

Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

William P. Campbell

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at ScriptureAwakening.com. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at info@scriptureawakening.com.



But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:6

Introduction

Upon hearing about spiritual disciplines, we might be tempted to say, “That’s for monks and mystics of the past! I’m not into religious rules and rituals.”

There has been a widespread suspicion of spiritual disciplines in many sectors of the Church for the past several generations. First, in the face of doctrinal confusion there has been an appropriate concern to keep in focus that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The practice of spiritual disciplines can appear to add works to the requirements of salvation. Let’s be clear: God’s saving relationship with you is a gift. You didn’t earn it. You don’t deserve it. By His Spirit, through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, He drew you to Himself.

Second, there has been widespread suspicion about spiritual disciplines because our culture shows little interest in exploring the spiritual depths of life. The success of modern science has brought the physical to the fore and the forces of a market economy have created an emphasis on financial success. However, there is a renewed interest in the spiritual side of life arising all around. We are discovering that something is missing that can’t be satisfied by tables of data and money in the bank.

The importance of rediscovering spiritual disciplines is that while God seeks us and calls us to Himself, He also requires us to seek Him as a way of life—all of our lives. A. W. Tozer writes, “We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him we need no more seek Him” (*The Pursuit of God*). Spiritual disciplines are wonderful pathways by which we can seek God and develop a closer walk with Him. People through the centuries have found spiritual disciplines are to be tools that strengthen our hearts, open the Scriptures before us and provide a firm path for spiritual growth.

Prayer

Prayer is the fundamental spiritual discipline and primary pathway to God. What is prayer? Billy Graham writes, “Prayer is simply a two-way conversation between you and God.” Bill Hybels puts it like this: “God wants us to talk to Him as to a friend or father—authentically, reverently, personally, earnestly.”

What can be more important than having a conversation with God? Those who have spent a lifetime practicing the discipline of prayer tell us that prayer is not only communication with God, it is also about communion with Him. When we pray, we are invited into a divine intimacy. Jesus talks about this intimacy in His prayer to the Father when He prays that we may be in Him as He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 17:21).

In *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster writes, “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves. Progressively, we are taught to see things from His point of view.” That’s intimacy!

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp... The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

Exodus 33:7, 11

God invites us into spiritual intimacy; but, as is true in many relationships, we are afraid of intimacy. Ever notice how we edge around prayer? The next time you attend a prayer meeting, compare the ratio of time spent talking about prayer with the amount of time actually spent in prayer. When fifteen minutes are set aside for prayer, we often talk about our prayer requests for twelve minutes, leaving only three minutes at the end to pray. Why do we want to talk around prayer rather than do it?

Sometimes we notice our lack of intimacy with God, not only in the lack of time we spend in prayer, but in the way we pray. Instead of lifting our hearts to God, reaching in and up in the pursuit of His help, we allow our prayers to become a bland routine of repeated phrases and current spiritual clichés. They become outward forms with little spiritual substance.

Teachers of Prayer

If we are to pray, we need help. So we turn to two of the greatest pray-ers in the world: Moses and Jesus. Moses was invited into a personal and intimate relationship to God when he was commissioned at the burning bush. The leadership of the nation and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt were not burdens he sought. More than once Moses asked to set the burden down. In the passage you are about to study, we read about Moses as a tired, desperate man talking to his God. From what he says, and from what God says to him, we can learn a great deal about prayer.

Moses: Exodus 33:7-23

In Exodus 33:11, we read, “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” *Face to face* literally means “mouth to mouth.” This is an extremely intimate, direct form of conversation. God not only talks to Moses, Moses talks to God. Actually, Moses argues with God! Moses tells God that without His presence, this whole enterprise of leaving Egypt is pointless.

God reassures Moses that His presence will go with the people. That’s not enough for Moses. He wants even more assurance that God Himself will accompany them, not just some angel. “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here,” he pleads (Exodus 33:15).

God reassures Moses again. “I will do this very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name” (Exodus 33:17). Moses is still not satisfied. “Now show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18), says Moses.

God responds to Moses’ perseverance by promising to make all His goodness pass before him. “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock, and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back; but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:21-23).

Being close to God is a dangerous business, not something to be trifled with. We have a need

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

Matthew 6:9-13

and a desire to draw near, but approaching God directly was not permitted in the Old Testament. The entire book of Exodus is about the people of Israel living with and experiencing the presence of the Lord by means of the temple system. It kept God close, but not too close. The good news is that in Jesus Christ we do have direct access to God. The heavens were torn open at His baptism (Mark 1:10), and the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom at His crucifixion (Mark 15:38)

Jesus: Matthew 6:6-15

Jesus is the Son of God, intimate with His Father. Certainly no one knows how to pray any better. We do well to pay attention to the prayer that He gave us. It's short, simple, and familiar. It's so familiar that we can easily miss its complexity and depth. Notice that the prayer can be divided in half. The first half focuses on God's glory. The second half focuses on our needs. What each half has in common is dependence upon God. God is the One who will bring in His kingdom (not men). God is also the One who meets our needs.

Jesus begins His teaching on prayer by saying that we should go into our rooms and shut the door when we want to pray, rather than pray on street corners or in the synagogues like the hypocrites who only want to be known for their piety. Likewise, we should keep our words to a minimum, not “heaping up” words, because God knows our needs before we even ask.

“Pray then like this,” Jesus teaches as He goes on with the words to what has come to be known as the *Lord's Prayer*. He begins the prayer with the words “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6: 9). Jesus is the first person in the Bible to address God as His Father. Here, He teaches His disciples to do the same. This term establishes the relationship between the pray-er and the Person to whom he/she is praying. It is an intimate, father-child relationship. And yet, this Father is “in heaven,” or transcendent. Notice the pronoun “our” at the beginning of the prayer. This is a prayer to be prayed in fellowship with other disciples.

As we pray “your kingdom come, your will be done,” (Matthew 6:10), we acknowledge the “yet and not yet” of God's Kingdom. Jesus ushers in the Kingdom, and yet the full realization of this Kingdom will not be known until the end of the age. In the meantime, we trust God to do His will here on earth.

As we pray “give us today our daily bread”(Matthew 6:11), we learn to live from day to day with the realization that all good things come from God. For the first century Christians, this was a reality of life. Many people had only enough resources to live from one day to the next. In the comparatively wealthy age in which we live, this is a harder concept to grasp. Perhaps those involved in Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon understand it best, as they live with the motto “one day at a time.”

