven throughout our days.

Take a look at Romans 8:28 again. What moments does it say God does *not* use for our good and His glory?

That's right. None. He uses everything. Sometimes I feel so overwhelmed by anxiety that my arms start to tingle. The only thing I can pray is, "God, You work all things for my good and Your glory. Help my unbelief<sup>17</sup>" over and over and over until the knot in my stomach is gone. Even in the hard moments that make us feel weak and broken, there are little moments to celebrate. So how do you celebrate the hard days? Do you celebrate at all? The most spiritually mature people will face times that are too heavy. How you handle those days matters for your growth in Christ.

For today's character study, we are going to look at Paul. To get to know some of his stories, please read Acts 27 and list some of the things that happened to him.

What a life, right? Shipwreck, snake bite, prison... the list of what this man endured for the gospel is astounding and inspiring. How would you react if these things were to happen to you?

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<sup>16</sup> Romans 5

<sup>17</sup> Mark 9:24

Now, please read Philippians 3:12-21 and write out all the actions that are listed.

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If we were to summarize this passage using the actions, it would read like this... I press on. I do forget what lies behind it. I press on to what is ahead. Those of us who are mature hold to what is true, keeping our eyes on the believers who are good examples. We press on as we wait for our Savior to transform our lowly broken bodies.

Paul, the man you read about in Acts 27, is the same man who wrote the scriptures that you read in Philippians and Romans. How in the world did Paul celebrate such a hard life? He celebrated all things, big and small, hard and easy. Because he focused on God's character, the reasons to celebrate were easy for him to identify, and celebration became like a muscle that he worked out to grow into spiritual maturity.

Somehow, I managed to turn a lesson about celebration into a gloomy moment. You need to know that even in the muddy moments that feel like they are going to swallow us up like quicksand, we can press on, and celebrate that God has promised to take care of His children.

Let's take a moment to practice: in the space below write about a hard time. Then write a list of the moments that you can celebrate that are woven throughout the hard ones. If you are not sure, pray about it and ask God to reveal something to you.

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If we press on, we will see that we can celebrate in all situations. Through these moments our roots grow deeper, and our bodies grow more mature so that we can bear more fruit.

My encouragement to you is to keep a confetti popper in your vehicle, room, locker, or backpack and when you are having a hard time, find one reason to celebrate and then bust that baby out and celebrate!

**PRAYER:**

Thank God for giving us things to celebrate. Ask Him to help you see the joy in all situations.

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DAY 10

## TRUNK: REST

What comes to mind when you read the word rest? Is rest a part of your weekly schedule? If I am being completely honest with you, talking about the spiritual discipline of rest with a teenager feels premature. Only old people talk about resting because they are old, right? First of all, rest is for everyone and second, if you can learn to make this a part of your life now, you will be much better off when you are old and tired (trust me, these gray hairs on my head do not lie).

Today we are going to look at two women I think about often. Please read Luke 10:38-42 and write a description of Martha and Mary in the space below. What details do you notice, and what emotions do you think they were feeling?

Martha: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Martha and Mary are sisters and when Jesus is visiting their house for dinner, Mary sits at His feet and listens to Him while Martha is getting dinner prepared. In her frustration, Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help. What does Jesus say to Martha?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Jesus told Martha that she was wrong, and that Mary made the right choice. What did Mary choose?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Read the following scriptures about sitting still in the presence of the Lord and summarize each of them.

Psalm 37:7 \_\_\_\_\_

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Psalm 46:1-7 \_\_\_\_\_

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Isaiah 40:31 \_\_\_\_\_

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Exodus 14:14 \_\_\_\_\_

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These scriptures touch only the tip of the discipline of being still. It is so important to God that you make time to slow down and soak in what He is saying to you. These scriptures show that you do not have to fight for yourself; when you rest in God, He takes care of you. When your dreams and goals align with God's, you do not have to worry about working so hard to achieve them. If you start with resting in Jesus, He will prepare you to be what you need.

Sitting still before the Lord is the starting point for all the other spiritual disciplines. We cannot shine our light or serve others until we have spent time sitting and soaking in time with Jesus.

In light of the scripture we read today, answer the following questions:

Why is it important to sit still before the Lord?

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Jesus said that Mary chose what is good. What do you do that is good?