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to ask forgiveness of our sins (debts) as well as those who sin against us (our debtors). We cannot come before God while holding grudges against others. By

repeating this prayer daily, we are reminded to let go of anger and hate towards others when we come before the Lord.

The verse “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13) does not refer to temptation as sin, but temptation as in testing. We are taught throughout the New Testament that, as Christians, we will be tested. Here, Jesus encourages us to pray against such testing. “Evil one” refers to Satan and his wiles. We are helpless on our own against Satan’s plans, but we are to trust in the Father to deliver us from the devil’s snares.

This prayer, taught by Jesus Himself, helps us to pray properly. It gives us the right focus: praying to God, without seeking to impress others. It teaches us the right manner in which to pray: not to be wordy or verbose. It also teaches us to pray with the right motivation: seeking the glory of God.

Prayer is conversation with God. Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is intimacy with God. Prayer is life-changing. Let us pray.

Spending Time With God

This study series, on “Spiritual Pathways,” is an exploration of six spiritual disciplines and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about spiritual pathways that you found encouraging or helpful. Take a moment to give thanks and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study. What attracts you to prayer? What is it about prayer that makes you uncomfortable?

2. Great spiritual teachers are those who have the ability to inspire us to pray. In the passage you are about to study, you will get an intimate glimpse of Moses in his prayer time as he calls out for God. Read over Exodus 33:7-23.

From your reading of this passage, describe Moses’ relationship to God in your own words.

3. How is it that Moses had a face to face relationship with God (Exodus 33:11) and yet couldn’t see God’s face (Exodus 33:20)?

4. Someone once commented, God doesn’t have favorites, but He does have intimates. What do you think it is like to be intimate with God?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 1

Prayer: The Pathway to Intimacy

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. As part of his leadership, Moses set up a tent of meeting outside the camp to meet with God (Exodus 33:7-11). What affect did that have on the people?

6. We probably won't set up physical tents to meet with God, but what can we do to set a regular meeting place with God?

7. What affects might come to others through our personal times with God?

8. What requests did Moses make of God and how would they help him handle his responsibilities (Exodus 33:12, 13)?

9. Why do you think Moses was concerned about the presence of God (Exodus 33:12-16)?

10. Moses felt that it was the presence of God that made Israel discernably distinct. How is it possible to recognize the presence of God in a church? How about in a person?

11. How would you describe the interaction between Moses and God (Exodus 33:18-23)?

12. God only partially answers Moses' requests. What is significant about what Moses can and can't know?



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SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 1

Prayer: The Pathway to Intimacy

13. What do you think God might be showing you about Himself, and what needs in your life might He be meeting as He does so?

17. In what way does this prayer give us a sense of humility?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Please read Matthew 6:5-15. We turn now to the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus begins His teaching on prayer with a corrective about pagans. Evidently the pagans thought that the number of words and the form of prayer increased the chances it would be answered. According to Jesus, what's wrong with that way of thinking?

18. It is reasonable to assume because Jesus tells us to ask for our "bread" daily that we should pray this daily. How would praying this prayer thoughtfully, every day, reorient your life?

15. God knows our needs before we ask, but evidently He wants us to ask anyway (Matthew 6:8). How is asking for our needs good for us?

19. In what ways will Jesus' prayer change the way you pray?

16. What specific things are we asking for when we pray the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)?

Scripture for Meditation

These I will bring to My holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Isaiah 56:7



It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Matthew 4:4

Introduction

We are preoccupied with food. Either we are eating it all the time, or we are eating hardly at all. We eat to feel good about ourselves or don't eat so we can feel good about ourselves! We are surrounded by restaurants of all kinds and bombarded with commercials about food in our media. We think of food as a means of physical sustenance and emotional comfort, but few of us would think that food has anything to do with the spiritual. People who study these things tell us that we don't eat well and our health suffers as a result. Is it possible that because of the way we eat not only our physical health suffers, but our spiritual health as well?

The second pathway we consider is fasting. Practiced by Christians throughout most of the history of the Church and used by the people in both the Old and New Testaments, fasting is a rarely practiced today. Sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century it fell into disuse. Richard Foster writes that in his research there was not a single book published on the subject of Christian fasting from 1861 to 1954.

In a culture awash in food, fasting is definitely going against the grain. Fasting is one of the last spiritual disciplines we get around to. We like to eat and, frankly, aren't interested in fasting. Because of weight problems, many of us have had to diet periodically and that is more than enough restraint for our liking. But while meditating on Jesus' words on fasting in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16ff), we realize that this, too, is for us.

Fasting in the Bible

Fasting is abstaining from food, partially or completely, for the purpose of seeking God. Fasting, not a favorite discipline, occupies a significant role in the Scriptures.

Sometimes fasting was used as an emergency measure when things looked desperate. David fasted when he sought God for the life of his dying child that he had with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:16ff). When Judah was under attack by an overwhelming invading army, King Jehoshaphat called a national fast (2 Chronicles 20:3). And when the Jews, while in exile in Persia, were to be killed by means of the evil political manipulation of Naaman, Mordecai and Esther called a fast to seek God for deliverance (Esther 4:16).

Sometimes fasting was used as a means of repentance, as when the exiled Jewish nation returned to the promised land under Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:1ff). As the Law was read by Ezra, the exiles discovered how far they had departed from the ways of God. Fasting was their repentant response. Other times fasting was used as a means of dedication and preparation. Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness prior to the beginning of His ministry. Prior to being called forth on their missionary journeys, Paul and Barnabus did the same (Acts 13:1-2).

The Practice of Fasting

Like no other discipline, fasting involves all of us—body and soul—in the pursuit of God. When

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-18

our body is hungry—our appetites working overtime, and our will wavering—we are reminded that we have chosen God above all our other desires. We can discover that, in a fast, hunger becomes our friend. Every time we feel a hunger pang it reminds us to lift our requests to God.

Some people fast periodically, usually during times of special needs. During Lent some generally fast weekly, usually for 24 or 36 hours. We can use the discipline of fasting as a means to place ourselves before God while calling out for Him to strengthen our faith.