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Are you more like Martha or Mary? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish that you could be more like one of them and why?

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What changes do you need to make in your life to live more like Mary?

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**PRAYER:**

Spend some time sitting still and listening for what God is saying to you.

Use the space below to ask the Lord to speak to you as you sit in His presence and then journal your prayer and thoughts as you listen.

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Before you start week 3, discuss what scripture you are going to memorize with your leader and write it below.

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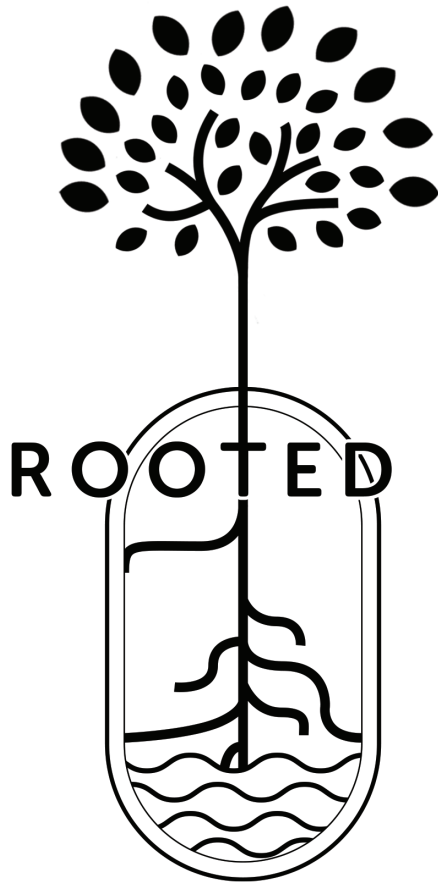
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## **WEEK 3: BRANCHES**

EXEGETICAL STUDY EXAMPLES



## DAY 11

# BRANCHES

Several years ago, my mom handed me and my two younger sisters each a small package and told us to open them at the same time. As she counted down, I ripped open the paper to see a shirt that said, “I am mom’s favorite” on the front of it. I started cheering, “See, I told you it was true!” as I looked over at one sister, who was already putting on her shirt that said the same thing and my other sister was grinning over hers. For years our family has jokingly argued over who was the favorite child in the family, and my mom decided she would settle the argument. We all put on our shirts, excited to be called the favorite and asked Mom to take a picture with us, and the argument was not over as we started fighting for a spot beside her. In front of her would not work, standing behind her wasn’t going to happen—we all wanted to be on her left and her right.

Our time today is going to be centered around the idea of working hard to elevate ourselves so that we can feel like we are God’s favorite child. As we examine Mark 10, I want you to think about that. Do you feel like God chooses favorites and if so, are you one of them?

Please read Mark 10:35-45.

When I read this passage, I pictured the same kind of “mom’s favorite” t-shirt situation going on with Jesus and His three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John. Let me set the stage for you. Jesus and His disciples are walking to Jerusalem and Jesus has predicted His upcoming death and resurrection a couple of times. Even though the disciples know what is coming, they start arguing about which one of them is the greatest. Jesus gives them the answer and as if having the “I am the favorite” shirt was not enough, James and John try again, and asking to be elevated to Jesus’ left and right.

Let’s break this into chunks; please read Mark 10: 35-37 again.

What are James and John asking Jesus for? \_\_\_\_\_

What is wrong with their request?

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How did it make them look to the other disciples who were with them?

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How many times have you prayed the same kind of prayer? Or thought the same things that James and John thought? If you aren't tracking with me, James and John asked for Jesus to elevate them above the other disciples. They were asking if they could be His favorites. What they did not understand was that when they were asking to be on His left and right, they were asking to be crucified beside Him. This request also made them look like they thought they were better than the other disciples. It is not a great look if you ask me!

Please read Mark 10:38-40.

Summarize Jesus' response in the space below.

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Answer: He said that they had no idea what they were asking, and He couldn't choose who would be on His left and right. What emotions do you think Jesus felt in this exchange?

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Jesus is showing patience and compassion while listening to their ridiculous request to be elevated above the other disciples. He could have scolded them for asking to be elevated above the rest. Instead, He tells them they have no idea what they are asking for, it is something He cannot

choose, and in a moment of foreshadowing, He tells them their time will come.

Let's look at Mark 10:41-45.

How are the other disciples feeling right now?

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What does Jesus tell them?

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Jesus is telling them that they cannot and should not ask to be placed on a pedestal. There are no special places reserved for His favorite followers. We are all to serve, and when we serve, that is where we will find our place. We all have the shirt that says, "I am Jesus' favorite." We cannot work to earn it; it is given to us the moment we repent and ask Him to be the Lord of our life.

What does this mean for you? If I were to give you a sheet of paper with a squiggly line on it and ask you to complete the picture using that line, do you think that everyone would draw the same picture? Of course not! We are all different, right?

In the same way, God has given each of us a command to serve like Jesus. He has gifted us in different ways and with different stories so that no one is greater than the other; we are all just different. In the same way that I gave you all the same paper and asked you to make something with it, God is giving each of you the same call and asking you to use the good gifts He has given you and do something with them.

There are three questions or thoughts that you might have after walking through these scriptures that I would like to address.

First thought: It is easy to see someone else living out their calling or their story and think, "My life does not look like hers so I must not be significant" and then you shrink back and stop living for Jesus because you do not feel



like you are good enough. Or you might be thinking, I will live for God when He shows me that He is worth living for. I will live for God once I get the social status or platform that I want. I will live for God when... fill in the blank. But Jesus is saying, live for Me and serve where you are, serve like Jesus. Be a servant of Jesus.

Listen, I get it. It is easy to get caught up in this mentality because we live in a social media world where anyone can be a writer, podcaster, or YouTuber. Beth Moore says that we are all living for the caption. I have a quote hanging on the wall in my office that keeps my motives in check because I can very quickly get my intentions off balance. It says, "Through quiet actions done behind the scenes God advanced His kingdom." It's not about the followers, the platform, the recognition, or anything aesthetically pleasing; it is just about you loving Jesus and doing what He puts in front of you, and that is enough.

The second thought: You are afraid that you will never be one of His favorites. I am here to tell you that you do not have to fear anymore, because not only does He not choose favorites, but He also does not elevate us above each other. What Jesus tells them in verse 44 is that to live a life free in Christ, you need to become a servant of Christ. You cannot serve from a pedestal. So, if you are like James and John and you think that the best places are reserved in an elevated place, you are wrong. The people who are living their best for Jesus are the ones who are serving and loving, washing feet like Jesus did, taking care of the lonely and forgotten. They are the ones using their goods and gifts from God to serve everyone around them.

The last thought: I have no doubt there are a couple of you who are struggling with the word servant. You're saying, "Me? Servant? You told me to love Jesus. You didn't tell me I was going to be a servant."

Please read Romans 6:15-16.

Paul says we are a slave to something. Whether you realize it or not, you are a slave to heaven or you are a slave to hell. Which one are you a slave to? Which one do you *want* to be a slave to? If you still are not sure about the difference or the way that you want to go, Romans 8:28 says that God works all things for the good of those who love Him. Satan is the opposite of God, so he works all things for his good at your expense. It is not worth it to continue to live in sin.

There is a lot to digest from today's lesson, but I hope you see the importance of simply serving God and allowing your service to the Lord be what guides you to your place and your purpose.

**PRAYER:**

Spend some time praying now for God to show you ways that you can serve where you are today.

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## DAY 12

### BRANCHES

I hope that as you have read, learned, and discussed the importance of rooting yourself in scripture and the disciplines needed for spiritual maturity, you have seen the value in growing your roots deep into the Word of God. Like any healthy oak, when the roots are healthy, the tree is healthy. This week, we will work through some of the spiritual disciplines needed to continue your growth into the strong and healthy person that God has called you to be.

To get our thoughts flowing we are going to start with an activity called “This or That.” Read through the list and circle which you prefer.

Ice cream or cake

Skateboarding or fishing

Chick-fil-a or Whataburger

Running or watching movies

Summer or winter

Swimming or reading

Music or podcast

In the same way that you choose between these options, we choose every day to either seek the kingdom of God or things of this world. Today we will discuss why and how we can seek God’s kingdom and learn to recognize when we are seeking earthly things. This is an important concept to understand, so be sure to write out any questions or doubts to discuss with your mentor.

Please read Matthew 6:25-29.

Summarize these scriptures in your own words below.

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Make a list of the things that the scripture says you should not worry about.