On a 24 hour fast, we eat nothing after the evening meal until the evening meal on the following day. Actually, that means we only miss breakfast and lunch. Unless you have health problems, you should be able to handle that. During a 36 hour fast, we eat nothing after the evening meal and skip all meals the following day. While this is a bit more of a stretch, it is still something you should be able to do without too much difficulty. Another option is to choose a selected fast, abstaining from certain types of food. You might choose to skip meat for a period of time, or coffee, or sugar. You will actually find this type of fast harder than total abstinence.

Many have found fasting and dieting to be very different. We discover that we are equipped with a power to abstain from food on a fast that isn't there when we diet. One person, while finishing up an extended fast while at a conference, was called on to work in the kitchen because they were short on help. Surprisingly, the temptation to eat was slight. This person even experienced a joy in serving others that wasn't natural.

Fasting and Spiritual Power

For many reasons it's hard for us to grasp how important the spiritual side of life is. Fasting allows us to experience the power of the spiritual. No where is this more clearly seen than in Jesus' confrontation with Satan. Jesus may have been physically weakened by lack of food, but He was spiritually strengthened through His fast. Further, when tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy His hunger, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 Jesus says: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4).

From the example of Jesus and His words, we learn that true sustenance is not merely physical. There are depths of our being that are only nourished by the spiritual substance of God's Word. Surely this is how we must understand Jesus when He teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." When we pray this, we are asking for all that we need to live, that which is both physical and spiritual.

When Jesus encountered the woman at the well in Samaria, she believed in Him and rushed off to tell her friends. Later, the disciples returned from their shopping trip to town and urged Jesus to eat. He said: "I have food to eat that you know nothing about" (John 4:32). The disciples wondered if Jesus got food somewhere else. Jesus clarified, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus wanted His disciples to know that He was

Meanwhile His disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then His disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought Him food?” “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”

John 4:31-34

drawing upon spiritual resources that provided power for living.

Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy* writes about the experience of a pastor with fasting and spiritual power. “It is now my regular practice to fast every time I preach. I have a sense of deeper dependency and of the immense power of the spoken word. This has been demonstrated by the dear individual in my congregation who runs our tape ministry. She said that since January of this year her order for sermon tapes has doubled. ‘I can’t explain it,’ she said ‘but whatever it is, keep it up.’”

Saving Room for God

Spiritual emptiness is the great disease of our time. We have houses full of stuff, and refrigerators full of food. But there is a spiritual void everywhere. We need to learn to feed our souls and fasting can help us do that.

A young pastor and his wife were invited over to a parishioner's home to get acquainted. Not understanding that the invitation included dinner, they had already eaten. To their horror their hostess had cooked a large five course meal; they saw a table carefully set and overflowing with food. Not wanting to offend, they felt obliged to eat all that was set before them. When seconds and thirds were urged they smiled meekly and kept eating. When they finally said good night and returned home they weren't interested in eating anything for a couple of days!

We live in a culture which is constantly saying to us, “Look at all I have cooked for you. Have some more, have some more, have some more.” As Christians we need to say, “No thanks, I'm saving room for God.”

Spending Time With God

This study series, on “Spiritual Pathways,” is an exploration of six spiritual disciplines and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 2

Fasting: The Pathway to Spiritual Nourishment

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Food is an essential part of life. What are some of the reasons that people eat?

2. What are some of the reasons that you eat?

3. Fasting is for the purpose of encouraging spiritual hunger. How would you describe your present experience of spiritual hunger? (Not aware of it? Slight? Intense? Etc.?)

4. Read Matthew 4:1-11. What tests does Jesus face as He begins His ministry?

5. How might fasting have been a helpful preparation for the challenges of ministry that Jesus would encounter on His way to the cross?

6. What challenges are you facing for which you could use more spiritual strength?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Begin your discussion by sharing something you have learned about fasting or spiritual disciplines from the commentary or your personal study.

8. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus refuses to comply with any of Satan's challenges. If Jesus was hungry, what would have been wrong with Jesus eating at Satan's suggestion (verses 3-4)?



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LESSON 2

Fasting: The Pathway to Spiritual Nourishment

9. What possible means for fasting can you discern from Jesus' answer to Satan in Matthew 4:4?

13. Read Matthew 6:16-18. How is Jesus' approach to fasting different from the hypocrites?

10. Jesus resists and Satan leaves, no doubt in frustration (Matthew 4:11). What can you learn from Jesus' example?

14. For most of us, there is no status in fasting—some of our fellow Christians might even think less of us. What spiritual activities currently tempt us to pursue status?

11. Jesus fasted for 40 days at the beginning of His ministry. What might be a reasonable amount of time for you?

15. How might Jesus' caution be applied to our current status-seeking temptations?

12. Jesus abstained from food and water during His 40 days in the wilderness. One good way to fast is to abstain from one or two items of food. What might be some things from which you could abstain?

16. In what ways is fasting different from dieting?



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SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 2

Fasting: The Pathway to Spiritual Nourishment

17. Although fasting was important to Jesus and throughout the Scriptures, it is not a common religious practice today. Why do you think this is so?

20. When we practice alms giving, prayer, and fasting (Matthew 6:4,6,18), Jesus assures us of the Father's reward when the motivations of our hearts are right (Matthew 6:18). How is this both comforting and challenging?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

18. What difficulties might you encounter on a fast?

21. How might the discipline of fasting be a helpful spiritual pathway for you?

19. How do you think you might overcome them?

Scripture for Meditation

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

Daniel 9:3



Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Matthew 11:28

Introduction

Our focus this week is on the spiritual pathway of simplicity. While fasting is refraining from food for the sake of being spiritually nourished, simplicity is refraining from activities and accumulation so that we might be filled up with spiritual riches from the Lord.

We are busy, complex people, living busy, complex lives. Certainly it's good to be productive and busy. However, for many the manner of our busyness often makes us fragmented people, running here there and everywhere as if our lives depended on it. We run from one meeting to the next and often find ourselves frustrated, anxious, stretched, and dry. We lament that there is more to do than there is time to do it. Working mothers and fathers find it difficult to manage work and family while common meal times become increasingly rare. Soccer moms spend their days driving their children from place to place. Even those who retire find ways to keep overly busy with family, projects, and community affairs, and end up perpetuating a complex, disjointed lifestyle.

Whatever our stage of life, many of us feel trapped in the “tyranny of the urgent.” We feel we must work and work in order to buy more and more. Someone once wrote, “Modern man is frantically trying to earn enough to buy things he's too busy to enjoy.” And all the while, the media blares out its unrelenting message: “Buy. Sell. Do.”