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List the things that you should worry about.

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To sum it up, we should not worry about the details of our life; God provides all that we need. We should worry about nothing... nothing. That thing you are worrying about, yeah, that is on the list of what you should not worry about.

What illustrations are used in this scripture?

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Why do you think that God used these two things as illustrations?

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Birds and flowers seem insignificant compared to human life, but God takes care of them, right? How much more will He take care of you?

Isaiah 26:3 says that we will have perfect peace when we set our minds on Christ. The first time I heard this scripture I was deep in a season of

worry and anxiety. I tried to not worry, and I failed every day, because I could not stop the anxiety. I was running down the road, listening to a podcast when the guest on the podcast recited Isaiah 26:3 and it stopped me in my tracks. I was trying to overcome worry and anxiety in my own strength. This scripture quickly realigned my efforts with the Lord and I didn't worry as much as I did before. The anxiety was practically gone.

Read Matthew 6:30-33.

According to these scriptures, what should you seek?

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What does that mean?

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Why should you seek the kingdom of God first?

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What does “seeking the kingdom first” look like in your life?

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What is a discipline or habit you want to grow in seeking God's kingdom?

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Becoming rooted in your faith and growing into an Oak of Righteousness requires you to seek the kingdom of God first. It is like the game of “This or That”—are you going to seek temporary things that momentarily fill you or

are you going to seek godly things that grow you, make you stronger, and allow you to branch out and live purposefully?

We must understand this concept well. Because of the broken state of humanity, it is easy for us to seek worldly things first and not realize this is what we are doing. I often wake up early in the morning intending to read my Bible and spend time in the Word. I find myself scrolling through social media while the coffee is brewing because, “I am too tired to read and comprehend anything until I have had my coffee.” I end up scrolling through everyone else’s best moments and compare our lives. First thing in the morning, I begin to feel bad about myself or like the things around me don’t measure up. Why is that not enough to make me put my phone down? I do not know the answer, but it sucks me in, and I spend all my time scrolling instead of digging deeper into the Word. I start the day off with a negative headspace. The opposite of that is when I seek God’s kingdom first, I sit in silence as my coffee brews, pour a cup and dig into the Word and prayer. As I practice this discipline, He grows me and shapes me into who I need to be. Because I have spent time in His Word, I recognize His voice more easily during the day when He is guiding me to a conversation or service.

Use the space below to rewrite Matthew 6:30-33 and make it more applicable to where you are in your struggles. You can use my example below or make one that applies to your life.

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Example: “Therefore, I tell you, Traci, do not worry about the brand of your shoes, or the number of social media followers that you have; instead seek first the kingdom of God. Seek ways that you can use your gifts.”

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DAY 13

## BRANCHES

### FINDING YOUR GIFT OR CALLING

What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to do with your life? How big of a difference do you want to make? These are not only questions that you will hear from everyone you know until you graduate high school, but they are also real questions that you need to answer. Before you answer, you may consider a couple more first. What gifts has God given you? What has He called you to? Now, do not get me wrong, it isn't likely that you are going to close this book today and have detailed answers, but I want to help you get started. What gifts has God given you? This one is not the easiest to answer because we are our own worst critics. Use these guiding questions to help you know the answer.

What do you enjoy doing? (writing, singing, running, swimming, teaching, or listening)

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What have people told you that you are good at?

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I did not know that I was a good speaker until someone told me that I could be a public speaker. I did not know that I was good at writing until my words moved someone to action. We all do not live with encouraging people in our lives, so if you have never been told you are good at anything, ask a trusted person like a teacher or small group leader. Someone has seen something in you but may not have done a good job of speaking it out loud. It is okay to ask!



Read Romans 12:6-8 and list the spiritual gifts in the space below.

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Prophecy, faith, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, and acts of mercy—these are on the shortlist, and there are so many more. You can google the spiritual gifts test and take the test to find out what your gift might be.

Please read Ephesians 4:1-15 and summarize what the scriptures are saying.

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We all have a part to play in the church. We are one body made up of many parts. Here is the thing: we cannot be something that God did not make us be. If we are the hand but we want to be the foot, then we will fail the other parts of the hand, because we are trying to be the foot. Many people run from their calling, and they are miserable. For six years I taught public school because I did not know how my calling of ministering to teenagers would fit into full-time ministry, and I was too afraid to step out and figure it out. I was afraid the answer would be something that I did not like or something too hard for me. Do not waste your time running from what God has called you to because you are afraid. Run with full speed into what God has for you, and you will find a life filled with purpose and fruit for the kingdom of God.

So, I ask you again, what are you good at doing? What gives you the most joy?

Not everyone is called to full-time ministry. Guys, you do not have to become a pastor just because that is what you see at the church. Girls, you do not have to become a missionary just because you do not see many other ways to serve full-time in ministry. You might not be called to a full-time position at a church and that is okay. Use what God has gifted you with to further the kingdom. For most of you, that means that you will work in the secular world. That is great because we need people living for God in those spaces.

**PRAYER:**

Spend some time praying and asking God to reveal to you this week the ways that He has gifted you and how you can use that for His kingdom work.

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DAY 14

## **BRANCHES**

### **WAITING FOR YOUR PLACE**

“Traci, no offense, but I do not relate to your story. You are on staff at this church, and it is the perfect place for you, doing exactly what you are called to do. I am still waiting to find my place.” – A girl I was mentoring, in my office one day.

I had to fight to keep my jaw off the floor as I apologized for making her think that my journey was rainbows and sunshine. I was recently flipping through my Bible when I found this prayer that I wrote beside Isaiah 43.

“I feel the deep waters right now—I’ve been here before, in the deep, deep waters of sadness. How long have I just wanted to be in full-time ministry? How long have I wanted to have a place and a way to point people to Jesus? 15 years? How long was I unsure of how that would happen? 13 years—and then I heard God while sitting in a breakout session about Girls Ministry, “This is it”—at least I thought I did. I thought He had affirmed me in that... “I ask for revival Lord, let it start with me.” I wrote this prayer six months before I was called for an interview for the Girls Associate position.

It serves as a timely reminder from the Lord of what He brought me out of, and it reminded me of the conversation I had with the student in my office. I need to tell you the same story so that you do not become discouraged in thinking that God called me and then provided a place immediately. God called me to Girls Ministry two years before He provided a place for me at Harmony Hill. Before He called me to Girls Ministry, I waited eleven years to have a clear idea of what exactly I was called to. Although seasons of waiting was discouraging, it was also formative.

We have all been called to something, we all have a purpose, God has a plan for each of us. Some of us may serve in full-time ministry, and others have been called to corporate America. We are all called to use our gifts for God’s glory. Because there is something in us that wants to know our purpose and live out that purpose, we can quickly become discouraged

when it feels like we are stagnant. Do not look at anyone else's story and think that God must love you less because they seem to be more settled than you. It only means that some work needs to be done in this season before you can move to the next. Celebrate God's purpose in your life and continue seeking His purpose for your life.

We are going to settle in Galatians 6 for the day. This was the scripture that I prayed all of 2019. I was praying so hard even then for the harvest (aka full-time ministry) but God reminded me through these scriptures that I had to sow the seeds before I could reap the harvest. I love how He has woven this theme of gardening and growing trees throughout my life.

Please read Galatians 6:6-10. Write down anything that sticks out to you.

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To put this in context, Paul wrote this letter to the Church of Galatia, and he is talking specifically about how believers need to bear each other's burdens. What he says in verse 7 is a sweet little nugget that we are going to dig in to. Paul contrasts two different types of people. Write a description of the two in the space below.

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The first person in these scriptures works for himself and cultivates corruption. The second person works for the Spirit and gains eternal life in heaven. List ways that we sow to our flesh and then ways that we sow to the spirit.

Flesh: \_\_\_\_\_

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Spirit: \_\_\_\_\_

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Take a trip down memory lane with me... all the way to my freshman year at Tyler Junior College. I was shy, awkward, lonely. I had a habit of grabbing lunch at the deli and then sitting on a bench at the bottom of the hill. As I ate my turkey on rye sandwich, I would watch other people gather and hang out in the courtyard in between classes. I would pray for the courage to step into their circle, but I also felt that to fit in with most of the crowd, I would have to compromise my convictions. I would have had to sow in the flesh to fit in with the crowd. During that time, I held onto scriptures like Galatians 6:9, “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Scripture was what got me through the hard days. The bench on campus represented a place of perseverance because it is where I sat when I decided I did not want to give up in doing good. What about you? What is your “bench”? What is the thing you need to stay in and continue to sow, knowing that you will reap if you do not give up?