Money and Simplicity

One of the compelling forces in our complex lives is our concern for material well being. The more we own, the more we have to expend energy thinking about how to manage, conserve, and multiply our resources. Certainly we need “our daily bread,” but we can easily get caught up with anxiety about how much we own, the state of our bank accounts, and the performance of our investments.

The Bible is full of passages warning of the dangers of wealth and materialism: “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Psalm 62:10). “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf” (Proverbs 11:28). “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13). “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew. 6:21). “Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’” (Luke 12:15). “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21b).

Scripture teaches that money is dangerous because we're prone to make it an idol. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Money so easily becomes the center of our thoughts as we obsess about ways to save it, ways to multiply it, and

So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:31-34

ways to spend it. It is something tangible we can grab onto, that gives us the feeling of being in control of our lives. The same could be said of our present-day inclination toward busyness. The busier we are, the more important we feel, the more in control we feel, and the more appointments we make. For many, work can become an idol. We bow down in worship to the calendars in our smart phones and tablets.

And yet, Jesus tells us, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes...But seek first (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25, 33). Jesus assures us that God will provide our needs as long as we seek God first and turn the reins over to Him.

A Simple Lifestyle

Richard Foster, in his landmark book *The Celebration of Discipline*, writes, “The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle...Simplicity begins in inward focus and unity. It means to live out of what Thomas Kelly called ‘The Divine Center.’” As the eye of a hurricane is a place of quiet in the center of a storm, so in the storms of life there can be that place of quiet. We find that quiet place when we practice simplicity.

As we re-prioritize and put God first, we see the wisdom of removing several items from over-crowded agendas; the freedom in cleaning out closets and giving away used clothing, toys, and curtains; the gift in resting on the Sabbath; the sheer honesty in living as if everything we own is a gift from God rather than something we have gained through our own effort or will. As we shift focus, we find clarity and freedom.

The words of an old Shaker hymn come to mind: “’Tis a gift to be simple, ’tis a gift to be free, ’tis a gift to come ’round where we ought to be...”

An Example of Simplicity

Unfortunately, in the world in which most of us live, simplicity seems, at times, like an unachievable dream. Maybe that’s why Kathleen Bolduc, a writer in Cincinnati, has developed a fascination with the simple lifestyle of the Amish. She writes:

Whenever I feel overwhelmed by the “too-muchness” of my life, I take I-275 east out of Cincinnati, exit at Route 32, drive east until the billboards begin to fade, and turn right onto Graces Run. I drive a ways down a meandering creek lined with gnarled oaks, into an Oz-like land where bird song drowns out depressing radio commentary, the laughter of children playing tag in a field works wonders on tense muscles, and a friendly wave from a bearded man driving horse and buggy reminds me that the world was meant to be a more neighborly place.

The Amish of Adams County have built a thriving settlement in these rolling hills. Theirs is a culture where God, family, hard work and community form the backbone of life. This is a place

And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me."

Exodus 20:1-3

where the constant "noise" of TV, radio, email, and cell phones is willfully avoided. Granted, I have no intention of turning off the electricity, throwing out the television, selling the car, or buying a horse and buggy.

But it's quiet up on Wheat Ridge Road, and easier, in the silence, to dwell on the big questions; easier to hear the answers to those questions. Who is God? Who am I? Who is my neighbor and what is my responsibility towards him/her? What is God's plan for my life? No wonder the sky seems bigger here.

The Shakers, as well as the Amish, discovered somewhere along the way that Scripture shows us another way to live.

The Simple Center

Let us be frank. Not many of us will be able to visit an Amish community with any regularity. While we may find ways to slow down the pace of our lives from time to time, the need to keep busy will be a life-long struggle. Not only will we struggle with the pace of our lives, we also will feel a compelling need to manage our abundant possessions. Simplicity will always be a challenge. What we need to keep before us is that our sense of worth comes not from what we own but from God's love for us in Jesus Christ. He must always be first in our hearts and on the forefront of our minds. The First Commandment is the key, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). When God is at the center, the fragmented complexities of life sort themselves out.

Think of practical steps you can take to honor the discipline of simplicity. What extraneous activities might you cut out of your life? Do you have possessions that you really don't need that you might give to someone who does have a need for them? How might you shuffle your priorities so that you spend quality time with God and people you love on a regular basis? Do you need to cut back activities to allow sufficient time for sleep, exercise, and rest? Modern conveniences like the smart phones, tablets, the internet, and email can either save time or rob us of time. Which is it for you?

Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary portion of this study guide, write down one insight about simplicity or spiritual disciplines that you found encouraging or helpful. Take a moment to give thanks to God for His provision in your life and to ask for guidance as you continue in this study.

2. Write down all activities that you have been engaged in for the past week or so; family, friends, work, church, etc. Then ask, "How do I feel about all of my activities?"

3. How would your life be different if you had only one or two things as your central focus?

4. Write down a list of all you have to do for today and tomorrow. Picture yourself handing that list over the Lord. Sit quietly, wait, and listen. How did this exercise affect you?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Jesus leads us into simplicity as He requires that He be the center and focus of our lives. Read Mark 10:17-31. How would you describe the young man who comes to Jesus?

6. Although the young man is highly moral and religious, he senses something is missing in his life (Mark 10:17). Why do you think Jesus points him to the Commandments (Mark 10:18-19) rather than calling him to faith?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 3

Fasting: The Pathway to Spiritual Nourishment

7. How might pointing out that God alone is good, help the young man see the root of his problem (Mark 10:18)?

10. Jesus speaks of the difficulties that being rich creates for entering the kingdom, (Mark 10:23-27). Why do you think affluence can create spiritual barriers?

8. Read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. Compare them with the list Jesus quotes in Mark 10:19. What is significant about the Commandments Jesus leaves out?

11. Some have taken these verses to mean that everyone should sell all their possessions and live in a state of perpetual poverty. Is that true or false? Why?

9. If keeping the Commandments cannot make a person good or provide eternal life, how would it help the man to sell all his possessions (Mark 10:21)?

12. The young man's wealth keeps him from responding to Jesus' invitation (Mark 10:21-22). What thing(s) hinder you from placing God as the number one priority in your life?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 3

Fasting: The Pathway to Spiritual Nourishment

13. What is the point of Jesus' illustration about the camel and the eye of the needle (Mark 10:24-27)?

17. What do you think Jesus means when He said, "Many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:31)?

14. What hope, then, is there for any of us to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mark 10:27)?

18. Simplicity means that God must be first in our lives and everything else a distant second. What practical steps do you need to take to live more simply and ensure that God is first in your life? When will you take those steps?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

15. Peter expressed the disciples' confusion and amazement at the impossible demands of the kingdom. What is he actually saying to Jesus in Mark 10:28?