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God strengthened my perseverance to live according to the scriptures and molded me into who I am today. As believers you have been called to persevere in your faith, but God will call you to a specific place and ministry. As you continue to grow and begin to discern what God has called you to, it is going to require you to build faith muscle<sup>18</sup> and train your weaknesses on your way to where you are going. What needs to be strengthened today? How can you sow in the Spirit?

We can live a life free in Christ<sup>19</sup> if we do not give up. We can live out our purpose if we do not give up. We can do great things for the kingdom of God if we do not give up. When we give up, we sow corruption, lose a piece of ourselves, and weaken our purpose. When we don’t give up, we live free in Christ, live out God’s purpose, and do great things for the kingdom.

## **PRAYER:**

Romans 5:3-5, “... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2

<sup>19</sup> Romans 8

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Let's dig into scripture one last time. Please turn to John 10 and read verses 1-12. What about these scriptures seems odd to you? What would be challenging for you if Jesus were to say these things to you?

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This section of scripture is portrayed in season 3 of "The Chosen." Jesus is with the disciples, and He is giving them these instructions to go where He tells them to and share the gospel with anyone who will hear. When He finishes, He asks if they have any questions, and one of the guys asks if there is going to be a ceremony. Jesus says, "This is it," to which the guy replies, "I do not feel any different." Jesus responds and says, "You do not serve God with your feelings."

Sometimes God is going to tell us to go and sometimes He is going to tell us to stay. It is our job to obey, even when we do not feel it. If you want to bear fruit, you need to root yourself in the scripture as you branch out and reach people with the gospel.

### **PRAYER:**

Thank you, God, for calling me out of darkness and into Your marvelous light. As I continue to dig into Your Word, and as I continue to grow in Your likeness, I ask that You will always be with me. I need Your wisdom to guide me and give me courage to do the bold things or to wait on You. Thank You for giving me a purpose in Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.



For the next two days, you have space to digest what we dug into this week. Write down questions that you have, go back over a lesson that you think you can get more out of, memorize scripture, pray and grow. Use the space provided as your creative space.

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# APPENDIX

## STUDY TOOLS:

- Websites – blueletterbible.com, gateway.com, biblehub.com
- Commentary – Matthew Henry, ESV Expository Commentary

## PODCAST:

- Whoa That's Good – Sadie Robertson
- Breakaway (Texas A&M Student Worship)
- The Bible Recap

## SCRIPTURE READING PLANS:

- Attributes of God: Psalm 115:3, Ephesians 1:11-12, Hebrews 13:8, James 1: 17, Jeremiah 29:11-13, Romans 11:33-36, Romans 1:20, 1 Timothy 1:17, Ephesians 2:4-7, Isaiah 6:3
- Praise: 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Psalm 22, Psalm 33, Psalm 63, Psalm 103, Acts 11:15-18, Romans 8:29-39, Romans 11:33-36, Titus 3:4-6, James 3:1-12
- Union with Christ: Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, John 15:1-19, Acts 9:4-5, Romans 5:12-19, Galatians 2:15-21, Ephesians 1, Philippians 3:8-9
- Walking by Faith: Genesis 22:1-14, Psalms 25:1-3, Proverbs 3:5-8, Isaiah 26:1-6, Daniel 3, Hebrews 11:1, James 2:14-26
- Prayer: Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 11:1-4, Luke 19:9-10, Luke 22:31-34, Acts 4:23-28, James 1:5-10
- Peace: Psalm 29, Psalm 119, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 11:1-10, Isaiah 26:1-6, John 20:21-23, John 30-31, Acts 10:36-38, Galatians 5:19-23

## **NEXT STEPS FOR DISCIPLESHIP:**

As believers we are called to make disciples and be discipled. Talk with the adult who went through this study with you, ask if they would like to continue a discipleship relationship, and decide what book of the Bible to study together next.

If you are unable to continue to meet with the same person, begin praying for someone else to disciple you. Do not be afraid to ask someone else to step in and lead you in discipleship.

Once you are comfortable, reach out to someone in the student ministry who is just starting their walk with the Lord and offer to lead them in discipleship.





# STUDENTS

Harmony Hill Baptist Church  
July 2023