16. How does Jesus' answer provide assurance to Peter's desperate question (Mark 10:29-31)?

Scripture for Meditation

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Philippians 4:12



Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3

Introduction

Some people say, “I don’t need to go to church to worship God. I worship on my own at home (or in the woods, or while I’m fishing, or while I’m cleaning the house).” Perhaps you’ve said it yourself.

Yes, we certainly can worship God in any place, at any time of day or night, alone or with others. But as Eugene Peterson writes in his book, *Reversed Thunder*, “Whether we like it or not, the moment we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, that is, from the time we become a Christian, we are at the same time a member of the Christian Church.”

You might be surprised to think of “fellowship” as a spiritual pathway to God. After all, what does standing around in the fellowship hall between services drinking coffee and eating donuts have to do with being connected to God?

Knowing God Together

Biblical teaching on fellowship is wonderfully deep and rich and about a great deal more than drinking coffee. God’s desires to create a people who share together the riches of His love. In the Old Testament the name of His people is Israel. God said through Moses after they left Egypt: “This is, ... what you are to tell the people of Israel: ...if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:3c, 5a). Or as He says elsewhere, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12).

In the New Testament, the people God created for Himself are called the Church. The word *church* means “the called-out ones.” God is gathering His believers into groups called the Church who join together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus told His disciples, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

Here is the wonderful mystery of fellowship: Jesus Christ makes Himself known to us through one another. We are the hands, feet, and eyes of Christ. Teresa of Avila put it so beautifully: “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks with compassion.” Perhaps this is why Jesus commands His disciples to love in John 13:34-35: “A new command I give you; love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

The bottom line is that we need each other to learn who God is and how to serve Him. And as we learn and serve, we also show the world who God is in and through our fellowship.

The Hard Work of Fellowship

But staying together as the people of God, who share true fellowship, is difficult. Look at all the different church fractures and divisions. Even Paul and Barnabas had a falling out in the book of Acts and went their separate ways. From the New Testament Church onwards, Christians

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

have found that fellowship is a demanding discipline that must be learned and then practiced.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic ways to practice Christian fellowship is to join a group of Christians who choose to live near each other and share their lives together in a very intentional way, a Christian community. Although there are exceptions, most of these groups are not wild or far out. Many members are frequently college students or families just out of college. Single men live in groups of three or four in apartments near each other and the women do the same. Families rent or buy near each other. Members of these intentional Christian communities often include people from all walks of life; seminary professors, engineers, and accountants. Many have a common worship one night a week and use music groups and a coffee house as a means of outreach on weekends. Some have a common mission, like living and serving together in the inner city.

More than one such community has started out well, but eventually—and regrettably—fallen apart. Problems occurred because of false assumptions. Just because those who chose to live near each other were Christians, shared the Spirit, loved the Lord, and wanted to do what was right, they thought they could enter into spiritual intimacy. However they discovered that it was not so easy to sort through personal differences. Sadly, they discovered in a painful way that Christian fellowship required hard work, lots of patience, and lots of forgiveness. Usually members weren't prepared to pay the price and do the work.

Even churches that are traditional and less intense find that true fellowship is a challenge. Singing in the choir, teaching Sunday school, and joining a committee all bring their own set of difficulties. When the person sitting next to us got the Sunday solo we hoped for, when the committee made a choice to which we were deeply opposed, when we were looking for a break from teaching but found we were needed—all these and more—mean that we were required to exercise patience, forgiveness, and humility when it would have been much easier just to get angry and walk away.

Learning to Live Together

However difficult, we need to learn to live together in Christ. Paul writes to the Church in Corinth: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 24-26).

We need one another, just as the body needs all of the separate parts to function. Mary Jane Owen, a national advocate for inclusion of people with disabilities in the life of the Church, puts

The Life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

1 John 1:2-4

it like this: “When I really acknowledge that I am in need of help, I become more civilized because I need to relate to you. And when you become aware, and your children become aware, and our society becomes aware, and our parish becomes aware, truly on a gut level, as well as on a head level and a spiritual level, that we need each other, what have we formed? We’ve formed a powerful sense of community. It binds us together. Your needs, your strengths; my needs, my strengths. Together, those intertwining threads weave the strongest fabric of society, of church, of community.”

As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, it is evident that he realized that it was very difficult for people in Christian community (or any community, for that matter) to live in harmony. He begged the members of this church “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2a). He suggested that this will take more than a little work when he goes on to say, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Unity is not easily achievable, mainly because of our human tendency towards competition, grudge-holding, impatience, and selfishness.

The Harmony of Fellowship

We should take hope, however, in the power of the “One Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4) that indwells the Body of Christ, for God, the Holy Spirit, empowers us to overcome our selfishness and live in unity. As individuals, we drink of His Spirit when we practice the spiritual pathway of solitude, and move back into community better prepared to live in patience and forbearance, forgiving one another, and loving one another, regardless of annoying idiosyncrasies.

In a truly harmonious, loving community, people who are unable to participate in community on their own (people with mental illness, physical or mental disabilities, young children, those who are home-bound, etc.) are welcomed and affirmed; small groups offer accountability, acceptance, and encouragement to one another; and spiritual gifts are discerned so that each member of the community can grow toward maturity in Christ. Only in community can the Body of Christ function. This is God’s design.

Thus the hard work required to live in community will seem like a high price to pay in our individualistic culture. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, this spiritual pathway generates a power that radiates far beyond the community itself, showing the world that the Spirit of Christ lives and breathes and has substance, even in the midst of the chaos, divisions, and the hopelessness that permeates our day and age.

Spending Time With God

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bers who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. What do you find pleasant about Christian fellowship?

2. What do you find difficult?

3. How has God expressed His love to you through the people that He has brought into your life?

4. Read John 17. From this text, why is unity and strong fellowship among Christians important to the Lord? Why should it be important to us?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Begin your discussion by sharing something you have learned about fellowship or spiritual disciplines from your personal study and/or the commentary.

6. Read Ephesians 4:1-5:2. Christian fellowship is founded upon common spiritual bonds with other believers. According to Paul, what do all Christians have in common (Ephesians 4:1-6)?

7. How do the common bonds mentioned here contribute to strong relationships with other believers?

8. How do the gifted leaders mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-13 contribute to the spiritual growth and unity of the Christian community?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 4

Fellowship: The Pathway to Love

9. How have pastors or other Christian leaders helped you grow towards spiritual maturity as a member of Christ's body? Give specific examples if you can.

12. Healthy Christian fellowship requires that we learn to think differently about the Church and the world (Ephesians 4:17-20). The way we think affects the way we act (Ephesians 4:25-31). Can you describe a time when your understanding led you into renewed fellowship between you and other believers? Explain.

10. What are the marks of healthy Christian fellowship (Ephesians 4:14-16)?

13. Concerning fellowship, one of the issues we must address is anger (Ephesians 4:26.) What problems might anger create for Christian fellowship? According to Paul, what should we do about it?

11. How would you evaluate your own experience of Christian fellowship in light of these marks? (What do you feel good about? What could be better?)

14. Another behavioral challenge to fellowship is sins of the tongue, including lying (Ephesians 4:25) and backbiting (Ephesians 4:29). How do these sins destroy fellowship and what should we do about it?



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 4

Fellowship: The Pathway to Love

15. How would you describe Paul's remedy for resolving hard feelings towards each other (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)? Take time to pray for such remedies to become greater realities in your church or fellowship.

18. Read aloud Philippians 2:12-18. What challenges you from these verses? What encouragement do you find from the same text? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

16. Is fellowship a gift from God to the Church, or something we work at (or both)? How does Philippians 2:1-4 bring light to this question?

17. In your own words, what do we need to do about our attitudes to enable fellowship to grow (Philippians 2:5-11)?

Scripture for Meditation

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:3



For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

Matthew 4:10b

Public Worship

Worshipping God is the major public event for many people in many places of the world. Even in the United States, with all of our football, baseball, basketball, or “whatever” fans, there are even more who gather to worship. Consider that there are stadiums which hold fifty or a hundred thousand people on a Sunday. Yet even more, consider churches which range in size from a handful to many thousands. When you put them all together there are millions and millions who gather to worship God each Sunday.

Public events not only bring a lot of people together, but they create enthusiasm and excitement. As much as there is joy in shouting over a touch down or home run, there is something potentially even more joyous, about gathering on Sunday mornings in a sanctuary to sing songs about God and to offer prayers of praise.

The Great Worship Service

In Revelation 4 and 5, we read about a heavenly worship service in which we will someday participate. All the riches of worship that we experience now are merely echoes and faint shadows of the great worship service to come. First, there are twenty-four elders and four archangels surrounding the throne of God (Revelation 4:4-7). They celebrate God's holiness and power constantly. “Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’” (Revelation 4:8b).

In addition to those awesome and strange worship leaders there is a surrounding crowd of angels so large that no stadium on earth could hold it. “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders...” (Revelation 5:11). As if that is not enough, all earthly creatures gather. “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them...” (Revelation 5:13).

There are many striking things about this celestial worship service: the number of worshipers, the different kinds of worshipers, the enthusiasm and the constancy of their worship. Concerning their constancy a pastor in a sermon on this passage said:

Constantly! I suppose it is the word constantly that strikes me. I love to worship God, but I don't know that constant, unceasing praise of God is all that attractive to me. When does that allow time to take a walk, or read a book, or enjoy a movie? As I read about the elders and creatures casting their crowns before God and falling on their faces all the time, I am uncomfortable. Don't they have other things they need to do as well?

As I ponder that scene it seems to me that there are two possible ways to think about their worship. Either they are mere robots who are somehow programmed to worship—a sort of “Yesss Massterr” zombie-like response to God—or they

Shout for joy to the LORD,
all the earth. Worship
the LORD with gladness;
come before Him with
joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is
God. It is He who made
us, and we are His; we
are His people, the sheep
of His pasture.

Enter His gates with
thanksgiving and His
courts with praise; give
thanks to Him and praise
His name.

For the LORD is good and
His love endures forever;
His faithfulness contin-
ues through all genera-
tions.

Psalms 100:1-5

are so wise and experienced that worship springs from the depth of their vast knowledge and wisdom. I conclude that they worship God freely and constantly because, unlike me, they see and experience God's glory in all its fullness. Their love for God is so deep that there is nothing else they would rather do. They indeed have a life, and have it to the fullest. They are "Glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. (*The Cross and the Kingdom* Sermon series, CHPC, 2005.)

The Creation's Worship

As much as we may worship God now, there is more for us to discover. For one thing, we don't have to wait to get to heaven to share in the constant worship of God. David writes, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2).

We live under a sky that constantly and unceasingly declares God's glory. Only on occasion are we aware that this symphony of worship is singing and swirling around us. In the midst of whatever we are doing, wherever we are, we can look up and with the ears of our hearts, listen. It is a bit like being in a room with a great sound system (audiophile quality) and only being aware of the music as background. But as any audiophile will tell you, great sound systems are not merely to provide background music but to thrill you with the riches of great sound. We don't merely read a book with music in the background. We put down our books, turn up the volume, and listen. Likewise, we can spiritually turn up the volume in our hearts, listen to the worship of God, and join in!

There are many practical ways that we can share in creation's worship. If you live near a beach or in the mountains there is often a special sense of God's presence for those who are looking and listening. Wherever we live, urban and suburban, sunsets and sunrises are great times to pause and enter into worship, "...where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy" (Psalm 65:8b). A walk down your neighborhood street in the evening under the stars can create a sense of wonder as we contemplate the vastness of God's universe. Hearing birds chirping can remind us that creation is singing God's glory and we can add our own quiet "thank you" to their songs.

The Worship in My Heart

Despite our best intentions, we sometimes become sleepy and complacent about our worship. Imperceptibly, worship may collapse into a comfortable habit of attending a meeting with a few hundred Christians once a week. Or worship can downsize into a daily routine of bite-sized inspirational thoughts for the day, concluding with a verse or two from the Bible.

Judith, a person who specializes in teaching worship, uses the following exercise to rekindle a sense of awe and wonder before God:

Imagine your heart with two levels. There is an entry level in which we do most of our living and

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Psalms 19:1-4a

feeling. But there is a deeper level in which the Holy Spirit resides. In the depths of the heart, on the bottom floor, the Spirit is always worshiping God and crying “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). Open the door on the floor of your heart, drop down a long ladder and then climb down to listen. This will take effort on our part because only occasionally do we get past the busy noise of the first floor to listen and join the Spirit in intimate worship of God.

Worship as a Discipline

Like all spiritual pathways, worship can be a duty and/or a desire. The challenge of worship is to learn how to meet with God and then determine to do so even when the desire is weak. As we take this step of faith, duty will often melt into desire.

As a spiritual discipline, worship has both a public and a private dimension. We must choose to spend time alone with God. If we go too long without a quiet time, then we begin to shrivel. Our spirits become thin and stretched. It is that tender, intimate encounter with the Lord that gives us strength for the challenges of the day. In quiet, perhaps sitting in a back yard in the evening or perhaps on a Saturday morning, with Bible and a note pad in a leisurely time with God, we experience true worship.

Yet personal, private worship is not enough. We must choose to meet with others in worship, even when we don't feel like being with others. We need the spiritual power that comes from the celebration of numbers of people gathered together in one place, singing praises to God accompanied by the swelling sound of musical instruments.

As Richard Foster so eloquently puts it, “To worship is to experience reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the Shekinah of God—the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of His people—or, better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God” (*Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*).

Spending Time With God

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SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 5

Worship: The Pathway to God's Presence

Devotion (Personal Study)

Exodus 3:4-6

1. What do you look forward to on Sunday mornings as you come to worship?

Psalm 19:1-4

2. What do you enjoy most about your quiet times (daily devotions)?

Isaiah 12:2-6

3. What is it about God Himself that most moves you to worship? What things in God's creation move you to worship as well? Explain.

Ephesians 1:3-6

4. From beginning to end, the Scriptures are filled with worship. Read the following verses and write down ways that they inspire you to worship.

Revelation 5:9-10.

Genesis 1:1



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SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 5

Worship: The Pathway to God's Presence

Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Begin your discussion by sharing something you have learned about worship or spiritual disciplines from your personal study and/or the commentary.

6. More than any other section of the Scriptures, the Psalms are the book of worship. Please read Psalm 100. How would you briefly describe its message?

7. How would you describe the emotional tone?

8. How does the worship depicted in Psalm 100 match your own experience, publicly or privately?

9. The emotions of this passage might be expressed at a sports event or a party. How appropriate would such behavior be at your church?

10. What role should emotion play in our worship? Are we supposed to worship when we don't feel like it? Why or why not?

11. What about non-happy emotions: anger, sadness, grief? (Would you consider Psalm 88 to be worship?) Explain.

12. What does the psalmist know about God that causes worship to flow naturally (Psalm 100:1-5)?



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SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 5

Worship: The Pathway to God's Presence

13. Worship requires continual rehearsing and refreshing of the truths we may already know. What can you do to keep God's truth in your mind and heart?

16. Why would expressions of our unworthiness (such as Isaiah experienced) be considered an important part of the way we worship God?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

14. Imagine yourself in the scene depicted in Revelation 5:6-14. What feelings or thoughts come to mind as you move through this heavenly experience? Why?

17. What kinds of benefits come to us as we live a life of worship?

15. Read Isaiah 6:1-8 and describe how the prophet must have felt in this encounter with God.

Scripture for Meditation

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe...

Hebrews 12:28



Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Joshua 1:8

Introduction

When Jewish children begin to learn Hebrew, the rabbi often dips their fingers in honey, has them draw the first letter of the alphabet (aleph), and then taste the honey. Then they recite these words, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103).

God’s Word is truly sweeter than honey, but often in our busy, hurried world, we treat it more like a hamburger from the drive thru window. We struggle to find the time to stop and savor it. We rush through our devotions, plan our to-do lists while sitting in church, and wonder why the words of eternal life often fail to satisfy. All the while, God is softly calling us, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10a).

When we do manage to take the time to be still before God and meditate on Scripture, we find that it leads our thirsty souls to the deep waters of the river of life. Meditation is the spiritual pathway that takes us into the heart of scriptural riches and then conveys those riches into the depths of our souls. Through a regular discipline of meditation, we offer up our hearts to God to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

In his book, *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer describes meditation as “an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God. Its purpose is to clear one’s mental and spiritual vision of God and let His truth make its full and proper impact on one’s mind and heart.”

Meditation is not restricted to monks, spiritual giants, or even just introverts; it is something all of us can do and all of us are called to do, so that God can feed us and fill us with His life-giving Spirit.

Biblical Meditation

As Joshua prepares to lead Israel into the Promised Land, God admonishes him to “Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (Joshua 1:8a).

In this verse, we find an important reminder about the importance of Biblical meditation. By his careful and constant attention to what God had spoken, Joshua received the guidance and strength he needed to handle the responsibilities to which God called him. The effects of meditation were both inward and outward. As he grew in his understanding of God’s Word, he also grew in his ability to follow God’s Word.

Although the whole Bible should be the subject of our meditation, the Book of Psalms is the book most commonly used for this discipline. Psalms is full of beautiful poetry and imagery well-worth savoring. It contains references to meditation starting with Psalm 1. This Psalm sets a tone and direction for the entire book: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Psalm 1:1-3

the wicked...But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:1-3a). By meditating on God’s teachings, we develop deep roots that keep us healthy, even through dry times.

In the Psalms, David and other teachers of Israel meditate on the law, precepts, and decrees of God. “I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Psalm 119:14-16). These psalms become our training for meditation, learning the words of the teachers and imitating them in their prayers. In the Psalms, we are invited to meditate on God’s unfailing love. “Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love” (Psalm 48:9). We also meditate on God’s acts. “I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds” (Psalm 77:12). Often when we face difficult times, the Psalms remind us of God’s faithfulness.

Christian Meditation

We must not confuse Christian meditation with eastern meditation. Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind. In Christian meditation, we focus the mind in order to fill it. Eastern meditation stresses the need to become detached from the world. Christian meditation helps us detach from the noise and chaos of the world so that we may gain a richer attachment to God and to other human beings. In Eastern meditation, there is an emphasis on losing personhood and individuality that one might merge with the cosmic mind. Christian meditation, however, stresses our transformation into the wholeness for which God created us...we become more like Christ. As a result, our lives and our ministries become more effective, blessing those with whom we come into contact. Richard Foster says that for this reason, meditation is the most practical of all the disciplines.

Christian meditation also involves the emotions. Do you know what it feels like to be really thirsty? Absolutely parched? And then to be given a long, cold drink of water? When you are dying of thirst, nothing compares with the gift of water. That’s joy! What a perfect metaphor for the joy we experience when we allow our spirits to be open to the life-giving waters promised us throughout Scripture!

Meditation is not only a place for the joyful. It becomes a Divine touchstone for our sorrows, struggles, and griefs. Nearly seventy percent of the psalms focus on lament. Psalm 42:3a says, “My tears have been my food day and night.” What a powerful verse for someone dealing with the loss of a loved one! As we spend time with images like this one, we can bring our emotions before God and find healing.

The Practice of Meditation

Meditation requires a careful study of the Scriptures. We seek to enter into the Scriptures with heart and mind. For instance, in reading through Colossians, we are invited by the Apostle Paul to: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2). Choosing to medi-

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the LORD.

Psalm 104:33-34

tate on these words, we focus on them with our mind and emotions. We ponder what he means by “things above” and “earthly things.” We muse in a leisurely fashion on heavenly things and consider what life will be like when we are with Christ in heaven. Maybe we even begin to write down some questions that come to mind as we wonder how we should now be living in light of being with Christ in heaven.

We might choose to think about earthly things as heavy and cumbersome. Setting them down, we feel a sense of relief and a new spring in our steps. When we finish with this time of meditation, career issues will no longer seem so pressing and the budget won't seem as challenging. We will feel uplifted, cleansed, and refreshed.

Focus is a key to Biblical meditation. Stay with a phrase or idea until it deeply penetrates your heart, mind, and spirit—your whole being. One student in a class on meditation described his experience: “One day, while meditating on Colossians 1:27, I continually repeated these words from Scripture: “Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father. Yet Christ is in me, the hope of glory.” Over and over I repeated those words, and fifteen minutes into my meditation, I was filled to overflowing with the joy of the Holy Spirit. I couldn't contain it. The joy spilled out all over the place.”

The benefits of meditation can be illustrated by comparing watching a movie on a home DVR to going to a movie theater. The comfortable seats, the large screen, the surround sound, and the darkened room of the theatre all help us enter into a story projected on the large screen. Watching a movie on the DVR is nice, but there are so many distractions: people walking in and out of the room, conversations going on around us, and knowing we can grab a bite from the kitchen when we get hungry. We may see the movie on our DVR, but the quality of experience is far more absorbing at the theater. In the same way, meditating is a more intentional focus on God that leads to a more satisfying encounter with the truth.

Meditation for the Rest of Us

Some people believe that meditation is a discipline only for spiritual giants. The truth is, we don't need any special gifts to be able to meditate. We only need the burning desire to know God better and the discipline to sit down with the Scriptures. If we come to God's Word ready to have our hearts warmed, our minds informed, and our feet and hands inspired to action, then we are prepared to enter in.

Spending Time With God

This study series, on “Spiritual Pathways,” is an exploration of six spiritual disciplines and is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 6

Meditation: The Pathway to Scripture

study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Where and how, during a typical week, do you usually interact with Scripture?

2. What do you find satisfying about that time? What do you find frustrating?

3. Read Luke 24:13-32. Notice how those for whom Jesus opened the Scriptures felt their hearts burn within. Have you ever had a similar experience yourself? Describe it.

4. What insights do you glean about meditation from God's instructions to Joshua as he faced the challenge of national leadership (Joshua 1:7-9)?

5. Joshua is told to meditate on the book of the law "day and night." What resources would you need or steps should you take to make meditation something that you do once a day? What about several times a day?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Begin your discussion by sharing something you have learned about meditation from your personal study and/or the commentary.



SERIES

SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS | DISCIPLINES FOR GROWTH

LESSON 6

Meditation: The Pathway to Scripture

7. Meditation begins with a thoughtful reading of the Scriptures. Read Psalm 1 looking for several (both stated and implied) contrasts. What do you see?

10. Once we are quiet and centered, we focus our minds to consider what a passage might teach. Read Psalm 1 a third time. Now reflect on its major teaching points. As a group, seek to come up with several essential truths from this Psalm.

8. What do you think it means to delight in the Scriptures (Psalm 1:2)?

9. The next step in Christian meditation, after reading a passage, is to become inwardly quiet and centered so that there are no distractions. Read Psalm 1 again. Now sit quietly and make a list of anxieties and concerns that come to mind. After you have written down your concerns, give them over to the Lord, and then share with the group how this exercise affected you.

11. In meditation, you not only focus on a passage but seek to enter into it. A good way to do that is by use of the imagination. (Although not everyone is comfortable with it, many find that meditation can be enhanced through imagination.) Imagine that you are a tree whose roots are reaching down to the life-giving water of the Scriptures (Psalm 1:3). After sitting with this image for a few moments describe your insights and impressions.

12. After reading, centering, focusing, and embracing the Scriptures, now reflect on them. Consider what you have experienced and what you may have learned. Since Psalm 1 is about the blessings that come from meditation, describe how meditation helps you to live a life that is pleasing to God.

14. Review question five (#5) in the personal study section. Now that you have spent time practicing mediation as a group, discuss how you might adjust or change your life to allow for more enriching times of personal Biblical meditation.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

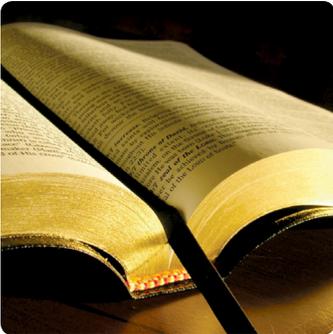
13. Psalm 23 is wonderful for the practice of Biblical meditation. Read it through a few times. Pick an image that grabs your attention: perhaps you are attracted to the stream, the green pasture, or a table in the wilderness. Focus on the image. Now use your imagination to place yourself in the scene. Imagine not only what you see, but engage all your senses—what do you feel, smell, hear, and taste? If you chose a stream, then listen to the sound of the water and notice the rocks at the bottom of the stream bed. As you settle down in the quiet, relax and rest there.

After you have spent some time in Biblical mediation, write down your experience and how it affected you. What insights do you receive about this passage? About yourself? About God? About the challenges you face?

Scripture for Meditation

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14



BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/. (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
 - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
 - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
 4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
 6. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

5. Dismissal

SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
 - Go to ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/ for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
 - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.
 - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).